VIVIAN SOLANA: Hello, my name is Vivian Solana. I am an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. A big thanks to the EDC for this opportunity to share my experience teaching online with you, but also for creating this space more broadly. I've learned a lot from hearing the different strategies and experiences from listening to the videos that my peers have contributed to this Welcome to My Online Classroom initiative. So huge thanks to everyone that's made it possible and that is participating in this.

The course I'm teaching is called Foundations in Socio-Cultural Anthropology. It is a mandatory second year course, mandatory to anthropology majors, that is essentially an advanced introduction to core concepts of the discipline. I have 50 students registered. I taught it for the first time last year with 55 students registered.

I had never taken, let alone taught, an online course before. And so I spent a lot of this summer thinking both, on the one hand, how to make use of the materials that I had spent so much time creating the year prior, but how to do so in a way-- adapt the course in the most effective way possible to an online environment.

And to this end, I actually made use of all the available support that we have at Carleton. I took a bunch of the EDC online workshops that were key for me to understand-- well, for many things, but amongst them to understand the basic limitations as well as opportunities that the teaching technologies that we have available offer. I participated in the workshops that my own department organized, and I had informal discussions with peers about our teaching projects.

Once I had a syllabus ready, especially those assignments, their rationales, and their ratings, and all of that, I shared it with an instructional designer in the EDC, Yuan Chen. Then I essentially asked Yuan if there was anything that they anticipated, any problems that they could foresee, in executing this plan online. And we had a great, very productive telephone conversation and a few email exchanges that really helped me kind of sharpen the design of my course and communicate it with as much clarity as possible.

On top of that, I had the privilege of working over the summer with an undergraduate student who had taken my course, this same course, last year and who applied to this awesome Student as Partners Program that basically gave a grant to the student to help me in the process of redesigning the course online. And that was extremely fun and productive. And if anyone wants to talk about that more, I can do so in the actual workshop.

And then right now, I have the support of Melanie Gridley, who is the teaching assistant assigned to this course, helping me execute it. By no means do I consider myself an expert teaching online, I am very much learning. So the goal of this video, for me, is to show you the basic design of my course, share a little bit of the rationale of why I designed things the way I did.

And then I did ask for feedback during the reading week from my students. I was almost surprised with how happy they seemed to be with the course, so that's good news. But I also received some recommendations for improvement, and then I'm brainstorming myself on how to make this course even better the second half.

So basically, my goal is to share with you these basic designs. And then if any of this resonates with you, or my teaching style resonates with you, or if you have a similar course to work on, then it would be great if you came to the session on November 23. And we can talk about any of this, or related aspects, in more detail.

So to me, one of the things that I love about Anthropology 2001 is that it's a 1.0 course. So I have the students for the fall and the winter term, and I love that because it makes it very easy to, or easier, to create a sense of community in the classroom, a kind of learning community, a feeling of familiarity with one another. And that was one of my biggest anxieties about going online, was how to recreate that online.

So I have a lot of thoughts on that, again, I'm just flagging them as things that we can talk about in the session. But one of the key things for me was to have to make the course blended because the design of my lectures. I do lectures the second year course. And I wanted to give them particular content, but I designed it in a way that I intersperse questions to them, maybe little activities to make sure that there's a lot of student participation throughout the classroom session. So I knew, from the

beginning, that I needed to see them on a weekly basis to create this kind of-- recreate those discussions that I would otherwise create in the classroom. So that's why I opted for a blended approach.

Now, this is-- it's a weekly structure. Each week covers a different topic. If you click on any given one of them, what you'll find is always this. You will have-- the first thing that I ask students to do is to watch videos, the recordings of my lectures on those topics. I shortened my lecture content. We edited to kind of really ask myself, is this truly important, to make these videos as short as possible. I have a maximum of three videos a week, but they're no longer than 15 minutes each.

And then to make sure that students actually listened to these videos that I've put so much work to, and that I actually rely upon to kind of set the stage for them to understand the readings and so on, I designed weekly quizzes. They're very simple multiple choice questions that are more like test your knowledge kind of thing. They're really meant to just give-- for me, they're making sure that I provide them with an incentive to listen to these lectures.

