

OpenCourseWare consortium, revisited

WEB WATCH The OCW Consortium members have hosted online learning materials from more than 13,000 courses in 20 languages, says N S Soundar Rajan

In 1999, the University of Tübingen in Germany, began publishing videos of lectures online. Anyone visiting the university's website could freely view these lectures. This was the beginning of the OpenCourseWare movement which is dedicated to the development of freely available, stand-alone online courses and teaching material informed by the best current research.

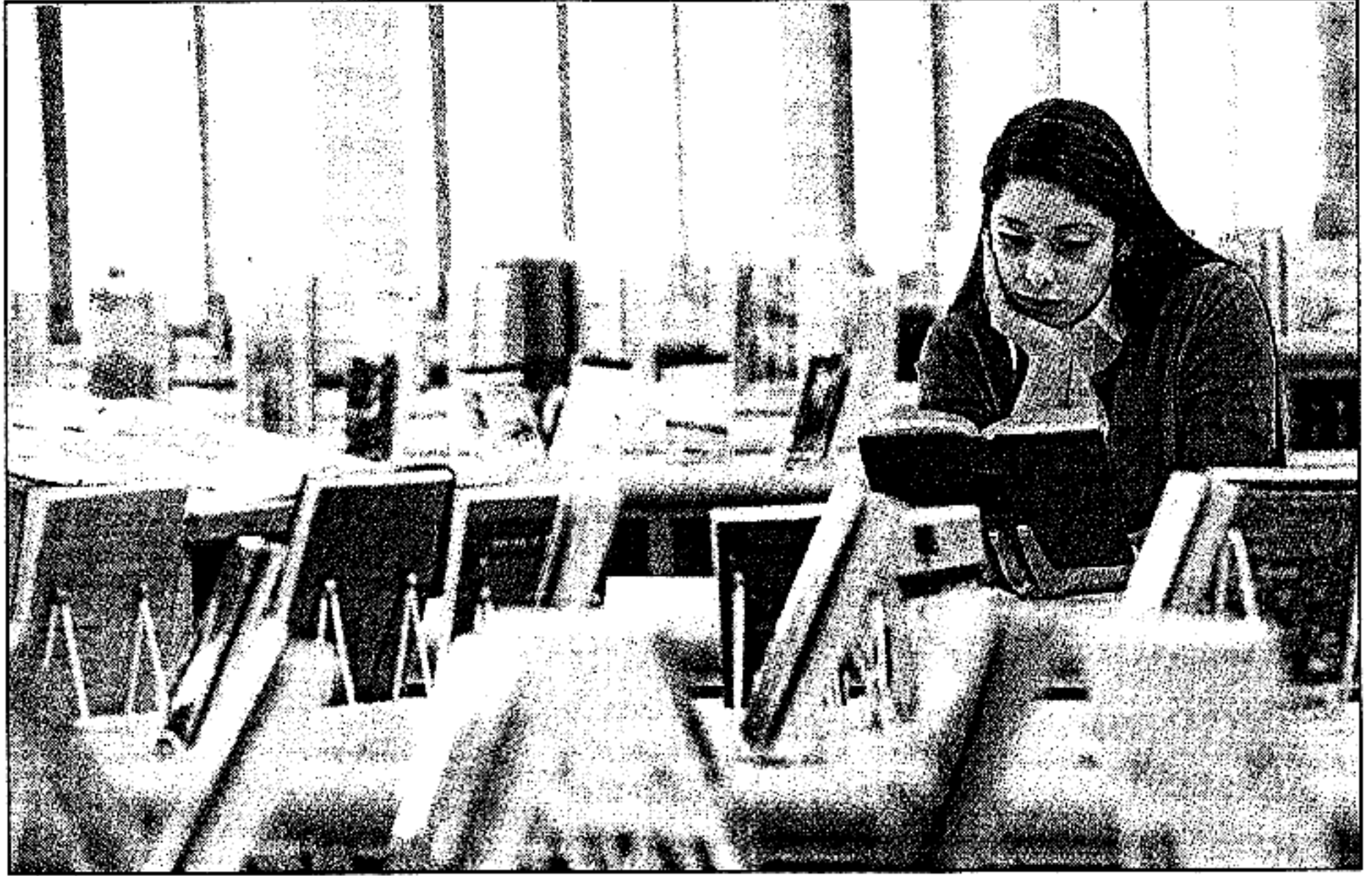
The OCW includes items such as lecture notes, reading lists, course assignments, syllabi, study materials, tests, samples, simulations, and the like. The OCW movement got a big boost when in 2002 world renowned universities like MIT and UC Berkeley launched their OpenCourseWare initiative. A couple of years later, 2008 to be exact, the OCW consortium was formed.

