

Setting the Stage for Student Success – Digital Education Strategies at The G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education at Ryerson University

Opportunity

Digital Educations Strategies (DES) is a centralized unit within The G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education at Ryerson University in Toronto. Annual enrollments at The Chang School exceed 70,000 students, with over 20,000 students in distance courses alone. The Chang School delivers both professional and post-graduate certificates, undergraduate courses, as well as courses that prepare students for accreditations. The Chang School currently has about 400 courses available in distance format, including 14 fully online certificate programs and 22 blended certificate programs that combine online and in-class learning.

DES works with program areas within The Chang School to design and deliver online and blended courses, focusing on technical and instructional design support. DES develops courses in collaboration with academic coordinators and subject matter experts (SMEs) who are faculty, industry professionals, and community leaders. About 20 percent of The Chang School instructors facilitating online courses are Ryerson faculty, while the rest are outside experts.

Digital Education Strategies at The Chang School

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Information: It's all around us and growing fast. Can we keep up? collapse

DES News View All...

- Health Assessment Course Receives...
- High Park Tour Receives Honorable...
- Lady Tasting Tea - Semifinalist in 2011
- Mad People's History - CAUCE 2011...

Educational Media View All...

- Video: High Park Tour
- Video: Online Role Play
- Video: Self-Labeling and Identity
- Video: Experience Sketch Animation

Web Picks View All...

- Higher Education Barriers During the...
- Inking
- Engaging Faculty in Online Education
- Better, Smarter, Faster- How Web 3.0...

Video Interviews View All...

Strategies: Interacting with online students

Perspectives: Teacher skills in a digital age

Perspectives: The impact of social media

Quick Poll

Should universities invest in mobile learning?

Yes - 75.8%

No - 24.2%

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Innovation

Four key factors are the cornerstones for creating quality online resources, courses, and programs at The Chang School: a collaborative and robust production model for online course development; an innovative and cost-effective online course distribution model; engaging and relevant learning and teaching tools; and business efficiency tools that enable The Chang School to administer a high number of courses per year.

Production Model: DES produces more than 40 new online courses a year with a team of three instructional designers. With an anticipated increase in staff, the goal is to develop 80 new online courses a year, largely for professional certificates. A sustainable course development model, which follows an eight-month process model with clearly defined roles and milestones, will support this increase in courses and resources without compromising product quality.

To foster student learning and success, online courses at The Chang School are not adapted from existing classroom materials, but are redesigned to reflect adult learning

and best practices that are suitable for the online environment. In fact, “many courses that have never been taught in the classroom are now being designed in an online format for their first run,” says Naza Djafarova, Director of DES. Each new online course is created by an SME, who works closely with an instructional designer in DES and other support staff as needed throughout the process.

The development process is outlined in the *Guide to Online Course Development*, a resource for SMEs, which encompasses the best practices and processes for high-quality teaching and learning. In addition to the development process, the *Guide* also provides information on:

- the benefits of online learning for students, instructors, and institutions;
- online course design elements, such as learning objectives, rich media, and instructional strategies and activities;
- assessment options;
- technology used in The Chang School; and
- sample rubrics.

The *Guide* is just one of many resources produced by DES to help instructors and SMEs in online teaching and learning. These resources are available to all course developers and educators at Ryerson and other academic institutions. They can be accessed at: <http://de.ryerson.ca/portals/de/resources.html>

Distribution and Delivery Model: The delivery model at The Chang School provides flexibility for students, faculty, and instructors. Courses are built for online delivery, but can also be packaged to be delivered as blended learning, offering online sessions combined with synchronous sessions, such as web conferencing or face-to-face. Thus, a single course may be offered in multiple sections taught by multiple instructors within the same semester. The Chang School meets the needs of working adults by offering courses in a variety of formats, such as 13-week fully online, seven-week accelerated online, and one-week accelerated blended options.

Through the distributive model created at The Chang School, a single master course is developed and distributed through multiple sections and locations. Because the sections are all linked to the master course, any updates to the master course are immediately reflected in the course sections. Thus, this model supports production efficiency, maintains quality standards, and ensures the academic integrity of the programs made available to students.

Learning and Teaching Tools: As well as providing consultation in best practices for online learning, DES works with SMEs to develop ideas for teaching and learning tools (also referred to as rich media) that can be incorporated into online courses at Ryerson. DES

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packages these tools to make them “efficient and usable in a number of courses and institutions,” says Naza Djafarova. Among these teaching and learning tools are several documentaries that DES has produced in recent years in order to generate discussion, present multiple viewpoints, and encourage students to take action on a topic or issue.

Award-winning titles include the *High Park Tour with Sam Benvie*, *Lady Tasting Tea – Inferential Statistics and Experimental Design*, and *Self-Labeling and Identity*. The documentaries feature photography, text, audio, video, animation, and graphics. Documentaries make a unique contribution to the learning experience as they tell stories that engage and inspire students. One documentary, *Images of Nursing: “I’m just a nurse,”* has not only reached over 90,000 views on YouTube, but is also in use in academic institutions around the world. Video presentations by renowned speakers and experts, as well as a special series for instructors on specific issues in online learning, are also available. To make these documentaries and videos as widely accessible as possible, these resources are available on The Chang School’s YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com//ChangSchool>.

