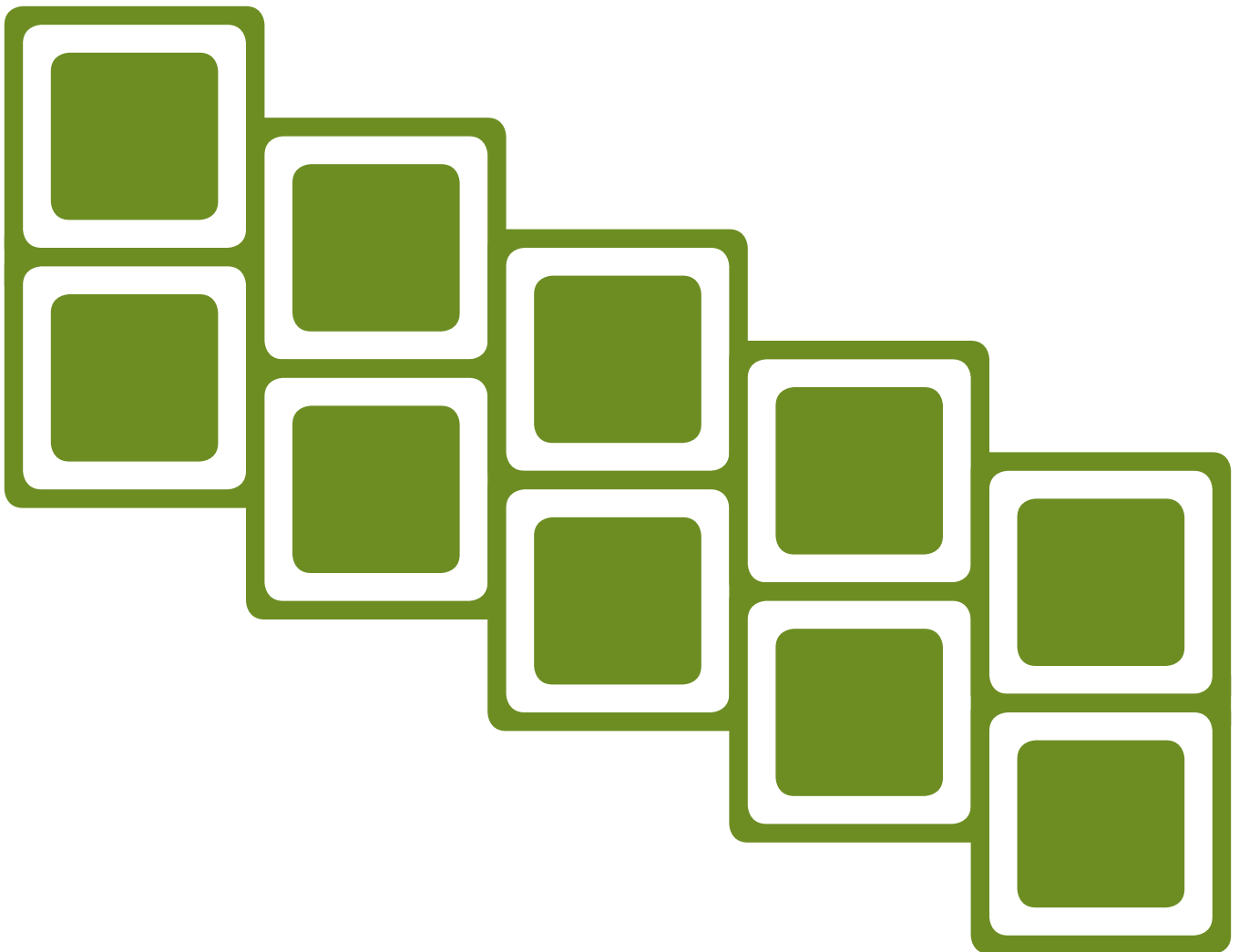


Summer Academe, Volume 7, 2013

# Book & Media Reviews



# *Unlocking the Gates: How and Why Leading Universities Are Opening Up Access to Their Courses*

Taylor Walsh,  
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, 320 pages)

Taylor Walsh's *Unlocking the Gates* is an essential primer about higher education's early years in online courseware development. Using a case study format, Walsh explores some of the first highly publicized experiments, Fathom and AllLearn, and those that followed, MIT's OpenCourseWare, Carnegie Mellon's Open Learning Initiative, Open Yale Courses, webcast.berkeley, and one international example, the National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning in India. As current ventures like EdX, Coursera, and Udacity seem to be rocking the foundations of traditional higher education, Walsh's work provides a valuable history and baseline understanding of higher ed's online world. In his foreword, William Bowen says, "All sectors of higher education will be affected in one way or another by what are truly transformational changes in the way knowledge is created and disseminated. . . . It will never again be possible to lock the gates" (p. xvi).

Well organized and engagingly written, the book employs qualitative research methodology, including interviews with nearly all the key players in the online initiatives described. Key quotations from these individuals bring to life the sense of purpose, excitement, accomplishment, and disappointment these pioneers experienced.

Ubiquitous technology in the hands of the masses has created an era of instant access to information and inspired experimentation at many institutions. Walsh begins with a definition of online courseware, describing the unbundling of familiar educational formats and traditions. Online instruction frees access to content for learners who are not in residence on a college campus. Open courseware does not require the traditional gateways of course credit and degrees in order to provide learning opportunities. Walsh describes these initiatives as content free of both the campus and credit, and offered to a massive public.

Familiar names that have come and gone in higher education's own dot-com bubble are the topics of the book's chapters. First Fathom and AllLearn, credit-free online entities created by Columbia and Yale respectively, demonstrate the significant infrastructure and cost of early efforts to monetize noncredit academic content for a broad public. The failure of Fathom shocked

the world of higher ed and sounded a loud note of caution concerning the purported revenue model that online delivery would offer to institutions.

MIT's OpenCourseWare initiative presented a 180-degree change in approach. Free and open to the world, this heavily funded initiative made MIT world renowned for open content. But the funding required, over \$33 million as of 2009 with projected annual operating costs of \$4 million, makes such an undertaking beyond the reach of the vast majority of institutions and leaves open the question of a business model.

Carnegie Mellon's Open Learning Initiative offers yet another approach to online instruction, bringing the expertise of a research university to bear on pedagogy and learning. The OLI online platform closely tracks student behavior and learning outcomes and enables faculty to adjust instruction to improve learning. Again heavily funded, this project may have made the most significant contribution to endorsing the value and validity of online education while refocusing attention on the importance of pedagogy and demonstration of learning.

Open Yale Courses are described as an effort embracing quality over the massive quantity MIT offered. Here careful video production of lectures given by some of Yale's most renowned faculty were expected to bring alumni and a large general public to Yale's e-door for well-delivered and highly produced, but lengthy, lectures. The videos were lauded for quality production, but responses to this project suggest that reverence for the lecture may be overrated.

Walsh explores [webcast.berkeley](http://webcast.berkeley) in yet another illustration of a major university's attempt to employ technology to improve learning. Ignoring the production quality Yale embraced, Berkeley set out to capture lectures in large classes and provide students with opportunities to review these to enhance their learning.

One initiative outside the United States is chronicled in the book: the National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning, a collaborative effort among India's technical universities. Here we see technology driving collaboration among the nation's elite institutions in an effort to reach vastly more learners than their campuses can accommodate and thus to contribute to employability and economic growth.

As MOOCs claim front pages and universities scramble to understand a changing landscape, *Unlocking the Gates* becomes an ever more critical read for all in higher education.

*Review by Karen Sibley,  
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