

CHARITY RAKESTRAW

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT EXPERT | HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATOR

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SUMMARY

Strategic academic leader with 14 years in online higher education and 10+ years of progressive leadership in remote faculty supervision, online learning innovation, and interdisciplinary curriculum development. Adept at using data-informed insights to improve student persistence, engagement, and success across large-scale online programs. Proven ability to lead high-performing teams, implement cross-departmental initiatives, and align academic outcomes with institutional strategy. Committed to fostering inclusive learning environments and building a culture of collaboration and resilience. PhD in History with 7 years of experience in postsecondary teaching; specialist in scalable instructional design and academic operations.

SELECTED LEADERSHIP ACHIEVEMENTS

- Directed development of 20+ online undergraduate and graduate courses for 400,000+ learners across programs in Education, IT, Health, and Business at Western Governors University.
- Supervised and supported a remote faculty team, improving instructional practices and student success through data-informed coaching and continuous improvement.
- Spearheaded curriculum redesign initiatives that integrated inclusive pedagogies and user experience enhancements, including LLMs and technology innovation.
- Led team-building workshops at national conferences and implemented 5 Dynamics and ADKAR change management training to foster a collaborative, adaptive team culture.
- Managed project budgets and vendor relationships as well as tasks and timelines for major year-long projects, ensuring alignment with university quality standards and on-time delivery.
- Led cross-functional teams including faculty, chairs, instructional designers, assessment developers, instructional technologists to successful program development and implementation.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

WESTERN GOVERNORS UNIVERSITY (WGU)

Lead Program Development Owner, College of General Education

Oct 2022 - Present

- Leads cross-functional, matrixed teams to design, develop, and maintain curriculum and assessments for General Education courses supporting over 400,000 learners in competency-based online programs.
- Aligns program development with institutional strategy and stakeholder needs through iterative feedback loops, attention to detail, continuous improvement planning, and goal setting based on course performance data.
- Applies LMS analytics, course evaluation data, and learner outcomes to identify opportunities for improving student engagement, persistence, and success.
- Oversees project scope, budget, timelines, and vendor partnerships to ensure effective execution of large-scale learner-focused instructional design initiatives.
- Integrates emerging technologies, including large language models (LLMs), and human-centered design approaches to optimize learner experience and curriculum scalability.
- Uses strong interpersonal skills to facilitate cross-department collaboration with faculty, assessment, design, technology, and operations teams to ensure smooth course launches and long-term sustainability.

Manager, Instructional Faculty, Social Sciences**Nov 2017- Oct 2022**

- Hired, trained, supervised, and evaluated remote faculty as department chair.
- Partnered with Student Affairs to provide direct support to resolve issues for students facing diverse challenges and at risk of losing academic momentum.
- Designed and led individualized coaching, faculty scheduling, observation protocols, and mentoring programs to support faculty development, innovate and improve teaching quality, and address learner needs.
- Developed and facilitated professional development workshops focused on learner resilience, inclusive pedagogy, assessment literacy, and competency-based education.
- Analyzed student data to improve teaching strategies and learner support services.
- Collaborated across departments to align instructional practices with university goals.

Project Manager, Program Development**June 2015 - Nov 2017**

- Managed ADDIE-based design processes for General Education curricula in Social Sciences, Science, Math, Communication, and Composition.
- Introduced workflow efficiencies and risk mitigation strategies across complex initiatives.

Lead Instructor, Social Sciences**Sept 2011 - June 2015**

- Taught U.S. and World History, Geography, and Social Studies courses online.
- Led curriculum development subject matter experts and mentored faculty in instructional design practices.

STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY**Instructor, Department of History****Aug 2008 - May 2011**

- Taught four in-person courses per semester; served on Faculty Senate.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA**Journal Editor and Marketing Director, *Southern Historian*****Aug 2005 - May 2007**

- Solicited and oversaw referee and selection process for all articles.
- Coordinated with advertisers, marketed memberships, and managed the budget.

