

**Institute for Research on Digital Learning
Annual Report
2017-2018**

1. Contact Information

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2. Charter Dates: 06/2014 was the first Charter as IRDL (ORU has been operating since 06/2001 as IRLT – Institute for Research on Learning Technologies).

3. Mandate: From elementary school to university, digital learning is now an essential component of education. Digital technologies and media are reshaping teaching and learning as educators work in a productive collaboration with industry, government, and research organizations. IRDL is at the forefront of research in the digital age and has a broad interdisciplinary mandate to engage and facilitate discussion, information sharing, systematic inquiry, and pedagogic innovation related to the uses of technology in teaching and learning. Working closely with the York community, school boards, industry, and government, IRDL’s researchers and scholars are well positioned to respond to changing priorities and conditions, exploring the evolving nature of instructional tools and strategies in formal schooling, informal learning environments, and digital cultures more generally.

4. Annual Activities in Fulfilling Mandate

FUNDING

Acting Director Natalie Coulter held 2 grants for the 2017-2018 fiscal year.

\$ 69,500	The Embodied Tween: Living Girlhood in Global and Digital Spaces (PI)	SSHRC Insight Development Grant, 2016-2018
\$ 8,000	From Community Participation to Mobilization: Black Youth Doing Politics (Co-PI)	Research Opportunity Grant, 2018

Jennifer Jenson held 7 grants for the 2017-2018 fiscal year.

\$501,082	ReFiguring Innovation in Games (PI)	\$2,498,116, 2015-2020, SSHRC Partnership Grant
\$131,086	Think, Design, Play (PI)	SSHRC Insight Grant 2014-19
\$ 34,000	Parents Reaching Out	Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018
\$ 10,000	Prove it to Me (Co-PI)	2014-2018
\$ 20,000	Get in the Game (returned)	Digital Inclusion Research Grant
\$ 24,978	Upskilling Teachers for the 21stCentury: Teaching with Digital Games	SSHRC Partnership Engage Grant, 2017-2018
\$ 3,921	Pedagogical Innovation	Faber Institute, Visiting Scholar Grant, 2018

Our core members were active this year, earning a number of grants promoting research in digital learning and effective pedagogy.

\$ 34,000	Kurt Thumlert, (Co-PI)	Parents Reaching Out, Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018
\$ 24,978	Kurt Thumlert (Co-PI)	Upskilling Teachers, SSHRC Partnership Engage Grant, 2017-2018
\$ 10,000	Kurt Thumlert (Investigator)	Prove it to Me, 2014-2018
\$103,296	Ron Owston (Co-PI)	SSHRC Partnership Grant 2016-2018
\$100,000	D. Gelb, M. Longford (Co-PIs)	AIF, 2015-2018

EVENTS

Event Type	Total Attendance	Internal (York)	External Guests
Open House - 1	32	30	2
Guest Speakers - 2	38	30	8
Workshops - 17	50	47	3
Annual Conference	65	8	57

Community Event – Open House (1)

The annual Winter Chiller was held on February 8, 2018. This event brings students and faculty together for discussion, collaboration, and fun. The 2018 Chiller was attended by 32 faculty and graduate students from the York community, OISE, and McMaster. The festivities were live tweeted.

Guest Speakers (6)

Speaker Series (2) - This year's annual Speaker Series got off to a great start with a talk by Emeritus Professor Russell Bishop, with an official welcome by Ruth Koleszar-Green, Chair of the Indigenous Council. This lively event was co-sponsored by IRDL and VPRI and was attended by 23 members of the York community and 7 external guests. Our second talk in the Speaker Series was given by Cheryl Williams. Ms. Williams's research focuses on the toy industry, digitalization, and media culture. Her talk was well received by attending faculty and students from the Faculty of Education, Communication and Culture, Children's Studies, LA&PS, and YouthREX. Winter talks were rescheduled due to the labour disruption at York.

October 2, 2017. "Relationships are Fundamental to Learning: How the Creation of a 'Family-like' Learning Context within the Classroom Improves Attendance, Retention, Engagement, and Achievement." Presented by Dr. Russell Bishop, Foundation Professor for Māori Education in the School of Education at the University of Waikato.