Open education

The OpenCourseWare Consortium, a collaboration of higher education institutions from around the world, is dedicated to "creating a broad and deep body of open educational content using a shared model." Incorporated as an independent non-profit organisation in 2008, the OpenCourseWare Consortium is a community of over 250 universities and associated organisations worldwide committed to advancing OpenCourseWare sharing and widening the reach to a fantastic global educational opportunity. The mission of the OpenCourseWare Consortium is to advance formal and informal learning through the worldwide sharing and use of free, open, high-quality education materials organised as courses. The Consortium's stated goals are:

- Extend the reach and impact of opencourseware by encouraging the adoption and adaptation of open educational materials around the world.
- Foster the development of additional opencourseware projects.
- Ensure the long-term sustainability of opencourseware projects by identifying ways to improve effectiveness and reduce costs.

Collectively, the OCW Consortium members have hosted online learning materials from



more than 13,000 courses in 20 languages, and these can be accessed through the Consortium's web site at <http://ocwconsortium.org/courses>. The OpenCourseWare is primarily used for self-improvement purposes and generally, there is no way to get a degree with OCW courses. However, this has not stopped people form study groups online that are built around the idea of OCW as it enjoys some distinct advantages over traditional educational methods. For one thing, participants discuss online the subjects they are studying and also grade each other's material. And, subjects to study are aplenty, and available in a wide range of subjects, includes everything from culinary training to rocket science.

Yale

The list is growing and let us look at some of latest courses offered by the a couple of pioneers of OCW consortium like Yale and MIT. Yale's newest offering includes Financial Theory with Professor John Geanakoplos, James Tobin Professor of Economics. This OCW course attempts to explain the role and the importance of the financial system in the global economy. Another OCW new course at Yale is Fundamentals of Physics II with Professor Ramamurti Shankar, John Randolph Huffman Professor of Physics at Yale. This is a continuation of Fundamentals of Physics, I (PHYS 200), the introductory course on the principles and

methods of physics for students who have good preparation in physics and mathematics. This course covers electricity, magnetism, optics and quantum mechanics. Another new course at Yale is the Moral Foundations of Politics with Professor Ian Shapiro, Sterling Professor of Political Science. This course explores main answers to the question, "when do governments deserve our allegiance?" It starts with a survey of major political theories of the Enlightenment — Utilitarianism, Marxism, and the social contract tradition — through classical formulations, historical context, and contemporary debates relating to politics today.

MIT

MIT OpenCourseWare, on the other hand, has launched OCW Scholar, a new series of courses, "designed for independent learners who have few additional resources available to them." To date, MIT has given students access to isolated materials from MIT courses, but, now, with this new initiative, lifelong learners can work with a more rounded set of resources. OWC Scholar takes video lectures, homework problems, problem solving videos, simulations, readings, etc., and stitches them into a structured curriculum. Perfect for the self-disciplined student! The OWC scholar courses include Physics I, a first-semester course that provides an introduction to Classical Mechanics;

Physics II: Electricity and Magnetism, is the second semester of introductory physics; Introduction to Solid State Chemistry, a first-year class on the principles of chemistry, with an emphasis on solid-state materials, and their application to engineering systems; Single Variable Calculus, covers differentiation and integration of functions of one variable, and concludes with a brief discussion of infinite series; and Multivariable Calculus, covers differential, integral and vector calculus for functions of more than one variable. These mathematical tools and methods are used extensively in the physical sciences, engineering, economics and computer graphics. The OCW Scholar courses are designed for independent learners who have few additional resources available to them. The courses are substantially more complete than typical OCW courses and include new custom-created content as well as materials repurposed from MIT classrooms.

This month marks the 10th anniversary of MIT OpenCourseWare and during this period MIT has shared its course materials with over 100 million individuals. MIT's goal for the next decade is to expand its reach to ten-fold, "to reach a billion minds." Many others, universities, educational institutions and home grown endeavours, throughout the world, are jumping so forcefully into the self-education space, its future is anybody's guess!