EDUCATION

- PhD, History – University of Alabama, 2009
- MEd, Instructional Design – Western Governors University, 2019
- MA, History – University of Alabama, 2005
- BA, History – Berry College, 2003

CERTIFICATIONS & TRAINING

- Intro to Large Language Models (LinkedIn Learning, 2024)
- Optimizing Diversity on Teams (UPenn, 2021)
- Evolving Leader Certified (WGU, 2020)
- Resilience Program Trained (UPenn, 2020)
- ADKAR Change Management (Prosci, 2019)
- Certified SCRUM Master (2016)

SKILLS AND TOOLS

Collaboration Tools (Google Workspace, Microsoft Office 365, WebEx, Zoom)

Data Analysis (Cognos, Confluence, Excel, PowerBI, Tableau)

Instructional and Web Design (Articulate, Canva, Padlet, Panopto, WordPress)

Project Management (JIRA, Smartsheet, Trello)

People Leadership (exceptional evaluations)

Verbal and Written Communication (seasoned presenter & published author)

AWARDS

- Student Obsession Award, WGU (2019)
- Mentoring Awards, WGU (2014, 2015)
- Dedication to Student Success Award, WGU (2013)

PUBLICATIONS

Books:

Ministers and Masters: Methodism, Manhood, and Honor in the Old South (Louisiana State University Press, 2011)

“The Making of the Southern Megachurch” (Louisiana State University Press, under contract).

Articles and Essays:

“Cold War Crusaders: Televangelists and the Transformation of American Christianity,” with Randi Barnes-Cox in Mark Boulton, ed., *Cold War and American Life* (Louisiana State University Press, 2023), 182-201.

“‘Contraband’ Women: Gender, Race, and Resistance in Union Camps,” with Kristopher Teters, in Megan Bever and Laura Mammina, eds., *American Discord: The Republic and Its People in the Civil War Era* (Louisiana State University Press, 2020), 172-186.

“Seeking Souls, Selling Salvation: A History of the Modern Megachurch,” in Stephen Hunt, ed., *Handbook of Megachurches* (Brill Publishers, 2019), 23-42.

“Sanctifying the SUV: Megachurches, the Prosperity Gospel, and the Suburban Christian,” in John Archer, Paul J.P. Sandul, and Katherine Solomonson, eds., *Making Suburbia: New Histories of Everyday America*. (University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 240-258.

“A Popular Historian: A Conversation with James M. McPherson,” in Megan L. Bever and Scott A. Suarez, eds., *Historian Behind the History: Conversations with Southern Historians* (The University of Alabama Press, 2014), 46-64.

“Lakewood Church and the Roots of the Megachurch Movement in the South,” *Southern Quarterly* 50 (Fall 2012): 60-78.

PRESENTATIONS

“Some Say He Was an Outlaw: Larry Norman’s Anti-Establishment Influence on Christian Rock,” American Society of Church History, New York City, January 2019.

“Teaching the College Survey as a Dual Enrollment Course: A Syllabus Workshop,” Louisiana Historical Association, Shreveport, Louisiana, March 2017.

“Show and Tell: Creating Videos with Animation and Images to Make Abstract Ideas Stick,” American Historical Association, Denver, Colorado, January 2017.

“The Traditional Survey is Dead, Long Live the Survey: Refashioning the U.S. and World Survey Courses for the Twenty-First Century, A Panel Discussion,” Louisiana Historical Association, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, March 2016.

“Adventures in On-Line Courses, Distance Learning, and MOOCs,” Louisiana Historical Association Annual Meeting, Hammond, Louisiana, March 2014.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

I have served on the following leadership committees:

Faculty Innovation Champions Program, WGU, Reviewer Committee (2022 - present)

Louisiana Historical Association, Teaching History Committee (2015-2018)

American Historical Association, History Tuning Project (2015-2016)

I have refereed manuscripts for the following presses and journals:

Southern Studies (2019)

Oxford University Press (2014, 2018)

University of Georgia Press (2017, 2018)

Journal of Southern Religion (2018)

North Carolina Historical Review, (2018)

Virginia Magazine of History and Biography (2016)

Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s History (2015)

Alabama Review (2014, 2015)

Culture, Society & Masculinities (2011)

My book reviews appear in the following journals:

American Historical Review

Civil War History

Alabama Review

Tampa Bay History

H-Net Reviews

The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society

The Journal of Southern History

The East Texas Historical Journal

Southern Historian