

# CHARITY RAKESTRAW

## PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT EXPERT | HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATOR

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### SUMMARY

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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

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- 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

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#### 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**

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- 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**

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- 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**

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"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**

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*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*