
Take the best of what the World Wide Web offers—connectivity—combine it with the highest quality resource of a university—faculty—and you get the latest technological innovation at the University of Oklahoma—Janux. While online learning has been a part of OU’s offerings for more than a decade, Janux Interactive Learning Community is the next evolution in this ever-expanding universe. As part of the larger One University effort that is defining how OU employs technology, Janux is an open software platform, available to anyone, anywhere with an Internet connection, whether they are enrolled as a student or not. Simply log in, start studying and connect with others in real time.

continued

BY SUSAN GROSSMAN

Janux Interactive
brings OU’s Campus
to Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime



Online in Real Time

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Hugh Scott

Organic chemistry is one tough course, but when tackled through Janux’s overwhelmingly popular “Chemistry of Beer,” taught by Mark Morvant, several thousand students are able to connect complex concepts to the real-world process of beer-brewing.



Hugh Scott

The NextThought crew filming “Introductory Management” makes it possible for Associate Professor Jeremy Short to connect with students in his course anywhere anytime through the magic of the Janux Interactive Learning Community.



Hugh Scott

Interim Provost Kyle Harper, a professor of classics, has nothing but praise for Janux's production company. "The simple genius of NextThought's platform is that it lets technology do what it's good at doing, connecting content and people. This technology has made me a better teacher, and it has made my students better students."

For Ken Parker, the learning in real time component is the distinguishing factor for Janux in the online course world. As founder and CEO of NextThought, the Norman-based company that partnered with OU to create the educational platform, Parker says this new online learning community is at the forefront of social learning and OpenCourseWare.

"No one else is doing anything like this," he says. "Janux is not static. It is interactive. Students are no longer online alone and studying but rather engaging with one another simultaneously in real time."

Take the popular "Chemistry of Beer" course for example. Taught by Mark Morvant, OU associate professor of chemistry, this course connects the beer-brewing process to the complex concepts involved with organic and biochemistry and applies those concepts to a real-world application: beer.

Approximately 8,400 students representing 90 countries are currently enrolled.

"The Chemistry of Beer' has 20 times more students enrolled than any of the other 19 Janux courses offered," Parker says. "Organic chemistry is notoriously difficult, and this course appeals to OU students because the principles are taught with a practical application. But it is also attractive to brew masters from around the world who can deepen their expertise, share their experiences and help one another in real time. This is a dramatically different learning environment from what has been done before."

Named for Janus, the two-faced Roman god of doors and gateways, Janux embraces the best of campus classroom tradi-

tions while cultivating all that technology has to offer to 21st-century students, whether they are enrolled OU students or life-long learners participating for noncredit. The lectures, readings, discussions and quizzes are open to all.

"We are living at the beginning of how technology can really be used," says Kyle Harper, OU interim provost and professor of classics. "At OU we are working to make sure that, as a top-tier university, we are on the cutting-edge of this technology and that we are the ones finding ways to make sure we are using technology to meet our core mission, which is to give our students the best education that provides them opportunities for careers and citizenship."

Janux launched in October 2013 with six courses including Harper's "Law and Justice." An additional 14 courses were added this spring. Harper said it was important to teach with the product himself for first-hand experience and refers to his students as "digital natives." They have grown up with the Internet and using technology is second nature for them.

"I used to give the video lectures on Janux in person," he says. "Now students watch those lectures online and come to class for conversation and debate. We can make high use of our time together in class instead of them simply listening to me. My students can jump in to the high-value role of the classroom, which is to challenge ideas and interact with each other."

Rohan Papaly, a biology major and classics minor from Oklahoma City, says Janux added an interesting dimension to his learning experience with Harper's "Law and



Robert Taylor

Janux's interactive learning platform enables students to learn about the enriching cultures, stories and expressive arts of "Native Peoples of Oklahoma," co-taught by Anthropologist Daniel Swan, above at Sam Noble Museum, and Joshua Nelson, from English.

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Justice” class last fall.

“It was like watching full-length movies online,” he says of the lecture portion of the platform. “The production value was great. All of the readings were online so we did not have to buy textbooks. Learning the material was easier. If you missed something, you could go back and watch it again.”

Papaly says he misses using the software this semester.

“Information in class goes by really fast, and you can miss bits of material here and there,” he says. “Janux allows you to go back and catch what you might have missed. And while there certainly are aspects of the online education world that I really like, such as not having to buy books, I do love having books in my hands. It feels more natural. I don't think learning online will replace the classroom, rather it is a dynamic that allows you to be a better student. It complements what happens in the classroom. Having both is enriching.”



ALL ABOUT JANUX

More information is available at <https://janux.ou.edu/landing/> where two options are available: the free, open option and the enrolled-student option.

Course selections during the spring semester included:

Native Peoples of Oklahoma
Practical Importance of Human Evolution
Chemistry of Beer
Understanding and Detecting Deception
Power and Elegance of Computational Thinking
Introduction to Computer Programming
Administration of Adult and Higher Education
Introduction to Water
Hydraulic Fracturing and Water Resources
Physical Geology for Science and Engineering Majors
History of Science to the Age of Newton
Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
Introduction to Sociology

Teaching with Janux was nothing but positive for Joshua Nelson, OU professor of English specializing in American Indian literature and film. He discovered that the online platform allows his students to participate in their education in nontraditional ways.

“I had never taught online before Janux, and I was enthusiastic about it,” he says. “We really settled in as a class and got to know each other. Throughout the semester, as they watched the videos and read the material, I could see their conversations with each other online start to evolve.”

In collaboration with Daniel Swan, OU professor of anthropology and curator of ethnology at Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, Nelson taught “The Native Peoples of Oklahoma,” an introduction to the history, cultural traditions and current conditions of the 38 Native American tribes in the state. The course covers a variety of Native topics incorporating many disciplines across campus, from history, law and government to film, poetry and prose.

Perhaps most importantly, Nelson says, was the involvement of tribal leaders who willingly shared their stories for his class.

“The great thing about this kind of online course is that it is not just me lecturing,” he says. “We conducted interviews with many of the state’s tribal leaders, and I was struck by how proud they were to participate. It was like doing a weekly television series. This really opened up the classroom to them.”

Moving forward, Nelson says using Janux is causing him to examine how he teaches, and he is looking forward to developing additional courses.

“Janux is an enormous investment on the part of the University,” he says. “Everything we needed to create a quality course was provided. It was fun working with a professional film crew and discovering new resources on campus to use for teaching.”

Much like today’s modern relationships, Harper observes that the future of learning will involve an online component combined with personal interaction. The entire ethos of the Internet is sharing, he says, and there is no putting that genie back in the bottle. Online learning is here to stay.

“We don’t think of friendships as being online or in person; they are both,” he says. “The either/or in education that has been part of the discussion for the last several years has been left in the past. Technology is a tool, and we want to put the best possible technology in the hands of our teachers. Janux is bold, and what makes it powerful is that it retains the best human elements of in-person learning and combines them with online social interaction.”

Susan Grossman is a freelance writer living in Norman.