

MIT to offer its courses free online by year end

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The Massachusetts Institute of Technology will become by year's end the first U.S. university to offer all of its roughly 1,800 courses free on the Internet, a school official said on Friday.

"We started this project because MIT believes that one of the best ways to advance education around the world is through the Internet," said Anne Margulies, head of online curriculum.

Online students will not be able to earn an MIT degree or have contact with faculty at the university, located across the river from Boston in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

MIT launched its "OpenCourseWare" program in 2003 and already offers hundreds of courses online. A small number of other U.S. schools are following suit. Stanford put some classes online last year and Bryn Mawr plans to do so soon.

Last month, 1.5 million users went to the MIT course site, sampling offerings like Cognitive Robotics, Inventions and Patents, and Superconducting Magnets.

Most users -- 60 percent come from outside the United States -- gravitate toward the subjects MIT is best-known for: computer science, physics and mathematics, Margulies said.

Even MIT students who pay thousands of dollars in tuition fees for each course use the free online service to study for exams or sample what courses they may want to take on campus, Margulies said.