Preamble and Information

Preamble: Thoughts about Moving Our Class Online

Feel free to skip the following, if you’d like, and just go straight to the practical information. But you might find it helpful to read about how I’m approaching this transition.

Everything we’re going to try to do is unlike anything I’ve ever done as a college teacher for the last 26 years! You may also be keenly feeling the strangeness, too, as students. Moreover, we’re going to be inhabiting this new teaching-and-learning universe in the midst of a pandemic that’s both global in scale and is affecting all of us on a personal level. I don’t think we can overestimate the impact of all these factors on our work.

My hope, then, is to create an online course experience that accomplishes the most fundamental goals I articulated for the class at the start of the semester but does that in as flexible a manner as possible, and not just in terms of all our different circumstances when it comes to internet access and bandwidth. I also want to recognize that as a group and individually, we (I include myself here) are all likely going to find that some weeks are easier to engage with the material than others. Finally, I understand that you all are likely going to have to do different kinds of prioritizing with your classes, depending on all sorts of things -- your majors, potential challenges in learning material online instead of in-person, etc.

What’s my teaching "philosophy," then, given these circumstances? We’re all going to do the best we can, while also being as generous and kind as possible to ourselves and to each other.

Now, a few words about evaluation. I actually couldn’t be more thrilled that the college has gone to P/F! I think it fits the situation in which we find ourselves, and I’ve had my own frustrations with grading over the years and the impediments it can create in our learning. But I recognize that having no grades might present some challenges for some of you: of course, grades offer both motivation and the threat of punishment. Most of you have spent much of your educational lives within the world of grades. You might be worried about losing the structure they provide.

At this point, you might expect me to extol the virtues of learning for its own sake. While I believe deeply in those virtues, I also think that kind of moralizing at this juncture might fall a little flat. So, I guess I’d put it more simply: you’re now free from grades. What might you want to do with that freedom?
Course Information

GOALS: I’ve organized the second half of this course mainly around the historical content. As we move through that content, I’ll continue to emphasize the different historical skills you’ll need to interpret it. From our original list of goals, here are the ones I want us most to focus on:

- You’ll gain a general knowledge of major events and themes in modern world history (from 1850 to the early 2000s)
- You’ll be able to connect this history to the global shift to and dependence on petroleum as a fuel, energy source, and essential element in the objects of our material world
- You’ll develop an understanding of the basic interpretive skills historians use to analyze the past, especially of the modern world
- You’ll be able to utilize those skills in writing and in analyzing visual material

And finally, I’ve changed the final documentary project to be as open-ended as possible so you may align it with your circumstances:

- You’ll engage in a small documentary project of your choice, in which you reflect in any way you’d like on the history of oil. For instance, you may choose to do some variation of the original video project in which you investigate the history of a consumer item; you may decide to explore consumption generally and its links to petroleum; or perhaps you’d like to think about oil in this time of pandemic. Whatever you choose, you may also decide to frame the topic more personally and, if you wish, reflect on it in relation to your own life.
- You’ll then produce a written, visual, audio, or audio-visual exploration of your topic. [Stay tuned for the separate page about this.] **You will have access to Adobe Premiere Pro if you'd like to learn that and use it.** Adobe provides lots of online tutorials. Given how much additional work the staff at OIT is having to do, however, I can’t guarantee that any of them will be available to provide support.

**Before discussing assignments, I want to flag that I decided, reluctantly, to drop the novel Americanah. A couple of you noted in particular your hope that we could still read it. But I became convinced that it was too big a book to do as a class, given our new world of remote learning.**

ASSIGNMENTS: **The following is for students who have reliable internet access of some sort; that is, you’ll be able, at the least, to post to Glow a couple times a week and access email.**

1. Each week, you’ll write a brief (250-500 words) response to the reading and post as a Glow Discussion. Please post by Monday at 12:00 PM.

2. I’ll offer 3 short discussions each week via either Zoom or Google Hangouts (we’ll figure out which works best). These discussions will be 30 minutes each and roughly fall during our normal class period on Tuesday afternoons. There will be a sign-up sheet available each week. Sign up for whatever slot you’d like. Please note that I’ll assess the format of these as we go along and may need to change how we do them.
3. These discussions are not required; if you can join one, wonderful! If you can’t, don’t worry about it. PLEASE sign up for a discussion by Tuesday at 10:00 AM if possible. I’ll then send you an invitation.