One of the award-winning learning activities created by DES is Lake Devo, which is an online role-playing tool that has been built for experiential, cross-disciplinary learning. Students create their own characters and collaboratively author scripts, which are then published as a 2-D “movie” that students and their instructor can discuss, debate, and analyze. Communication is by text, rather than voice, and the tool can be used by online instructors to engage students in practicing problem-solving skills within a real-world context. More information about Lake Devo is available at <https://lakedevo.ryerson.ca>.

More examples of the various learning objects, documentaries, and tools that have been produced by DES for instructors are available on the DES website at <http://de.ryerson.ca>.

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Welcome to Lake Devo Pilot!

Lake Devo is an online application that was created to address the need for an easily adaptable role-play environment to support the pedagogical objectives of online instructors. Users can create their own characters and collaboratively work on scripts, which are then published as a 2-D "movie" that can be discussed, debated and analyzed.

[Watch Demo](#)

Note that Lake Devo web application is currently available only to the Ryerson University community.

Your participation in this project will help inform us of best practices in online educational role play, as well as make improvements to the application. If you have any feedback regarding your Lake Devo experience, please contact us at lakedevo@ryerson.ca. We appreciate your input!

Express Yourself
Create a customized avatar of your character using the character builder. A range of multimedia options such as clothing, facial features, expressions and sound effects are available. It's easy and fun!

Collaborate Live
Role playing live allows your group to tackle conflicts that mimic real life interactions. Lake Devo updates are immediate, so you can respond to each other's dialogue spontaneously. You can also interact behind the scenes in the Backstage Area Chat, while the dialogue is scripted

Publish & Share
Your live role play is compiled into a 2-D narrative "movie", complete with script, characters, background scenes and sound effects. It's easy to preview your movie, make final edits and decide when to publish for audience viewing

Watch & Comment
Browse the collection of movies at your leisure. Movies can be viewed repeatedly and accessed anytime on the Lake Devo website. Debate with other registered users on how the conflict was handled by adding your comments in the movie's discussion area.

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Business Efficiency Tools: In addition to producing, delivering, and offering best practices in the use of online learning materials in higher education, The Chang School is also a profit centre at Ryerson. DES makes a strong contribution to this with its robust data-processing and reporting tools, which have become necessary in ensuring that The Chang School can successfully administer 400+ online courses. Two examples of these tools are highlighted below:

- DES created an online application for ordering resources sold through the Ryerson Bookstore for its online courses. Program areas within The Chang School order the resources, after which the bookstore prices and approves them for ordering in time for course start-up. This bookstore application provides current online course enrollment data in order to ensure enough books are available for student purchasing.
- To track the steps in the course production process, DES uses an in-house online course application that captures all milestones in the development contract between SMEs and DES. Detailed and high-level progress reports are regularly sent to program directors in The Chang School, who hire the SMEs contracted for course developments. In addition to course development, course delivery can also be tracked through this tool.

Outcomes and Benefits

The DES approach to online learning takes into account the needs of adult learners at all stages of their lives, helping learners apply their newfound knowledge and skills to the workplace faster and more effectively. DES has received numerous prestigious awards from international and national organizations, recognizing its work of outstanding quality, innovation, and relevance in the field of digital education. Additionally, DES staff regularly present their latest products and established best practices for online learning at industry conferences.

A number of instructors have reported to DES that they have found the experience of working with DES to design a class for online delivery helped them to strengthen their classroom teaching. The detailed production model is beneficial to all parties involved in the process, as well as The Chang School students, who are the end-users, as it stresses the importance and value of clearly presented information, student guidance, assigned course participation, collaborative student work, and student-to-student communication in online courses. The use of written materials for much of the information delivery, rather than video or web-conferencing, means that course content can easily be updated and revised to ensure course currency, relevance, and accessibility.

DES has met with a number of successes in the past decade at The Chang School. These successes are apparent through its many awards and recognition, positive student survey results, and instructor feedback. Some of these successes are documented in a video presentation created in 2012 and available online on The Chang School's YouTube Channel (<http://goo.gl/ooT2l>).

Challenges and Enhancements

One challenge that DES has overcome has been to create awareness of the differences between traditional undergraduate, full-time, day-time students and continuing education students. For example, continuing education students are often working professionals, who tend to have clear learning goals and needs that require a different pedagogical approach that builds on their prior experience. However, faculty and students do appreciate having a mix of students in their classes, as the continuing education students bring industry expertise and perspective that are valuable to the classroom.

Another challenge that DES has overcome has been to successfully establish a standard of collaboration for developing online courses. While traditionally, instructors work alone to develop courses and prepare PowerPoint presentations for classroom courses, the online

format requires the collaboration of different specialists, including the instructor, instructional designer, multimedia developer, copyright editor, and others.

Potential

DES has plans to turn its technological direction towards the development and incorporation of eBooks and mobile apps, as well as the introduction of educational resources into iTunesU. The Chang School recognizes that niche specialization certificates are growing in demand, especially in the areas of leadership, administration, and financial management. They are therefore meeting this demand by creating more micro-specialization certificates at The Chang School.

DES staff members are open to sharing models, ideas, and strategies with colleagues in post-secondary institutions in Ontario and beyond, and have done so through participating in conferences. As such, the web sites above provide resources freely available for viewing by any institutions and course developers that build online courses.

For Further Information

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