Hello!

My name is Ian Wereley, and I am a contract instructor in the Department of History at Carleton University. I am glad that you have joined me today, and I’ll start by saying “Welcome to My Online Classroom”!

I teach an entirely online, second year course called “A History of Oil: Science, Technology, Culture, and Conflict.”

The course was developed during the spring of 2018, and taught in the Department of History during the Summer semesters of 2018 and 2019. Looking ahead, it will also be taught again this summer.

The course is capped at 125 students, and is listed as a free elective for students in any discipline. I have found that the course is often used to satisfy mid-degree breadth requirements and, as such, about three quarters of my students come from outside of the History Department, and about one quarter from outside the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. In my experience, about 10-15% of my students take the course from outside of Canada, in their home countries or while travelling abroad.

The course is run asynchronously, which means that all lecture content is pre-recorded, and all readings and activities can be completed by the students at any time before the assigned due date. This type of course is far more flexible and accommodating to the students, but it requires much preparation and organisation on the part of the instructor.

My course is structured around a series of modules that students navigate through each week. A module contains 2-3 short lecture videos of 5-10 minutes each, a selection of 2-3 digital readings and videos, and an online multiple choice mini-quiz. In addition to these elements, every week students engage in either a discussion forum with their peers, or a personal reflection activity graded by myself and the teaching assistants assigned to the course. Combined, these activities represent 30% of the final grade.

There is a multiple-choice mid-term quiz in this course, and a written final exam, which combined represent 35% of the final grade. The major project of the course is a document analysis worth 35% of the final grade, in which students download PDFs of historical oil advertisements, and then analyze their value as primary sources. This assignment is broken down into Part I (a rough draft) and Part II (the final submission), in order to encourage students to start early on their work, and to provide feedback during critical learning moments in the project.

Of course, it is important to acknowledge that your course building experience, in these days of social distancing and working remotely, will inevitably be quite different from mine, as you will not have access to the full suite of technologies available on site at Carleton’s Educational Development Centre and the Media Production Centre.

You will, however, quickly find that both these Centres will provide you with technological advice and a great many other vital kinds of support, including, for example, advice on everything from planning lessons and using online tools, to sorting out grade distributions. Be sure to reach out frequently to the EDC for advice and support; you will not be disappointed.

In this Virtual Workshop, I will discuss some of the challenges and opportunities that I faced while designing, creating, and teaching “A History of Oil” online. When I created this course in 2018, I was also experiencing a time of great stress and uncertainty, which included the confluence of my PhD defence, the birth of my first child, and a lengthy Carleton support staff strike, which removed from me the invaluable support of the skilled technologists at the EDC and the MPC’s recording studio.

In our 90-minute session, I will offer general advice for teaching online, and share some simple tips and tricks that I’ve learned along the way. I will discuss tools like Big Blue Button, Discussion Forums, and Feedback Polls, and suggest ways for creating lecture videos using screen recording apps like Kaltura Capture.

Importantly, I will set aside most of our time together for open discussion and Q&A.

These are strange times to be sure, but they also offer some incredible new opportunities for online classrooms. I look forward to discussing some of them with you in our workshop!