4. If you can’t join the discussion, then you’ll need to do one additional thing. Send me an email by Friday 12:00 noon in which you respond to the discussion posts of your classmates. Did any of them make you think differently about the material? Are you able to synthesize different points of view?

For students who for whatever reason are not able to access the internet regularly — or can some weeks and not others — we’ll get creative! Please let me know, and I’ll work with you individually.

VIRTUAL OFFICE HOURS: my designated virtual office hours for our class will be Friday mornings from 10-12. We can use any medium you’d like: video chat, phone, or in-time emailing. Please sign up on Glow. I’ll also be available by appointment.

Evaluation

I will provide brief comments on all your written work. If you do the assigned work, you’ll pass the class. If you miss an assignment, we’ll start to have a conversation about what’s going on. I’m not going to set a rule about what happens if you miss more than one assignment, but do know that it is possible to fail this course if you don’t meet the minimum requirements.

Course Schedule

The following is my proposed schedule for the rest of the semester. As we go along and see how it feels to do our course online, I may make changes. Please, then, keep an eye out for emails and Glow announcements.

If you encounter any problems accessing any of the material, do not worry -- just let me know as soon as you can.

Also, please refer to the new "course information" about weekly writing responses, to be posted on Glow "Discussions": Preamble and Information

Week 7 (week of April 6): The Middle East and the Modern Worlds of Oil (I)

We’re going to ease ourselves back into our course material by diving into the present, but using the lens of the past.

First, please review the following material from the week we ended our in-person classes:

*Ervand Abrahamian, “The 1953 Coup in Iran”; “Oil Maps of the Middle East,” at the British Library at https://www.bl.uk/maps/articles/oil-posts-of-the-middle-east (Links to an external site.)

The maps may also be found here, on Glow: Oil Maps of the Middle East / British Library
*You'll also find it helpful to review what you've read in Black's book and to look at the following pages: pp. 86-88; 93-98 (two brief essays on "infrastructure"); 183-191.

Then, **read the following articles** on what's going on with oil right now, which you can link to, below, or find here on Glow: Three Articles on Oil -- end of March, beginning of April 2020. But realize that I'm posting these on April 3, and by the time we discuss them, other events may have happened that will affect the current global situation with oil:


**PROMPT:** Please write on *any* of the following questions, and for this week only, please post your response by Tuesday, 12:00 PM.

- Does history seem important to these journalists' accounts?
- How do the authors turn to it or not?
- The very sudden economic fallout in the oil market has been profound. Does it feel at all relevant to how you've experienced the last month?

Also, feel free to add any questions you might have about the articles that you'd like answered, and I'll do my best. Some of these questions may also get answered next week.

Feel free to use your future responses to ask questions about anything that needs clarifying or additional information.

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**Week Eight (week of April 13): The Middle East and the Modern Worlds of Oil (II)**

**Please read:**

1. Black, chapter 7 (you've started this chapter already, last week)

2. All documents (including introductory sections) from Merrill, *Oil Crisis of 1973*, in the course packet or here: [Merrill Oil Crisis Docs.pdf](Merrill Oil Crisis Docs.pdf)

3. All visual sources in "The Oil Shocks of the 1970s," on the Yale "Energy History" website: [https://energyhistory.yale.edu/module/oil-shocks-1970s](https://energyhistory.yale.edu/module/oil-shocks-1970s)
The above site includes a couple videos, but if you can't access the videos easily, please just read the transcripts shown alongside the links to the videos.

PROMPT: historians have tended to use 1973 as a watershed “crisis” year for the United States, ending the long post-World War II period of economic growth. How do these documents read from your standpoint of living through another, even more profound period of “crisis”?

**By Friday, April 17, 5:00 PM** (your time, whatever it is), please also email me with a brief description of your intended documentary project, details TBA.

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**Week Nine (week of April 20): Environmental Justice and Climate Change**

Note: this week has two videos. If you’re unable to watch them because of internet access, please let me know -- we have other options available.

1. Black, ch. 6 (review) and 8


   Note: this approx. 22-minute video is weird and culturally interesting, but you might find it a bit dull at times! If you find your attention lagging, it’s okay to advance it a bit to move it along.


