

MOOCs

BU's fourth offering, Alien Worlds, launched October 31

March On

BU LAUNCHED ITS FIRST MOOC, SABER-metrics 101, just last spring, and almost 17,000 students signed up for the course about baseball analytics taught by Major League Baseball datacaster Andy Andres, a College of General Studies senior lecturer. Four months later, on October 31, the University went live with its fourth MOOC (massive open online course), Alien Worlds: The Science of Exoplanet Discovery and Characterization, in which the orbs travel faster and farther than anything in Fenway Park.

"This is about the thousands of planets that we have discovered around stars in our own galaxy," says Andrew West, a College of Arts & Sciences assistant professor of astronomy, who was recently awarded a National Science Foundation CAREER grant and a Cottrell Scholarship for his research and teaching. "What is really exciting about it is that it makes clear that we live in this amazing time of discovery. For the first time in human history, we know that there are planets common around other stars. Almost every star has a planet. This is something we have thought about for thousands of years, and now we know it's true. This is a world-changing set of discoveries. My class is about that, and about what it means for our place in the universe."

Two other BU MOOCs came online in September, through the online learning consortium edX. (These courses are ending as of press time, but alumni can still peruse the course material once they're over.) War for the Greater Middle East, taught by Andrew Bacevich, a CAS and Pardee School of Global Studies professor emeritus of history and of international relations, is an examination of a 34-year-old war that he says has failed to produce stability or democracy. Bacevich, who retired from BU in August, picked a choice moment to argue for a Middle East policy reboot—his course started just two weeks after President Barack Obama vowed to launch airstrikes and other measures intended to roll back the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

WEB EXTRA
Watch video trailers for the MOOCs War for the Greater Middle East, the Art of Poetry, and Alien Worlds at bu.edu/bostonia.



VERNON DOUGETTE

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The Art of Poetry, led by Robert Pinsky, former US poet laureate, a CAS professor of creative writing, and winner of multiple literary awards, went live September 29. Pinsky makes it clear that a MOOC is not simply a videotaped classroom session. "The Art of Poetry," he says, is based on his experiences of the web "as a setting for serious learning," inspired by the "Classic Poem" discussions he conducted for years for *Slate*. As a three-time poet laureate, from 1997 to 2000, and in the years since, Pinsky, the author of 19 books, has devoted much of his career to fostering a wider, deeper appreciation of his craft, dispelling the notion that poetry is too obscure or inaccessible to be enjoyed like prose or music. The MOOC is in the spirit of the videos in the Favorite Poem Project, founded by Pinsky to celebrate, document, and encourage poetry's role in Americans' lives.

A fifth MOOC, AP Physics 1, launches in January 2015, and a sixth, Differential Equations, is in development. BU's MOOCs are available, for free and without credit, to students globally, who can do the course work at their own pace and convenience. They can opt either to audit the class or to pursue a completion certificate.

→ Learn more about BU's MOOCs, or register for a class, at www.bu.edu/digital/free-courses-moocs/.