What Are Small Private Online Courses (SPOCs)?

Online Learning for Skills Transformation

Online courses come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. By this point, most of us have heard of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)—but have you heard of Small Private Online Courses (SPOCs)?

SPOCs are classes that provide innovative and accessible educational opportunities. But this approach to online learning has some major differences with MOOCs and other course offerings, especially when it comes to professional education.

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What Are SPOCs?

To define Small Private Online Courses, or SPOCs, you can say they are **online classes with limited enrollment, often offered by universities to individual learners or employees within organizations.** SPOCs, specifically those offered by Emeritus, are usually created and delivered by or in partnership with top-tier schools and provide a level of access to renowned faculty that simply isn't possible in other online course settings.

These **cohort-based courses*** combine digital elements like video and interactive peer-to-peer exercises with discussions and lectures (live, recorded, or a mix of both)—factors that make them more appealing to professionals and organizations.

While SPOCs range in length at Emeritus, most land around seven weeks to eight months, with prices ranging from $2,500 to $8,000 for individuals. Discounts apply for group enrollment.

Read more about the benefits of online learning

COHORT-BASED LEARNING

When students progress through a program at the same pace, completing coursework together until graduation. This can be done online, in person, or in a hybrid setting, enabling learners to build strong relationships with their peers.

Are Small Private Online Courses Right for You?

The types of online classes that are typically classified as MOOCs are usually free or low-cost and open to anyone worldwide with internet access. When they first came on the scene, education experts lauded them as a key solution to unequal access to education, and major institutions including Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology jumped on board.

However, completion rates in free online courses are consistently low, and research shows interventions designed to help students finish courses haven't significantly moved that needle. Due to their large size, MOOCs typically rely on recorded lectures and digital grading, though some programs offer additional features (like certificates of completion) for a fee.

Average SPOC Cost & Duration

$2,500 to $8,000*

7 Weeks to 8 Months

*Discounts apply for group enrollments

In addition to expert teaching, SPOCs provide participants with the opportunity to learn from a network of peers across organizations and even continents. It's no surprise that completion rates are much higher.

At Emeritus, we average 90% completion, with over 100,000 students a year from 80 countries. While free online courses like MOOCs can be a helpful resource for learners driven by personal interest or hoping to learn the basics of a specific topic, SPOCs may be a more practical choice for professionals looking to upskill or reskill.

Upskill and Reskill With Small Private Online Courses

Interested in learning more about how SPOCs can help your team or company upskill or reskill to meet the needs of today's workforce? Get in touch with Emeritus.

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How Are SPOCs Formatted?

While SPOCs overall vary in format, what sets them apart at Emeritus is their unique approach to teaching and learning. At Emeritus, courses are designed to provide both theoretical knowledge and tangible skills for professionals facing real-world problems.

Our model combines synchronous (live) and asynchronous (self-paced) learning, allowing students to connect with their peers while balancing their personal and professional lives. Small class sizes mean that hands-on work—both individual and in groups—is overseen by professors and experts in the field.

At the end of Emeritus courses, students earn a digital certificate of completion and emerge equipped with new insights to bring back to their organizations. That's why **94% of past participants** report that their coursework had a positive impact on their career development.

In a survey of 2,200 Emeritus learners

who took online courses before May 2021...

81%

said the program delivery format allowed for an **easy balance across work, personal life, and studies**

94%

believe that the program has had a **positive impact on their career and professional development**

91%

believe that the program has had a **positive impact on their business or organization**

78%

said they learned tools and strategies that they can **immediately apply to their work**

25%

got **new opportunities at work** after their program (with 97% of those learners believing the program played a role)

31%

of participants who completed courses saw a **salary increase** (17% on average)

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Learn more about Emeritus at
emeritus.org/enterprise