And then only after that, I ask them to go through the materials assigned for the week, which are typically an article and a chapter of a book. And then I also have-- we created [INAUDIBLE]. And I created these multimedia readings that I can talk about more in the session. And then I asked them to post responses to these materials, answering a prompt that I give them every week and that I post to these reading forums.

And like you are noticing here, I divide the students into four different groups to create a sense of reading communities in each of these forums. So that students are less intimidated, perhaps, to share their writing with the whole class. I give them a smaller class, let's say. And then because I have a teaching assistant, it's not the marking-- the continuous feedback is not so onerous. So I am in charge of two groups, and Melanie is in charge of following the other two.

And then only after that, we meet on Fridays for an hour and a half through Zoom in these weekly virtual classrooms. Now what happens in those classrooms is that I'll begin by maybe talking about the topic a little bit, perhaps something that has-- an aspect of it that has evolved from the reading forums. And then I will give them

instructions for an activity that they will engage with in their breakout rooms in groups and small groups.

So typically it's a discussion question, but I could also have a news article, and then I ask them to find words-- different activities. Each session has a different activity that they'll do in breakout rooms. And then we come together, and I ask them to use the whiteboard to take notes collectively on their discussion, or perhaps to post the results of their activity on it.

And then that serves a lot of purposes. For one, they can use that to then present the results to the full group. But also, I ask them all to either save a screenshot or a copy of this whiteboard because then that's what they used to upload at the end of the session to this virtual classroom participation assignment. And I use that to mark their attendance to these sessions.

Last but not least, I always post a PDF of the PowerPoint that I used during the virtual classroom to explain the activity that I've come up for the session. So that if there's ever any student who can't make it to the session for whatever reason, I simply tell them to-- that they have the option of doing this activity on their own, uploading the results to the same assignment window, and, again, get an opportunity to make up for that absence.

OK, a couple of final thoughts. If I had to summate the biggest advice from what I've learned out of this process, well, I think the biggest part is-- and really, this really came out in the feedback that I got from students using the feedback tool on cuLearn-- is that organization is-- it's always important to teaching, but online teaching, it's even more so. So I would say really focus on creating a structure that you like that you find effective and be consistent, use it throughout. Whatever that structure is, stick with it, so that students can learn it relatively quickly.

I also didn't have a virtual classroom until the third week to give time for students to learn the structure and understand the flow of how every week should function, or how they should organize themselves every week, find themselves, organize themselves. And that really helped, I think, for giving them time to navigate all these different aspects of the course.

So I think that's key because it kind of-- if the organization is consistent, clear,

expectable, almost predictable for them, they can focus on the content, instead of having to worry about learning different instructions every week. Grade everything speaks for itself. But just a note on that, in the evaluation that I got, one of the things that came up was that there was no incentive for them to comment on each other's reading posts because that wasn't part of my rubric.

And so that was the one thing that I didn't give marks for. And in fact, it's true. That's one thing that I've noticed I don't like so far about the course, which is that students do the reading responses, but they seldom engage with each other's. So if I want them to do that, I've realized I have to integrate it into the marking rubric. I have to give them points for it.

Let go. This one's very important, and it was for me. By far, the biggest challenging of online teaching, I think, is getting comfortable with recording lectures. Of course, when you do a recording, you will always find-- after you finish the recording, you will always find a fault. You might have stuttered. You might have preferred to use a different word, maybe a different image. Maybe there was a small typo that you hadn't noticed, et cetera, et cetera.

And of course, the first few recordings that I did, I redid them a gazillion times each. It was exhausting. It was frustrating. At some point, it really helped me to just work on my confidence and let go. And say, OK, so long as I had-- it felt like I had covered what I wanted to cover and it was good enough, I uploaded it. I stopped even rewatching them. And it's OK, they're enjoying the videos. I'm not sure about this, but I like to think that what that also means is that there's a little bit of spontaneity in the videos that maybe the students enjoy, being reminded that there's a human behind it and not a robot.

And then the last thing is respond quickly. I think they really appreciate when you answer their emails without too much of a delay, et cetera, because it helps with their anxiety. And I've at least found that that's easier because I have less prep work because I did a bunch of the prep in advanced. But I know each and every one of us has a very different situation. But if you can afford to respond to them quickly, I think that really helps. OK, I very much look forward to our conversation and to seeing you online soon. Take care.