Harvard, MIT announce online learning partnership

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CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (AP) -- Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have joined forces to offer free online courses in a project aimed at attracting millions of online learners around the world, the universities announced Wednesday.

Beginning this fall, a variety of courses developed by faculty at both institutions will be available online through the new $60 million partnership, known as "edX."

"Anyone with an Internet connection anywhere in the world can have access," Harvard President Drew Faust said during a news conference to announce the initiative.

MIT has offered a program called OpenCourseWare for a decade that makes materials from more than 2,000 classes available free online. It has been used by more than 100 million people. In December, the school announced it also would begin offering a special credential, known as MITx, for people who complete the online version of certain courses.

Harvard has long offered courses to a wider community through its extension program.

The MITx platform will serve as the foundation for the new learning system.

MIT President Susan Hockfield said more than 120,000 people registered for the first course offered by MITx. She said Harvard and MIT hope other universities will join them in offering courses on the open-source edX platform.

"Fasten your seatbelts," Hockfield said.

Other universities, including Stanford, Yale and Carnegie-Mellon, have been experimenting with teaching to a global audience online.

The Harvard-MIT initiative will be overseen by a not-for-profit organization based in Cambridge, to be owned equally by the two universities. MIT and Harvard have made commitments of $30 million each in institutional support, grants and philanthropy to start the collaboration.

Certificates will be given to students who pass the online courses.

Harvard and MIT also plan to use the edX platform to research how students learn and which teaching methods and tools are most successful.

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