November 14, 2017. "Hidden curriculum: Young people, big data, and user generated content." Presented by Cheryl Williams, PhD candidate, Communication and Culture, York University.

Postponed. "Enlivening the imagination: Media, play, and technologies of animation in children's toys." Dr. Meredith A Bak, Rutgers University.

Postponed. A multi-modal talk by Dr. Melanie McBride on olfactory literacies. Title TBA.

Knowledge Exchange (4) – This winter, executive member Kurt Thumlert organized an IRDL knowledge exchange. Three IRDL members brought their expertise to his graduate seminars, and he reciprocated with a Twine workshop for a course taught by one of IRDL's post-doctoral fellows. Attendance ranged from 15 to 25 students for each event. Themes included learning through games, designing your own game, challenging the barriers and intersectional boundaries of exclusion and inequality in the game industry with feminist perspectives in game design, and exploring the critical and creative pedagogical applications of Twine.

December 17, 2017. EDU 5855, Cultural Studies of Technology for Education. "Bringing Game Design to Underserved Classrooms: Research Interventions." Speaker: Cristyne Hébert.

February 18, 2018. EDU 5863, Digital Games and Learning. "Learning with Gamemaker Studio: An Interactive Workshop." Speaker: Carole Chan.

March 18, 2018. EDU 5863, Digital Games and Learning. “Diversifying Barbie and Mortal Kombat.” Speaker : Jennifer Jenson.

March 18, 2018. CTL7016 (OISE), Integrating Technology in the Classroom. “Production Pedagogies and Twine: Learning through Game Design.” Speaker: Kurt Thumlert. Included a workshop.

Workshops (17) and Campus Symposia (2)

Acting Director Natalie Coulter held 17 Pomodoro-style workshops described as “ Shut up and Write.” Workshops scheduled in March were cancelled due to the labour disruption. Workshop attendance varied from 3 to 12 participants drawn from a variety of York departments, including Communication and Culture, Sociology, Education, and Humanities, and from McMaster University, Ryerson University, and the University of Guelph.

IRDL members also contributed to two intra-faculty mini-conferences this February, including *Digital Doings* (Coulter, Lotherington) and *Focus on Research* (Coulter, Haig-Brown, Owston, Lotherington).

Annual Conference (1)

ReFiguring Innovation in Games held its 3rd annual conference in Edmonton, Alberta, hosted by the University of Alberta. The three-day conference was attended by 65 researchers, graduate and undergraduate students, and games industry representatives from Canada, the U.S., and Europe. Highlights included a special panel on the games industry; a talk by Holly Arnason from the Edmonton Public Library on “Video games at Edmonton Public Library: Approaches to digital literacy and community building”; and the “Mentoring Roundtable,” at which graduate students currently engaged in research were given the opportunity to network and receive one-on-one feedback and assistance from top researchers attending the conference.

KMb Activities

IRDL research was highlighted and made accessible to non-scholarly audiences in a variety of ways, including:

- Game industry and ReFig collaboration
- Shut Up and Write workshops, open to all
- Live tweeting of IRDL events
- Workshop for teachers on pedagogy, humour, and *South Park* (Jenson, Spain)
- Blended learning multi-industry conference, key note address by Ron Owston

5. Challenges and Areas for Improvement

There are three primary challenges that IRDL faces for 2018-2019: 1) ongoing, interdisciplinary outreach and conversations with the York community; 2) seeking out new membership in the face of significant retirements; and 3) locating a space where lab-based research is possible. On the first point, IRDL continues to reach out to the York community and to communities beyond the university to engage faculty, staff, and students in activities. That said, participation remains a challenge, one that we will continue to work on. On the second point, both Mary Leigh Morbey and Jean Adams will retire from the university this year, and it is likely that Ron Owston will retire next year. These retirements mean that a core component of IRDL that has been mobilized for more than a decade around these individuals will need to be recast. The result is both a challenge and an opportunity for IRDL in the coming years. On the third point, Jen Jenson currently has CFI funds that cannot be spent because there is simply no space that can accommodate the equipment. This is a challenge that is much wider than IRDL, and we will seek out a temporary solution in the coming academic year.

