Language learning online: A multimedia, narrative approach to teaching Italian

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Summary

As society becomes more global, fluency in more than one language is increasingly important, and as online learning continues to grow, so does the demand for online language courses. In this course tour, the presenters will demonstrate Penn State World Campus’s rich multimedia, scenario-based approach to its online Italian courses. They will talk about language learning pedagogy and emerging technological tools, demonstrate how they designed their immersive Italian language learning environment, and discuss the various ways they are assessing the courses.

The presenters are currently developing an immersive series of Italian Courses based on a 15-day tour theme. Every day of the tour reveals a variety of activities that represent what most likely happens in a real tour, like communication surrounding currency exchanges, public transport, and dining out. Students are thus motivated to hear, speak, read, and write in Italian. Additionally, as students progress through each course (Italian 001, 002, and 003), they visit a region of Italy not explored in previous courses.

The courses are designed to be rich multimedia experiences integrating authentic cultural images, language, locations, and communication scenarios. They will contain a standard set of tools such as drag-and-drop and matching activities to provide immediate feedback on vocabulary and grammar understanding. The course will contain text and audio-based dialogues with links to a video-based phrasebook that allows the students to read, hear, and compare their pronunciation with a proficient speaker. Other tools such as Google maps and a cultural guide will be integrated to reveal key cultural information (e.g. churches, markets, bridges, and other key cultural spots).

Presenter Bios

Andrea Gregg has worked in Higher Education for over ten years and has been involved in online learning and distance education at Penn State for the past seven years. She has worked with all phases of instructional design, including needs assessment, design and development, implementation, and evaluation. She currently works as a Senior Instructional Designer with the Penn State World Campus where she leads and supervises a 9-person team of Instructional Designers and Instructional Production Specialists to design, develop, maintain, and support over 125 online undergraduate and graduate courses.

Cecelia Merkel is a metadata specialist at Penn State University. She works with groups to consider how they can tag and organize their digital content so it is findable by internal and external stakeholders. She coordinates the Media and Learning Design Initiative, a team working to connect the media production capacity of Penn State Public Broadcasting (WPSU) with the course production needs of Penn State World Campus.

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