



## New Ways of Learning

Author : Mike Smith

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The TED 2011 conference is going on now and there have been a number of interesting presentations. The full videos won't be online for awhile, but summaries are available. [A report on one of the sessions](#) resonated with me as the School considers the possibility of offering an online MPA degree.

The presentation was by Salman Khan, a New York City hedge fund analyst who was tutoring his cousins from across the country. He made short video versions of his tutorials to make it easier to coordinate their schedules. "And then a funny thing happened. His cousins reported that they liked learning from his videos better than from him." Initially Khan was surprised and confused that his cousins would choose a video rather than interact with him. "But then he thought about it from their standpoint and it began to make sense. Having a video made it so they could repeat and replay anything that they didn't understand as many times as necessary. They could refer back to weeks-old lessons without having to feel embarrassed about it. They could learn without another person standing over their shoulder asking 'do you understand yet?'"

Khan had posted the videos for his cousins on YouTube, "and without any marketing on his part, more and more people started watching. And more and more people started emailing and leaving comments about how much they had helped." Khan joked in his TED presentation that it was weird because as "a hedge fund analyst I wasn't used to doing anything of social value." Khan eventually created [the Khan Academy](#) and has posted more than 2,200 talks on a range of subject—between 100,000 and 200,000 lectures are watched every day.

So what's the point? The big idea behind Khan's work is that "all education should be self-driven." It seems crazy to build an educational system that assumes everyone learns at the same pace and in the same way, and yet we have done exactly that at every level of education. It may



be democratic, but is it the best way to insure that people are engaged learners? Khan illustrates that challenging our assumptions about how students learn is essential if we want them to reach their greatest potential.

One reason I am interested in exploring an online MPA is because it gives us the opportunity to think differently about how we engage our graduate students, and also how we teach public officials. The mere mention of online education causes some people to cringe because of assumptions about low quality, and in many cases those assumptions are deserved. Khan's use of video instruction is one illustration of how technology and an openness to change can produce educational improvements. We are exploring a partnership with [2tor](#), an online educational company, because they offer us the opportunity to do something transformative in educating our MPA students. We owe it to ourselves and to our students to explore the possibility.