SEARCHLIGHTS & SUNGLASSES
LEARNING LAYER

Online courses increase: Where are we headed?

An increasing number of universities are offering online courses. A 2011 report by the Sloan Consortium found nearly one in three higher education students took at least one online course.

E-learning comes in many varieties: reading modules, recorded lectures or summaries, interactive exercises or live webinars. In recent years, massive open online courses (MOOCs) have tried to provide interactive learning environments for thousands of people at a time. Coursera, one of the largest providers of MOOCs, is expanding partnerships with universities, and the Knight Center's data journalism MOOC reaches almost 4,000 participants worldwide.

Discussion at three levels:

Flashlight: Study this online education infographic. Why is e-learning popular? Have you taken online classes? Were they better, worse or the same as learning in a classroom? Do you think these classes will continue to grow in the future? The study was conducted by Pearson Education, if you conduct a similar survey in your school, do the results match?

Spotlight: Khan Academy promises learning in "just about any" subject. Sign on to the web site and search for "journalism," "media" and "communication." Are there any classes? What do you think of them? Are there reasons why more educators don't use YouTube or Khan Academy? Just like the infographic you saw above, analyze the most popular e-learning options and the range of courses they offer. Which subjects are the most popular? Which are lacking courses? Are there some subjects which simply cannot be taught online?

Searchlight: Visit Learn Labs, and look at the courses offered. How do these courses cater to a specific perspective on media use and information exchange? What courses appeal to you and your learning style? Compare the courses to the webinars at NewsU.org and other online media education you can find: Are they competitively priced? Do you think Media Bistro's business model is profitable?

Extra credit: What portal does your school use for online classes? How many of your classes use an online component? Should all your classes have one? Blackboard is the most commonly used e-learning platform, what platform does your

school use? Do you think it has all the features you need? How can it be improved? Should [e-learning platforms remain open-source](#) or is Blackboard right in acquiring patents?