In terms of areas that need improvement, there are four broad categories: 1) funding; 2) participation; 3) outreach; 4) membership. Frankly, funding is a perennial issue, especially funding that resides outside the Tri-Council. Related to funding is assisting IRDL members to seek out Tri-Council funding and other funding that is related to their research. Participation in IRDL's activities could also be improved through a more direct connection to Y-File, as well as having a method by which to communicate activities to other ORUs and ADRs who can send announcements to their faculty lists or targeted faculty members. Outreach beyond IRDL's known community can also be improved, including inviting others outside of York to events. And finally, IRDL's mandate is broad enough that it should have more core members. Adding to the core membership is an explicit goal of the coming year, especially with so many of our core members preparing to retire.

6. PIER Responses

Recommendation 1 – Create opportunities and spaces to promote interactive research engagement that fosters collaboration and interdisciplinarity.

Current Activities:

- IRDL hosts an annual Speaker Series that brings together IRDL members, graduate and undergraduate students, international scholars, and the wider York community to discuss leading edge ideas related to learning, technologies, and digital cultures.

- IRDL also typically hosts 1–2 workshops that are generated by the interests and needs of core members. Recent past workshop topics include: 1) methodologies for community-based research; 2) storytelling with Twine; and 3) how to make online learning more engaging.

Actions:

- Increase visibility and attendance at Speaker Series.
- Support IRDL core members' research applications to SSHRC and other funding programs.
- Continue to host workshops that are driven by the interests and needs of the IRDL community more generally.
- Continue to expand our membership and reach out to new departments at York, e.g., Children's Studies and Communication Studies.

Measures:

- Number of attendees at events (Speaker Series and workshops).
- Number of applications for external funding supported directly by IRDL.

Recommendation 2 – Work together to build research engagement.

Current activities:

- Many IRDL core members hold external research funding, and those activities are reported on annually in the ORU Report.
- We offer mentorship to both students and faculty to help them produce successful grant applications.
- In 2017–2018, we held weekly writing sessions for graduate students and faculty members across campus.

Actions:

- Increase awareness among IRDL members of research funding that is outside of the Tri-Council.
- Continue to mentor faculty and students applying for external funding.

Measures:

- Number of core faculty who have applied for funding as reported on in annual report.
- Number of core faculty and students who have been awarded funding and the amount awarded.

Recommendation 3 – Promote and capture a multiplicity of research outputs with an emphasis on impact.

Current activities:

- IRDL uses social media (Twitter & Facebook) to promote events and to ‘live tweet’ those events in real time.
- IRDL has committed annually to producing at least 2 ‘plain language summaries’ of Faculty research papers, which it promotes on its website and through social media.
- When requested, IRDL live streams the Speaker Series talks.

Actions:

- IRDL has taken steps to make more use of Y-File and other York media to promote faculty research and events.
- We will update our website to make members’ research publications and other research outputs more publicly accessible.

Measures:

- Research outputs that are more ‘non-traditional’ will be highlighted in the annual report.
- We will continue to find ways to increase our social media presence.

7. Financial Position - attached

8. Space Utilization

Room #	Name of Occupant	Occupant Affiliation ¹	Type of Workspace ²	Length and frequency of Occupancy ³	Notes ⁴
709	Kurt Thumlert	Faculty	Closed Office	4 days/week	
710	Research Lab	Faculty and Graduate Students	Closed Office	2 days/week	
714	Natalie Coulter	Faculty	Closed Office	3-4 days/week	Acting Director
715	Erin McLaughlin-Jenkins	Staff	Closed Office	3 days/week	
717	Cristyne Hébert Colleen Thumlert Melanie McBride	Post-docs and Research Associate	Closed Office	4 days/week	
719	Kisha McPherson	Research Assistant	Closed Office	3 days/week	

720	Karen Skardzius; Alia Miroshnichenko	Graduate Students + storage for considerable amount of electronic and game equipment	Closed Office	5 days/week for storage. 2-3 days/week grad students	
Cubicle 719	Sam McCreedy	Graduate Student	Workspace	2 days/week	
Cubicle 720	Sarah Stang	Graduate Student	Workspace	2 days/week	

9. Objectives for Upcoming Year

This year IRDL will return to Dr. Jenson who returns from a sabbatical. Dr. Natalie Coulter (Acting Director) will continue to develop a monthly Women of Colour Graduate Caucus. IRDL will also continue to hold successful events that include faculty, undergraduates, and graduate students from the Faculty of Education, LAPS, and AMPD such as the Winter Chiller, the Speaker Series, and IRDL workshops.

