Art History in the Virtual Classroom: Developing a Visually Engaging Online Learning Experience

Kelly Joslin  
*Sinclair Community College*

Sally A. Struthers  
*Wright State University - Main Campus, sally.struthers@wright.edu*

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Moving from the traditional classroom to the online environment presents faculty who wish to develop online Art History courses with unique instructional design challenges. What steps should be taken to ensure a visually rich and engaging learning experience for students? This session examines the development of ART 235, History of Photography as an online course and features the results of the faculty developers’ collaborative work with the college’s Web Development Team.

The e-Redesign cohort was composed of faculty members from a variety of disciplines. Tracy Jayne, instructed by Kelly and Sally, worked with Kelly and Sally to facilitate the creation of the “Cool Tools” course enhancements. This “traditional” approach to online course development in which faculty developers merely provide content. The e-Redesign program allows faculty developers to actively participate in the overall design of their online courses while placing a strong focus on student engagement, share best practices in a cohort setting with their faculty colleagues from a variety of disciplines and knowledgeably produce an excellent online course modeled on Quality Matters Rubric standards.

### INTRODUCTION

Sinclair Community College currently offers 206 fully online courses - including fully online labs for Astronomy and Anatomy & Physiology - and 18 fully online degree/certificate programs with 6 degree/certificate programs currently under development. Approximately 6,500 students (unique head count) enroll in the college’s online courses each quarter with a 12,000 seat count per quarter total enrollment.

The college’s comprehensive Web Course Development Team provides faculty content experts with the necessary creative support to effectively develop/revise online course offerings. The college’s Web Course Development Team currently consists of 1 full-time Web Course Development Team Manager, 4 full-time Instructional Designers, 2 full-time Instructional Technologists, 1 full-time Graphics Designer, 4 part-time designers, and 2 student employees.

The e-Redesign program is unique in that it moves beyond the "traditional" approach to online course development in which faculty developers merely provide content.

The e-Redesign program more fully engages faculty content experts in the broader spectrum of online course development strategies that more effectively engage the online learner with a variety of active learning tools and techniques. To this end, the e-Redesign program allows faculty developers to actively participate in the overall design of their online courses while placing a strong focus on student engagement, share best practices in a cohort setting with their faculty colleagues from a variety of disciplines and knowledgeably produce an excellent online course modeled on Quality Matters Rubric standards.

### METHODS AND MATERIALS

During June 2009, Kelly Joslin, Art Department Chairperson/Associate Professor, and Dr. Sally Struthers, Professor, Art History, participated in a 3-day e-Redesign workshop facilitated by Sinclair Community College’s Web Course Development Team Instructional Designer, Tracy Jayne. Their goal was to collaboratively redesign the existing ART 235, History of Photography online course with Sally originally developed many years before and Kelly continued to develop content during the remainder of Summer Quarter 2009 and through Fall Quarter 2009. They collaboratively developed the remaining course lesson modules, writing activity assignments for discussion forum posts, and module quizzes. Additional interactive elements within the course were drawn from the Web Course Development Team’s “Cool Tools.”

Kelly and Sally elected to include 2 slide shows, 2 flip books, 2 interactive timelines, and a carousel-based “Gallery of Photographers.” These “Cool Tools” have proven to be highly effective as a means to provide enhanced visual illustration for course lesson. Instructional Designer, Tracy Jayne, worked with Kelly and Sally to facilitate the creation of the “Cool Tools” course enhancements.

### RESULTS

The revised ART 235, History of Photography online course successfully launched during Winter Quarter 2010 with 3 course sections being offered serving a total of 64 students.

Sally Struthers taught 2 course sections - ART 235-TC and ART 235-TE – and adjunct faculty member, Mary Noren, taught ART 235-TF.

Student Engagement: With interactive flipbooks, slide shows, timelines, carousels, moving images, and discussion forums the ART 235, History of Photography course became more visually appealing and engaging for students.

Content Currency: The 235, History of Photography course, in its online format, is more up-to-date than the photography textbooks and the course content can be updated, as needed on an ongoing basis.

Increased Rigor: The following revisions were made to the revised ART 235, History of Photography online course as a means to increase overall course rigor.

- More content information and imagery were added to individual lesson modules. As a result, module quizzes increased from 4 modules in the original course to 12 modules in the revised course.

### DISCUSSION

The revised ART 235, History of Photography online course appears to have been quite well received by students. As a result, 4 course sections have been scheduled for Spring Quarter 2010. Examination of students’ grades for individual assignments, final course grades, and survey feedback will be used to assess course effectiveness and guide further revisions/enhancements.

### CONCLUSIONS

The success of the revised ART 235, History of Photography online course clearly demonstrates the benefits of providing faculty content experts with a more “hands-on” approach to the online course development process. More importantly, when faculty members have the full support of a comprehensive Web Course Development Team, the resulting online courses provide students with an enhanced visually and intellectually engaging learning experience.