Carleton University | Hurrelmann Online Classroom Intro Video

ACHIM HURRELMANN: Hi. My name is Achim Hurrelmann. I teach in the Department of Political Science and in the Institute of European, Russian, and Eurasian studies, and I look forward to welcoming you to my online classroom.

I've taught online classes at Carleton in various formats for about 10 years. My first exposure to online teaching came when I added a CUTV section to my third-year lecture on the political system of the European Union. The CUTV model on what is now Carleton online as most you will know works through video recording regular lectures. And that for the instructor can be quite an attractive model because I at least when I lecture, I utlilize lots of energy and lots of ideas from the interaction with my students. So speaking to an extra class is certainly preferable than lecturing to a camera or computer screen.

But at the same time offering this class, I realized that online students in the college and online model will always have been more challenging learning environment than face-to-face students, and that's because they cannot directly participate in class interactions and also because the material is delivered to them in a very clunky format. They receive these long hours, long video recordings of lectures which are not broken up at all in any way amenable to learning at home, and that's why I was keen to develop a course that was really structured from the get go around the online learning experience.

The opportunity to develop this course came when I redesigned political science 5103, which is also Euros 5108, which is an MA level course on Canada, EU relations. The course is offered only in the summer term, and I devised a blended format that combined online materials delivered once you learn with an intensive seminar meeting on four consecutive days at the very end of the term. This summer, the course is offered again, but, of course, it's offered in an online only format. But I retain the same basic structure beginning with asynchronous online teaching CU learn and then synchronous seminars via Zoom at the end of the term.

MA courses in my discipline, in political science and also in European Russian and Eurasian studies, have always offered in a seminar format. The focus is really on interaction and participation. So the main challenge in developing the course,

particularly those asynchronous elements delivered on cuLearn learn, was to allow for this interaction to move beyond just recorded lectures. And I did so with the support of the EDC by devising a number of techniques, including online lessons that combine short recorded lectures with other materials and activities, including small assignments such as quizzes and research exercises, and also an online debate that also has a role playing component.

All in all, I must say that I've really enjoyed online teaching. And I just want to mention a few things that I've learned doing so over the years. First, it's clear that not everything that works in a face to face classroom can be replicated in an online environment. And often we just shouldn't try, but rather we should focus on the areas where online teaching has advantages, and they exist.

For instance, I can design online lessons in a way that much better structures the students learning processes, for instance, by delivering a very brief lecture that introduces required readings then asking the students to do the readings. Then, perhaps, thinking of an exercise in which some knowledge from the readings can be applied. And only then moving to the next lecture element, and so on and so forth.

Second, it's of crucial importance in online teaching to make sure that the students remain engaged. And this is a particular challenge in asynchronous online teaching. I think it can only be addressed by making the cost delivery as interesting as possible.

Again, no long lectures, breaking up the material, making it as diverse as possible. But it's also necessary to include lots of smaller assignments, regularly, frequently to force students to keep up but also to give the instructor the chance to monitor student progress, even if that means additional grading. But if all this is done, my experience is that the learning result in online teaching can actually be superior to those in the face to face seminars.

Third, just like regular teaching, online teaching provides lots of opportunities to be creative. And my experience is really in the online setting that creativity, that good ideas, trump technical sophistication. For instance, the role playing exercise that I use in my summer class works with a really simple online forum. I know that cuLearn has lots of technical options, and that might be intimidating to people who

are teaching online for the first time, but there's really no need to use them all in one and the same class.

Fourth, we should also think about the fact that online teaching makes it possible to break open the very rigid weekly structure of our regular teaching and to explore whether there might be better ways to actually divide the material not broken up into 12, 13, or 14 weeks. However, and this is a big caveat but I came to understand the hard way, it's very important in doing so to watch student workloads. When I first designed online classes, students would complain that the workload was too high, and they had good reason. And it just took me a while to correctly calibrate the workload of online activities to make it comparable to workloads in a regular face to face teaching setting.

I want to end by saying that I would not want to teach all of my classes online. And in fact, this fall I will have to deliver courses online, where I'm not sure if online is actually the best environment to do so. I actually honestly would have preferred to teach these classes face to face. But that is, of course, the situation that we are all in.

So in developing these online courses for the fall, I will try to remind myself of the opportunities of online teaching and the things that work online and can be explored. And I do have some ideas for new things I would like to try, for instance, in a new first year seminar that I will teach for the first time, such as working through regular group instruction with just subgroups of students. And I am really curious to see how that will work out.