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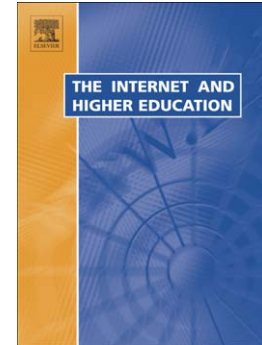
Massive Open Online Courses and Underserved Students in the United States

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**Abstract**

MOOCs have been advanced as a mechanism for increasing access to higher education for underserved populations. However, we still know little about the socio-demographics of MOOC participants in general and even less about underserved MOOC participants in particular. In order to broaden our understanding of MOOC participants, including those who stand to benefit the most from free college coursework, this study relies on a sample of 2,634 U.S. MOOC users who participated in at least 398 different MOOCs offered by 129 different universities and 22 different providers. This study replicates findings that suggest MOOC participants are already educationally advantaged while also contributing new findings on the underrepresentation of some racial/ethnic minorities in MOOCs. In addition, data indicate that while underserved users were more likely to take MOOCs for educational advancement, they were also less likely to complete MOOCs. Such findings further challenge the democratizing power of MOOCs as currently conceived.

**Keywords:** MOOCs; Underserved Students; Higher Education

**Highlights:**

- Underserved populations within the U.S. were largely underrepresented in MOOCs.
- The majority of users were not motivated to take MOOCs for educational advancement.
- Underserved users were more likely to take MOOCs for educational advancement.
- Underserved users were less likely to complete MOOCs.

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