Ball State University

Connecting students and technology

Undergraduate publishing studio enables immersive learning and digital publication app development using Adobe Digital Publishing Suite

Ball State University believes that engaging students in unique, high-impact learning experiences gives them the skills to deliver real-world solutions before and after graduation. This belief is the bedrock of what the university calls immersive learning.

The university’s new Digital Publishing Studio supports immersive learning by enabling students to design, develop, and publish digital content and tablet applications. With Adobe Digital Publishing Suite in the studio, undergraduates gain practical experience developing digital apps under the guidance of faculty and industry professionals. The studio also supports student media by creating tablet versions of publications including Ball Bearings magazine, the national award-winning student-run magazine published by the Department of Journalism; Sports Link, a student-driven immersive learning course that covers Ball State sports and is run by the Department of Telecommunications; and 72 HRS, a student-run weekend entertainment magazine.

The genesis of a digital studio
The concept that evolved into Ball State’s Digital Publishing Studio dates back to 2006, with an emerging media special topics course called iMedia, which initially focused on interactive television programming and mobile application development. A couple of years ago, iMedia collaborated with Sports Link, the school’s immersive learning project for producing sports programming, to develop a digital magazine app for the Apple iPad.

“Adobe Digital Publishing Suite enables us to publish the projects we want,” says Jennifer George-Pallonis, the George and Frances Ball Distinguished Professor of Multimedia Journalism at Ball State University. “It’s a turnkey solution that gets our work into app stores, allows us to do cutting-edge work, and takes students’ projects into the real world, beyond prototypes.”

Over the past year, the Digital Publishing Studio has published five issues of Ball Bearings, seven issues of 72 HRS, and four issues of Sports Link. The publications showcase student work while preparing students for careers.

For example, students participating in Sports Link spend an entire 12-credit semester immersed in producing sports media. Students produce approximately 16,000 hours of cross-platform sports media annually. Collaborating with the studio allowed Sports Link students to expand their skills by working with designers and developing content for digital publishing.

“Digital sports production and content is the fastest growing segment of the sports industry,” says Chris Taylor, a telecommunications instructor and the director of digital sports production at Ball State University. “Being able to get your content to fans, alumni, parents, and potential students on a digital platform is critical. It’s no longer about what is the best screen; it’s all about creating content for the best available screens.”

Meeting university academic goals
The Digital Publishing Studio helps Ball State accomplish multiple academic goals. First, it allows students to experiment with new technologies. It also lets them work on projects outside of student media. For example, the Digital Publishing Studio creates apps that serve the university, such as a compilation of content for the university’s budget request to the Indiana state legislature and iLearn, a magazine about online and blended course development published by Ball State’s Integrated Learning Institute.
The studio also promotes immersive learning collaboration with professionals on projects such as the Indiana Office of Development and Tourism’s annual travel guide. Journalism students and students from several other majors including landscape architecture and computer science will also be collaborating for academic credit on a tablet app to educate people about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C.

"Adobe Digital Publishing Suite gives me the ability to create educational experiences that go far beyond what the software simply allows me to do," says George-Palilonis. "It lets us envision completely new projects, whether they are university publications, or publications we create in partnership with others."

Preparing students for career success
After working in the Digital Publishing Studio, many students have attained digital publishing internships and jobs. In some cases, they even do the teaching. For example, Ellen Collier, who is a sophomore, worked on the iLearn, 72 HRS, and Ball Bearings publications and parlayed the experience into a summer internship with Indianapolis Monthly magazine.

Recent graduate Chelsea Kardokus also worked in the studio as an honors student and wrote her honors thesis about developing the Ball Bearings app. Her experience with Digital Publishing Suite helped her land her first job, at TIME, where she helps design the magazine’s iPad app.

When she started interviewing for jobs during her final semester at Ball State University, Kardokus was able to show prospective employers the digital magazine she created and talk about the processes and skills she used. Learning Digital Publishing Suite gave her an advantage as a page designer and graphics reporter by showcasing her skills in multimedia journalism and digital publishing.

"Adobe Digital Publishing Suite has given me not only a new skill set to use in the workplace, but also a brand new way of thinking about content and interactivity," says Kardokus. "Now, while I am designing a print page, I think about how each element can be recreated and best presented on a digital platform. It has been crucial in my job to be able to understand this thought process and take a print publication and repurpose it for the iPad."

The success of the students, George-Palilonis points out, underscores the growing need for digital publishing skills. "The communications industry is clearly showing us there is a growing demand for advanced competencies in digital publishing. Our studio is the perfect way for our students to cultivate and showcase the skills they build here using Adobe Digital Publishing Suite."

Challenge
- Addressing the need for students to acquire digital publishing training and experience
- Expanding student media into formats with growing numbers of consumers
- Meeting Ball State University’s goals of immersive education focused on real-world, in-demand skills

Solution
Leverage Adobe Digital Publishing Suite to give students the tools and training they need to successfully design, develop, and publish digital applications

Systems at a glance
Adobe Digital Publishing Suite, Professional Edition

At the heart of Ball State’s immersive learning initiative is Adobe Digital Publishing Suite. The solution enables students to design, develop, and publish digital content and tablet applications under the guidance of faculty and industry professionals.
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Chelsea Kardokus, Ball State University graduate

Promote readership and research
George-Palilonis plans the publication of even more digital apps designed and developed entirely by students. Projects planned for this academic year include an interactive multimedia annual report for the Ball State Athletics Department and an interactive, multimedia fourth-grade Indiana history textbook in collaboration with students and professors in Ball State's history department. Taylor says the studio will also be used to increase the reach of Sports Link.

“Our goal this year is to increase our digital publication frequency, with more content, more video, and more interactive media,” says Taylor. “Streaming our student productions both in video and audio will continue to drive our digital apps, so the content is available wherever and whenever someone wants it.”

The Digital Publishing Studio will also create opportunities for public relations students. They will launch a marketing and PR campaign to promote readership of the studio’s publications. Currently, the publications are promoted via Facebook, Twitter, and within publications’ print versions. The Digital Publishing Studio also uses the university’s email and messaging boards to drive traffic to app stores. The marketing campaign will give students hands-on experience developing strategies and tactics to promote awareness and downloads of apps. It will also expose them to the analytical tools in Digital Publishing Suite.

Those analytical tools are going to enable the Digital Publishing Studio to expand into research. Using Digital Publishing Suite, Ball State University can perform frequent and timely analyses of reader habits, such as application installs and launches, issue downloads, rich media use, and more. These kinds of data will allow the university to easily make changes to content based on the analytics they are seeing.

“The studio experience at Ball State is great for students in helping them understand how to use Adobe Digital Publishing Suite,” says George-Palilonis. “It can transform student learning experiences and storytelling skills. It can also revitalize our approach to journalism. It’s an exciting time to be an educator and researcher or a student embarking on a new digital career.”

For more information