

Announcement

First-ever HBCU-created MOOC Offers Context for Understanding World Religions

Offered through Canvas Network, New Massive Open Online Course Marks a Milestone for HBCUs Adopting 21st Century Educational Innovation

MARSHALL, TEXAS and SALT LAKE CITY – September 16, 2014 – Although Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have been shaking up higher education since 2012 by offering free courses to students anywhere in the world, historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have been notably absent from MOOC platforms, until now. Today [Canvas Network](#) and the [Center for Excellence in Distance Learning \(CEDL\) at Wiley College](#) announced a new MOOC developed by Dr. Keith Augustus Burton of CEDL member institution [Oakwood University](#), "Understanding World Religions: An Occupational Approach." Enrollment is free, and anyone can register at [canvas.net](#).

This MOOC is the product of innovation-focused collaboration between Oakwood University and the Center for Excellence in Distance Learning at Wiley College, which promotes greater sharing of resources and best practices in online education among the HBCU community.

“On behalf of all the members of the Center for Excellence in Distance Learning at Wiley College, we are proud to be standard-bearers for educational innovation in the HBCU community with the introduction of its first massive open online course,” said Dr. Haywood L. Strickland, president and CEO of [Wiley College](#). “We recognize the substantial contributions of Canvas Network in providing a superior platform that will make Dr. Burton’s MOOC and scholarship freely available to students across the globe.”

Although elite colleges and universities have been on the vanguard of the MOOC movement, HBCUs have been slower to branch into this and other developments in online education. Many have hailed MOOCs as an affordable alternative to traditional higher education studies, but these courses have been viewed largely as educational experiments and luxuries with little relevance to students served by a majority of HBCUs.

“By spearheading the creation of the first HBCU-developed MOOC, we intend to claim a place for our students and institutions on the MOOC landscape,” said Dr. Kim Long, Director of the Center for Excellence in Distance Learning at Wiley College. “The Center uses open educational resources (OER) to lower costs for students and improve engagement in the more than 40 online courses we now support, including Dr. Burton’s MOOC. The Center’s five institutional members are taking advantage of these resources in new and creative ways to serve the needs of HBCU students.”

The MOOC’s approach to the topic of world religions is particularly timely, according to Melissa Loble, senior director of Canvas Network. “Current events highlight how religious differences often drive deep divisions,” she said. “But by exploring world religions through the lens of workplace diversity, this course

will offer students an intriguing journey of discovery to find common ground in diverse religious beliefs and practice.”

World Religions is a fitting topic for the first-ever MOOC created by an HBCU for other reasons as well. Most HBCUs are church-affiliated and maintain strong ties to their religious heritage, offering religion courses as part of their core curriculum. In designing the course, Dr. Burton hopes it will attract a variety of learners both inside and outside the HBCU community. He said, “Canvas Network’s MOOC platform has the potential to draw students from throughout the world to participate in an instructive dialogue as they learn about influential religions and share their own firsthand traditions and experiences. We are excited to see how the MOOC format scales what is possible with this course.”

“Understanding World Religions: An Occupational Approach” is scheduled to start on October 27. The course is offered free of charge, and registration is now open at canvas.net. Participating members of the Center for Excellence in Distance Learning will offer academic credit for students who complete the MOOC, based on the established credit alignment policies of each institution. In so doing, CEDL member institutions may become the first HBCUs to offer students the option of earning faster, cheaper college credit via MOOCs.

About the Center for Excellence in Distance Learning at Wiley College

The [Center for Excellence in Distance Learning at Wiley College](https://cexdl.org) is a membership organization that helps Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) develop online education courses and programs using [open educational resources \(OER\)](#). Members of the Center have access to a growing number of pre-built OER-based courses in high enrollment subjects, which faculty members may adapt to fit their course learning outcomes and instructional style. Support partner Lumen Learning provides courseware and support to help each institution use OER effectively to achieve their distance learning goals. Current CEDL members include Wiley College, Oakwood University, Florida Memorial University, Talladega College and Jarvis Christian College. For more information about the Center, its members and work, visit cexdl.org.

About Canvas Network

Canvas Network offers open, online courses taught by educators everywhere. Powered by the Canvas learning management system, Canvas Network provides a place and platform where teachers, students and institutions worldwide can connect and chart their own course for personal growth, professional development and academic inquiry. Canvas Network is developed and supported by Instructure, an education technology company that partners with educators, institutions, and technologists to build open educational resources and break down barriers to learning. To learn more, visit canvas.net.

About Lumen Learning

Lumen Learning provides high quality open courseware and support for institutions seeking to transition high enrollment courses to open educational resources. Founded in 2012, the Lumen team delivers OER-based courseware and support to 40+ higher education institutions, including six of the 20 largest U.S. community colleges and system-level agreements in three states. Lumen Learning has pioneered research-based approaches to successful adoption of open educational resources. Its pilot projects typically result in eliminating textbook costs, as well as 5-10% improvements in student success. Learn more at lumenlearning.com.

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