

RYERSON UNIVERSITY

Disability studies partners with Chang School to explore mad people's history

By Antoinette Mercurio

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David Reville, School of Disability Studies instructor, teaches an online course at The Chang School about the history of madness.

Madness has taken on a whole new meaning at Ryerson.

The School of Disability Studies (DST) and The G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education have come together to deliver a course about mad people's history, which looks at the history of madness from the point of view of people who were or are deemed mad. Originally administered through the School of DST, the course is now available online to provide access to working professionals, people with disabilities and those outside of Toronto.

In the past, madness has been defined as a state of insanity. Today madness includes a broader sweep of human behaviour such as bipolar affective disorder, anxiety and, more recently, shyness. People living with mental illnesses are often stigmatized and stereotyped as being violent, dangerous and unable to live independently. DST instructor David Reville teaches mad people's history and says that madness is an important aspect of disability studies.

"Madness has been around as long as recorded history [but] even into the early 1990s, mental illness wasn't being talked about. Society needs to be more tolerant of different ways of behaving," he said. "Ryerson is unusual to have such a focus on madness. To offer a course like mad people's history is a symbol of how open-minded the university is. We're on the brink of seeing the birth of a new discipline - mad studies - and Ryerson is at the forefront."

Although the course predominantly focuses on history - ranging from 6,000 years ago to the modern era - other study topics include gender, sexual orientation, race, popular culture, mad activism and the politics

of language.

Offering mad people's history at The Chang School provided Reville access to an important resource. The Digital Education Strategies unit helped Reville create videos that he uses in the course. So far three documentaries have been produced: an introduction to mad people's history; the political action taken over the years; and the labels some mad people use to identify themselves. Please click [here](#) to see two of the three videos.

Reville spent two years in mental hospitals in the '60s and he brings his personal experience to this course. He unapologetically describes himself as a mad activist.

"There's lots of literature written from a medical perspective. Mad people's history, though, features writing by people who have experienced madness themselves," he said.

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