

TERTIARY EDUCATION

NUS first local varsity to offer free online courses

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SINGAPORE – The National University of Singapore (NUS) will be the first university here to hop onto the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) bandwagon — a move the two other local universities told TODAY they may also consider making in the future.

MOOCs are a recent and growing phenomenon in distance education, where participating universities offer some of their courses for free online.

Its name reflects its emphasis: “Massive” number of students, because courses are conducted via the Internet; and “open”, because courses are all free, meaning that they are widely accessible.

NUS said yesterday it will offer two such courses, for a start, beginning from January next year, in partnership with Coursera, a fast-growing MOOC provider.

Started by Stanford computer science professors Andrew Ng and Daphne Koller in April last year, Coursera has registered 2.8 million students and sees 1.4 million course enrolments each month. It announced on Wednesday partnerships with 29 new universities globally, bringing to 62 the total number of institutions it offers courses with.

Other renowned universities that

offer such online courses include Stanford, Brown, Harvard, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

NUS’ first course, which will run for eight weeks, is under the NUS Centre for Quantum Technologies, where students will learn about the “randomness” concept and its usefulness.

The second, a six-week course offered by the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, will teach classical musical composition.

NUS Provost and Deputy President (Academic Affairs) Tan Eng Chye said that “the availability of academic content on an open online platform will accelerate knowledge sharing in higher education globally”.

The move will mean “more students can now have access to, and benefit from, NUS’ educational offerings”, he added.

Asked if more courses will be offered as MOOCs in the near future, an NUS spokesperson said it is “keen” to explore such options and plans to “offer about two or three courses on Coursera every year”.

Meanwhile, the Nanyang Technological University and the Singapore Management University said that they were also exploring the possibility of offering their courses via MOOC providers.

The universities did not say when they could do so.