

# From CHALKBOARD to BLACKBOARD

It's not your  
grandfather's  
classroom  
any more



While the tools may be different, the focus on engaging students remains the same.  
CHALKBOARD PHOTO COURTESY RYERSON ARCHIVES.

by Sharon Aschaiek

Since Ryerson's inception in 1948, generations of students have reaped the rewards of a forward-thinking approach to teaching.

"We couldn't have gotten to where we are today without instructors who were early adopters and risk takers and embraced technology," says Matt Justice, Manager of Digital Media Projects, Computing and Communications Services.

Those savvy faculty and instructors helped establish Ryerson as a leading institution that uses a range of technologies to inform, engage and empower students. The University encourages students and faculty to incorporate new and emerging technologies.

In 1948, students learned from chalkboards in Quonset huts. Today, Ryerson students learn in fully wired classrooms and, new for 2008, 12 theatres in the new AMC cinema complex at Yonge and Dundas outfitted with cutting-edge presentation technology.

Students may borrow one of 60 laptops through the Library's popular laptop loan program to take notes during lectures, or facilitate in-class presentations. Their courses have been

developed using Blackboard, a learning management system for online content sharing and communicating. Since 2007, nearly 3,500 courses have involved the use of online technology.

Outside of class, students can access lecture notes and supplementary library materials on the Internet, and podcasts and blogs by their professors. In fact, more than 6,300 online discussion forums have been formed and more than 8,500 student groups have been created to enable online collaboration between teams of students.

A campus-wide wireless network lets them perform these functions anywhere at Ryerson.

"Technology has enabled us to support student-centred learning by teaching them in a variety of ways," says Judy Britnell, Director of the Learning and Teaching Office and Chair of the Committee for Effective Teaching and Learning Environments.

"We envision that combining new technologies with a greater emphasis on students' learning will lead to a transformed educational experience," says Britnell. Her committee recently re-designed a classroom that demonstrates best practices in terms of technologies, furnishings and physical enhancements for teaching and learning.

Over the last decade, the University has incorporated computer podiums into every classroom enabling teachers to use the latest digital technologies and real-time web access. Personal response systems called clickers help faculty judge how students are handling material as the class progresses. Students answer or submit questions using handheld remotes, while instructors collect responses and analyze the data in real-time.

Experiential learning will always be Ryerson's strength, and technology is simply a means to enhance it. Provost and Vice President Academic Alan Shepard, in his Academic Plan for the next five years, said the University will invest in the learning and teaching environment of a 21st-century university while strengthening experiential learning and preserving studio and lab cultures.

Says Justice: "Technology will never replace classroom teaching, but used effectively, it can enhance learning opportunities in the classroom and beyond, creating opportunities for media-rich learning, timely feedback and thought-provoking discussion." □

## BY THE NUMBERS **Total Ryerson academic awards issued since 1948**