We continue with our initiatives to increase membership and build a diverse and active executive as two members of the current executive—Mary Leigh Morbey and Jean Adams—are retiring after serving for over a decade as part of IRDL’s leadership team. IRDL will continue to reach out to York members and to communities beyond the university to engage faculty, staff, students, and members of communities who will benefit from the work being done at IRDL and will make vital contributions to IRDL and, by extension, to the innovative research activities at York University. Steps taken to expand and diversify membership and participation include greater dissemination of IRDL news and event invitations through Y-File and York listservs. Improvements to ORU access to Y-File and to ORU promotion in general are underway in consultation with VPRI. In addition, we are also boosting our social media presence and our outreach to non-York individuals and groups who are broadly concerned with learning in a digital age and with digital games and education. We view this year as an opportunity to build on what has been to date a successful intensification of IRDL’s research and outreach mandate. Further, we will continue to work to advise and support those who are seeking opportunities to teach online and in blended formats.

Other objectives for the coming year include supporting an IRDL intern, applying once again for a Banting Post-Doctoral scholar, hiring a RAY student to support our social media campaign, securing lab space for upcoming projects, and increasing the funding opportunities of IRDL’s members by helping them to seek out Tri-Council funding and other funding that is related to their research and by supporting their applications

through grant-writing assistance. We will also continue to work with IRDL members David Gelb and Michael Longford to support the 2018 Digitally Engaged Learning, an international conference at York. This conference provides an excellent opportunity for the broader York community and IRDL members, students, and staff to participate in a conference that specifically relates to York’s own intensification efforts.

We will continue to reach out to graduate students from many faculties to help support their research and professional activities. We will continue with the weekly writing sessions and develop a monthly workshop on academic professionalization with BIPOC female graduate students. These activities contribute to a vibrant research culture at York.

10. Other relevant items the Director wishes to include in the annual report

IRDL had a very busy 2017-2018, but unfortunately some of our activities were hampered by the labour disruption and we had to cancel the winter talks. We were a partner on a SSHRC Partnership Grant with Nombuso Dlamini at York titled “From Community Participation to Mobilization: Black Youth Doing Politics.” We also focused on KMB innovations this year, hosting a weekly drop-in writing session called “Shut up and write” based on the Pomodoro writing method. Each week between 3 and 12 members of the York community dropped in. We were asked to present this at the Mini Conference held by the Faculty of Education, York University. Another successful KMB was hosting IRDL’s second “Winter Chiller,” which was an incredibly productive event and, as far as we know, the first of its kind at York. What distinguished it from other events was the fact that there was no overarching agenda—no speakers, no workshops, just an opportunity to meet with folks across campus with good food and some wine. Building on the success of the Winter Chiller, we will be hosting a research talk night at a York pub, hopefully at et. al., the faculty pub. The event will include a panel of speakers with short talks and a social event.

11. Appendix 1 – Membership and Governance

Core Members	Faculty
Melanie Baljko	Computer Science, Lassonde School of Engineering
Natalie Coulter	Communication Studies, LA&PS
Graeme Deans	Schulich School of Business
David Gelb	Design, School of Arts, Media, Performance & Design
Jennifer Jenson	Education

Michael Longford	Design, School of Arts, Media, Performance & Design
Heather Lotherington	Education
Jonathan Obar	Communication Studies, LA&PS
Ron Owston	Education
Kurt Thumlert	Education
Sue Winton	Education

