

PEER 2 PEER UNIVERSITY

Virtual university for free

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Special to
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Today, it's being hailed as nothing less than a revolutionary way for people around the world to pursue higher education free of charge and regardless of geography.

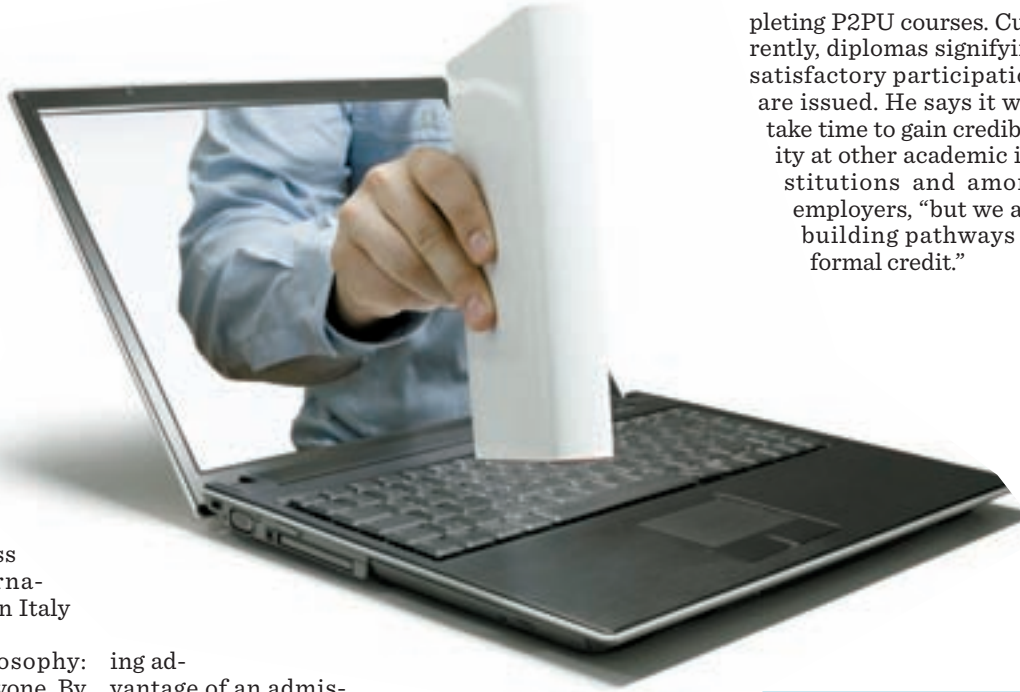
But Peer 2 Peer University, or P2PU, sprang during an informal gabfest among a group of educators, artists and business people at an international conference in Italy in 2007.

Slogan and philosophy: "Learning for Everyone, By Everyone, About Almost Anything."

One of P2PU's five founders is Stian Haklev, an M.A. student at the University of Toronto. Two others are from the U.S., one is from Australia and one from South Africa.

Haklev recalls that, "We were talking about open resources, open licensing of online resources and so on. We started thinking about what a truly open university could look like, and we ended up deciding to explore the concept by actually doing it, rather than by just theorizing."

Three years later, thanks to the combined efforts of a wildly diverse group of international volunteer educators, Haklev says about 1,400 students around the world have enrolled — tak-



ing advantage of an admission process that deliberately gives more weight to the motivations and interests of applicants than to their academic credentials or previous study experience.

The handful of six-week online courses that launched in 2009 has now burgeoned to more than 50. They range from such standard academic fare as an introduction to finance and economics to creative non-fiction writing, plus other strikingly offbeat topics (see box at right for examples).

Haklev points out that the virtual university's innovative modus operandi wouldn't have been possible before the proliferation of resources that are freely available on the Internet.

And, he stresses, an essential part of the concept is not

just learning but — true to the "peer" part of P2PU's monicker — also being part of virtual worldwide community whose members learn from each other.

Students not only access their lessons online, they also meet on Skype for class discussions, watch videos simultaneously and read one another's essays and blogs related to course assignments.

They must also agree that whatever relevant materials they generate while studying at P2PU will be "open licensed," meaning that they are freely available for downloading from the Internet and reuse by others.

Still being worked out, says Haklev, is how to ensure widely accepted accreditation for successfully com-

pleting P2PU courses. Currently, diplomas signifying satisfactory participation are issued. He says it will take time to gain credibility at other academic institutions and among employers, "but we are building pathways to formal credit."

P2PU's course topics

Along with academically traditional courses, P2PU offers a growing array of profoundly untraditional topics, many suggested by students. Currently, these include: Poker and Strategic Thinking; Neuroethics and International Bio-law; Consciousness; Games and Apps; Human Trafficking; The Praxis of Queer Pedagogy; and land Restoration and Afforestation. For more information, visit p2pu.org.

Is your workplace accessible? It should be, say experts

QMI AGENCY — Workplaces that aren't fully accessible could be shutting the door on potential customers and talent, experts say.

More than four million Canadians with disabilities spend upwards of \$25 billion across the country each year, according to the government of Canada.

Of these, only 54% who are able to work are employed, in many cases because offices and retail spaces just aren't accessible to them.

As a result, bosses are missing out on customers

and skilled workers, said experts recently.

To date, only Ontario has legislation in place making it mandatory for businesses to be accessible to everyone. By Jan. 2012, all Ontario businesses in every industry will be required to be up to code.

According to Ottawa's Government Services for Entrepreneurs, it's only a matter of time before other provinces follow suit. The federal government offers tax incentives for business owners making upgrades for accessibility reasons.

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