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

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ART HISTORY IN THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM: DEVELOPING A VISUALLY ENGAGING ONLINE LEARNING EXPERIENCE.

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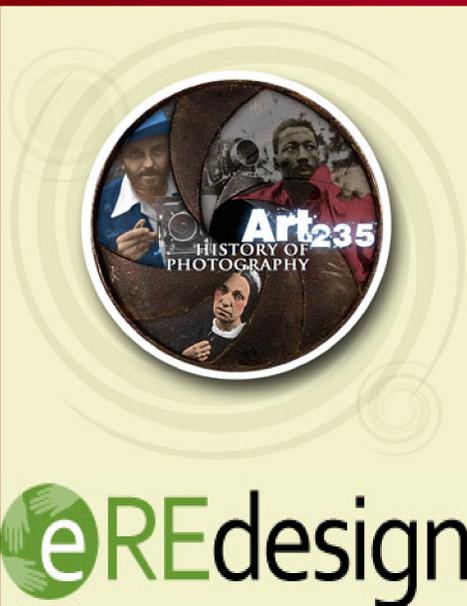Sinclair Community College

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ABSTRACT

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.

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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 Web Course Development Team Instructional Designer, Tracy Jayne. Their goal was to collaboratively redesign the existing ART 235, History of Photography online course that Sally originally developed many years before and Kelly revised/enhanced over subsequent years while teaching the course.

The e-Redesign cohort was composed of faculty members from a variety of disciplines. Tracy provided cohort members with information regarding quality online course development – including Quality Matters Rubric standards – and an array of tools and services by which to effectively present course content and create engaging learning activities for students.

Faculty were given access to the e-Redesign ANGEL course shell containing online course development resources. Additionally, faculty were also provided with an ANGEL Master Course Shell and Repository in which to "build" their online courses.

METHODS AND MATERIALS (Continued)

Workshop Session 1 focused on Course Mapping, Learning Objectives, Active Learning, Assessments & Rubrics. **Workshop Session 2** focused on Page Layout and Repository/Master System. **Workshop Session 3** focused on Images, Copyright, Accessibility, and "Cool Tools."

During each workshop session, faculty worked in a "hands-on" manner to create content pages directly in their ANGEL Master Course Shells and Repositories. At the conclusion of the 3-day workshop sessions, faculty teams formally presented their Master Courses - including the first lesson module - to Instructional Designer, Tracy Jayne, and cohort members for feedback.

Following the e-Redesign workshop sessions, Kelly and Sally 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 modules. 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 ART 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, the number of lesson modules increased from 4 modules in the original course to 12 modules in the revised course.

RESULTS (Continued)

• The overall number of quiz questions for the course's 4 quizzes was increased from 80 questions in the original course to 100 questions in the revised course. Originally, module quizzes consisted of 20 questions per quiz. The revised module quizzes now consist of 25 questions per quiz.

• Accountability for reading and discussing material presented in course lesson modules and associated linked web sites.

Student Response:
The revised ART 235, History of Photography online course launched at the start of Winter Quarter 2010. Because this is the first quarter in which the revised online course has been offered, we have yet been able to fully study all the results – including individual student survey responses.

However, from a faculty perspective, the students enrolled in the revised ART 235, History of Photography course appear much more involved in the 4 Writing Activity Discussion Forums' discussion/ dialogue/argument with one another than students enrolled in the earlier version of ART 235, History of Photography. Dr. Struthers notes, "As I monitored the discussion forums, I could virtually hear the 'voice' of the individual students and clearly distinguish each one's distinct personality."

An example of one student's response to the course:

"Thanks for an interesting course! My goal was to learn more about photography and I certainly achieved that goal! My appreciation for the art of photography has deepened with my new-found knowledge about its history."

- Mary C. ART 235 TC student, Winter Quarter 2010

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 enhanced visually and intellectually engaging learning experiences.