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Graduate seminar showcases a new approach to digital posters

2019 University of Calgary Teaching and Learning Grants now accepting applications

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What exactly is the virtual? How can the use of current technology enrich and deepen the study of new media? These are among the questions that Dr. Derritt Mason, PhD, an assistant professor in the Department of English, addressed alongside his students in a recent graduate seminar called The Virtual Child.

Learning about digital texts designed for young people, the students enrolled in The Virtual Child applied an array of technological approaches to their projects — Mason, above, was able to provide all of them with their own iPads for the semester thanks to a University of Calgary Teaching and Learning Grant. The iPads allowed access to apps that the students used to build interactive digital poster presentations, which were displayed to the public in the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning.

"Since we are using new media forms and digital technology in the class, which is relatively unconventional for an English class, it seemed like we needed an equally creative way of presenting all of the work that the students would be doing," Mason notes. "And also, I wanted the opportunity for people to come in and see, because it's rare that you get to see what kind of work people are doing in other graduate classes. So it's an opportunity for my colleagues and the students' colleagues to come in and have a look at what the students have been working on all term."

Access to technology leads to innovative student projects

Paul Meunier, a first-year PhD student in the Department of English, delivered a presentation called Feral Virtualities / Virtually Feral, addressing issues of virtual manifestation in the voice, body, and community through performances by queer, Indigenous, feminist, and other under-represented identities. His project lent primary focus to *full-metal indigiqueer,* the acclaimed, recently released poetry collection by UCalgary PhD student Joshua Whitehead.

Meunier believes having access to a wide range of technologies throughout the semester transformed the way he engaged with texts — especially the iPad. "It helped bring a sense of play to my studies, especially as someone who has never used one before," he says. "While the iPad didn't play a huge role in my final exhibit, I did become comfortable using it over the semester, and I certainly brought it to augment my exhibit, presenting the video game of my choice, *Never Alone*, and other iPad-related apps to help demonstrate the breadth of learnings I wished to share."

Other student projects addressed virtuality and texts for young people across a wide spectrum of contexts, including gendered prejudices in fairy tales, the identity-related complications of online avatars, and the relationships between ADHD and new technology.

Mason sees more potential within this innovative presentation context. He says, "Hopefully the students can go forward now with knowledge of digital texts for young people to incorporate into their own teaching and learning projects as well."

2019 University of Calgary Teaching and Learning Grants

The 2019 University of Calgary Teaching and Learning Grants program is now open to applications. This program is designed to provide resources for integrating research evidence into teaching practice, generating new knowledge about teaching and learning at the University of Calgary, and supporting the dissemination of results to benefit others. The grant application deadline is Oct. 29, 2018.

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