The OpenLab at City Tech: A Place to Learn, Work, and Share
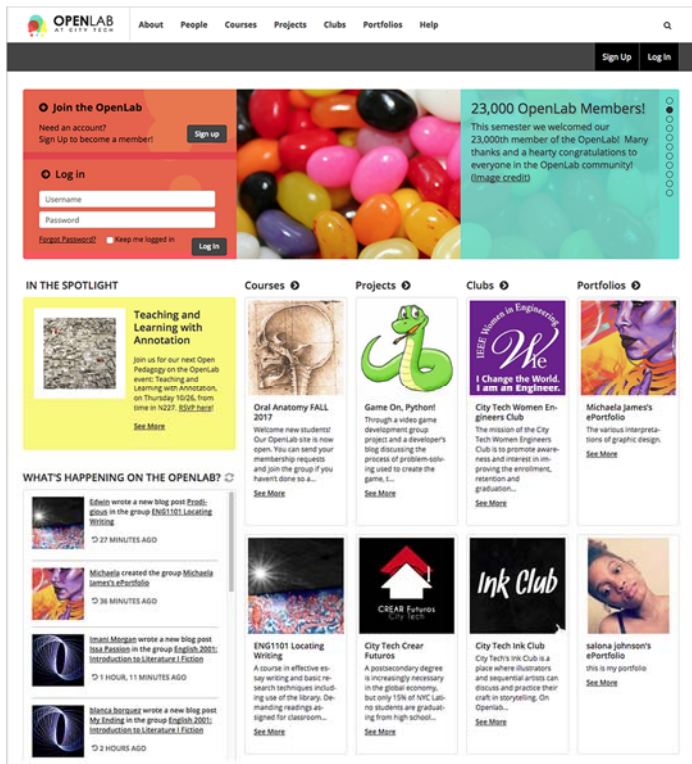
Jill Belli, Charlie Edwards, Genevieve Hitchings, Jody Rosen, Jenna Spevack (Co-Directors) and team
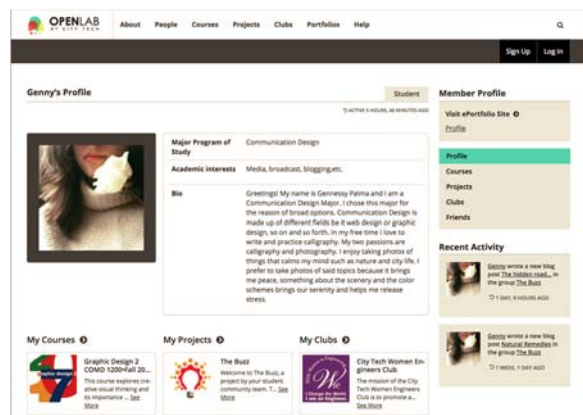
About City Tech

New York City College of Technology (City Tech) is the designated senior college of technology within the 24-campus City University of New York (CUNY). Located in downtown Brooklyn, it serves a diverse student body of more than 17,000 undergraduates in a wide range of professional and technical degree programs.

What is the OpenLab?

The OpenLab (openlab.citytech.cuny.edu) is an innovative open digital platform where City Tech's students, faculty, and staff meet to learn, work, and share their ideas. Created as part of "A Living Laboratory: Revitalizing General Education for a 21st Century College of Technology" (PS031S100159), the OpenLab is designed to support teaching, learning, and collaboration at City Tech, building connections and community at our busy urban commuter campus. Unlike closed online teaching systems, the OpenLab allows classes across the curriculum to communicate with one another and the world beyond the college. Like a lab, it provides a space where faculty and students can work together, experiment, and innovate. The OpenLab will be publicly released in 2018, making the software freely available to others around the nation and the world.

A Place for Everyone

Since its launch in Fall 2011, more than 23,000 students, faculty, and staff have used the OpenLab. Anyone at City Tech can join and set up a profile (see left), participate in courses, start or join clubs around their shared interests, create projects of all kinds and build portfolios to share their work. Members can easily create websites, participate in discussion forums, edit documents together, share multimedia content, comment on one another's work, send messages, and make friendship connections.

The OpenLab team encourages student engagement with the site through the work of our student bloggers and their site, The Buzz (openlab.citytech.cuny.edu/the-buzz).

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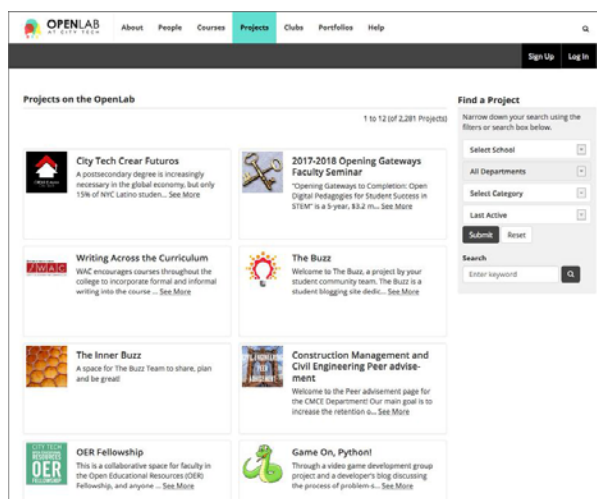Jill Belli, Charlie Edwards, Genevieve Hitchings, Jody Rosen, Jenna Spevack (Co-Directors) and team

Open Digital Pedagogy

Hundreds of courses across the disciplines use the OpenLab each semester, from Dental Hygiene to Hospitality Management, English to Entertainment Technology. The openness of the OpenLab encourages innovative pedagogies: for example, enabling faculty to bring multiple courses together into the same working space. In addition to fostering openness, however, the OpenLab also supports a wide range of privacy settings. The OpenLab's Community Team of advanced graduate students provides support and professional development throughout the year, and we seek to foster best practices through our Open Pedagogy interest group (openlab.citytech.cuny.edu/openpedagogyopenlab).

Connection, Collaboration, and Sharing

OpenLab members have created thousands of projects on the site, for student research, college committees, grant-funded initiatives, departmental working groups, course coordination, and more. As shown here, the OpenLab supports key college-wide programs such as Writing Across the Curriculum, First Year Learning Communities, and Crear Futuros, enabling students, faculty, and staff to collaborate across disciplinary and departmental boundaries, and making the work of the college visible to everyone in our community. It also promotes sharing beyond City Tech: for instance, it houses the Library's important Open Educational Resources effort, which enables faculty to replace textbooks with no-cost course materials that are made freely available to all. Finally, it amplifies the impact of grant-funded projects, since others can see and benefit from the work we do.

An OpenLab for You

The OpenLab is built using the widely-adopted free and open-source software platforms WordPress and BuddyPress, and is thus part of a worldwide community focused on the design and development of code that is made freely available for use, adaption, and sharing. We are currently partnering with the Commons In A Box project (commonsinabox.org) at The Graduate Center, CUNY, to create a version of the Commons In A Box software that is modeled on the OpenLab; this work is made possible by an NEH Digital Humanities Implementation Grant (HK-250705-16). Commons In A Box OpenLab will be released in Fall 2018, enabling individuals and institutions around the nation and the world to create an OpenLab of their own.