

OpenCourseWare is based on a simple but revolutionary idea. That MIT can advance its mission by sharing nearly all of its course content online, for free. Early 2000 was still the heyday of the dotcom era. MIT was trying to figure out what MIT should do in this e-learning space. It was before YouTube. It was before Facebook. It was before the web had completely taken hold.

What we're going to do is we're going to take all of the materials we use in our classrooms and we're going to put them on the web. When OCW was first launched, the focus was on opening to the world what we teach. For an education institution like MIT, we have 11,000 students. To reach 200 million people is really an amazing feat. Every year, I have 60 to 70 bright new faces.

Through OCW, that number is not 60 or 70 but its thousands or even millions OCW was the pioneer here of being really a sharing kind of culture because we wanted to show students outside of MIT what kind of place this is and what kind of students come here. Educating engineers so they can build more bridges. Educating musicians so we can make better musicians. Educating philosophers who can think about the world around us.

What does it mean to learn something at the most fundamental level? It makes everybody better. It creates a community of self-learners. It gives access to materials. The promise of OpenCourseWare really comes down to who you are and what you're trying to achieve. You don't have to register for anything; you just go there and you can pull out the materials. No one is watching you really. You can explore whatever you want to learn whenever you want to.

OCW laid the foundation and it remains integral to the MIT mission: to advance knowledge and educate students in service to the nation and the world.