Internal Affiliates – Faculty & Staff

Monique Adriaen	French Studies, LA&PS
Karen Anderson	Sociology, LA&PS
Chloe Brushwood Rose	Education
Radu Campeanu	Information Technology, LA&PS
Avi Cohen	Economics, LA&PS
Cheryl Cowdy	Children’s Studies, LA&PS
Mary Louise Craven	Communication Studies, LA&PS
Warren Crichlow	Education
Caitlin Fisher	Film, School of Arts, Media, Performance & Design
Shelley Hornstein	Visual Arts, School of Arts, Media, Performance & Design
Tom Johnson	Osgoode Law School
Dalton Kehoe	Communication Studies, LA&PS
Sam Lanfranco	School of Information Technology, LA&PS
Anne MacLennen	Communication Studies, LA&PS
Lyndon Martin	Education
Gareth Morgan	Schulich School of Business
Gillian Parekh	Education
Celia Popovic	Education
Ron Sheese	Psychology, Faculty of Health
Carolyn Steele	Career Centre
Herb Wideman	Contract Senior Researcher
Laurie Wilcox	Psychology, Faculty of Health
Renate Wickens	Cinema and Media Studies, School of Arts, Media, Performance & Design
Ros Woodhouse	The Writing Department, LA&PS

Internal Affiliates – Graduate Students & Post-Doctoral Fellows

Chris Alton	PhD Candidate, Communication & Culture
Alex Chalk	PhD Candidate, Communication & Culture
Foad Hamidi	PhD Candidate, Computer Science & Engineering

Maren Hancock	PhD Candidate, Women's Studies
Daniel Harley	PhD Candidate, Communication & Culture
Dr. Cristyne Hébert	Post-Doctoral Fellow, Education
Melanie McBride	Post-Doctoral Fellow, Education
Sam McCready	PhD Candidate, Education
Kisha McPherson	PhD Candidate, Education
Alia Miroshnichenko	PhD Candidate, Communication Studies
Karen Skardzius	PhD Candidate, Communication & Culture
Sarah Stang	PhD Candidate, Communication & Culture
Tatyana Terzopoulos	PhD Candidate, Education
Brittany Tomin	PhD Candidate, Education
Tannaz Zargarian	PhD Candidate, Education

Alumni

Dr. Kelly Bergstrom	University of Hawaii, Manoa, HI
Dr. Negin Dahya	University of Washington, Seattle, WA
Dr. Milena Droumeva	Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC
Dr. Emily Flynn-Jones	University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON
Dr. Alison Harvey	University of Leicester, Leicester, UK
Dr. Felan Parker	University of Toronto, Toronto, ON
Dr. Michelle Sengara	York University, Faculty of Education
Dr. Nicholas Taylor	NC State University, Raleigh, NC

External Affiliates

Richard Fouchaux	Ontario Human Rights Commission
Robert Martellacci	Mindshare Learning
Shann McGrail	Microsoft Canada, Education Manager
Patrick McQuade	Peel District School Board
Natalia Rhonda	Ministry of Education

Members Emeritus

Jean Adams	Schulich School of Business
Mary Leigh Morbey	Faculty of Education
Roberta Sinyor	Languages, Literature & Linguistics, LA&PS

Executive Committee Members

Natalie Coulter	Chair, Communication Studies, LA&PS
Jennifer Jenson	Education (sabbatical)
Graeme Deans	Schulich School of Business

Michael Longford	Design, School of Arts, Media, Performance & Design
Heather Lotherington	Education
Jonathan Obar	Communication Studies, LA&PS
Kurt Thumlert	Education
Karen Skardzius	Graduate Student Rep, Communication and Culture

12. Appendix 2 – Additional Information about Progress in Fulfilling Mandate

- Won a Research Opportunity Grant at York University (\$8000) to hold a workshop for the partners of the SSHRC Partnership Grant that we applied for with Nombuso Dlamini.
- IRDL has proposed to do a games lounge for the York Research Rock Star night on November 3rd where we will showcase our students' work.
- Natalie Coulter will be applying for a MiTacs this fall and an IDG grant.
- This summer IRDL will host Akeelah's Room! for girls to create and develop content for the online community. It will also host a group of girls from the community to participate in game-making workshops delivered by the IRDL team.
- Ran summer camp with Motorola funding at a Peel District high-needs high school during month of July.
- Post-doctoral Fellow Dr. Cristyne Hébert was successful in her application for a tenure-stream position at the University of Regina. She begins her new position as Assistant Professor in Assessment and Evaluation in the Faculty of Education in the fall of 2018.