PROMPT: explore in any way you choose the following question:

Considering our sources this week, how would you describe the different meanings of "science" that the oil and gas industry (and its political supporters) seems to want to impart?

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**Week Ten (week of April 27): Plastics!**

1. Read two of the articles in “Planet or Plastic?” National Geographic, June 2018 (sign into library portal) https://natgeo.gale.com/natgeo/archive/CoversDetailsPage/CoversDetailsWindow?disableHighlighting=false&displayGroupName=NatGeo-Covers&currPage=&scanId=&query=&docIndex=&source=&prodId=NGMA&search_within_results=&p=
2. Rebecca Altman, “American Beauties”: https://www.topic.com/american-beauties (Links to an external site.)


PROMPT: Give yourself a ten-minute time limit. Find as many plastic objects in your house and either list them or take pictures of them. Load your list or pictures onto our Discussion board for this week. Then, describe how these items appear to you as you actually have to look for/at them very intentionally and think about them in light of our readings/viewings this week.

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Week Eleven (week of May 4): Documentary Week

Individual meetings with me to talk about your project!

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Week Twelve (week of May 11):


2. Gökçe Günel, Spaceship in the Desert, Introduction and chapter one (link to come)

Prompt: Take one photo of anything (or any living being!) that helps inspire you to think about the future beyond oil-dependency, or conjure that thing or person in your head. Then write a brief essay that explains why and how it inspires you, with reference to any of our material from the second half of the class. If you do take a photo, please include that in your post.

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Due Saturday, May 23: Your final documentary project

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Description of Project and Options

As we make the shift to remote teaching and learning, I've decided to offer you an array of options for your final project.

**You have until Friday, April 17, 5:00 PM, to let me know which of these options you're choosing and to briefly describe your plans.**

**The final deadline for this project is Saturday, May 23, by 5:00 PM.**
As you think about these options, you'll need to consider many factors, of course. I want to encourage all of you to consider learning Adobe Professional Premiere if you feel you have the internet access and connectivity to allow you to do this. While we won't be doing these as group projects -- caveat: unless you and one or two other people feel you can figure out how to do this, in which case let me know! -- you may decide that you have the time and energy to learn this platform. I and the folks in OIT will do as much as we can to support you in this, though please realize you'll be a bit more on your own than had we been able to do this as a class on campus.

Other factors you'll need to think about, beyond your internet capacities and your own energy: take a look ahead at your other classes and see what your workload is looking like until the end of exam period. Finally, think about what interests you and what kinds of projects you've enjoyed in the past. Might you enjoy trying to do a podcast? Would you like to emphasize visual elements (these might include doing artistic responses or using photography)? Would you really like to do some kind of either non-fiction creative writing or perhaps even creative writing?

My hope is that, in these very trying times, this final project can be as much as possible what you want it to be.

OVERALL GOALS

You'll engage in a small documentary project of your choice, in which you reflect in any way you’d like on the history of oil. For instance, you may choose to do some variation of the original video project in which you investigate the history of a consumer item; you may decide to explore consumption generally and its links to petroleum; or perhaps you'd like to think about oil in this time of pandemic. Whatever you choose, you may also decide to frame the topic more personally and, if you wish, reflect on it in relation to your own life.

You'll then produce an audio-visual, audio, visual, or written exploration of your topic.

WHAT DO I MEAN BY A "DOCUMENTARY" PROJECT?

At its essence, to "document" something is to provide factual support (evidence) for statements you're making. But all sorts of things can do that kind of work: think about material objects in a local history museum, for instance. Combined with textual captions, ordinary objects from the past can "document" what life was like in that place.

We've talked a lot about different kinds of visual sources as "documents" of their time. You can also use visual media to document your ideas and positions you want to advocate -- or to illuminate data. For a really creative "audio" depiction of data, check this out: "What Does a Volatile Stock Market Sound Like?" [https://www.marketplace.org/2020/03/31/the-sounds-of-a-volatile-stock-market/](https://www.marketplace.org/2020/03/31/the-sounds-of-a-volatile-stock-market/) (Links to an external site.)

So: don't be afraid to think creatively!
OPTIONS

The following are the options you may choose from: if you can come up with something else that's not listed here, please let me know! With all these options, I will do my best to provide or direct you toward additional resources and support. Do realize, however, that the folks at OIT have a lot of extra work this spring and may not be able to provide the kind of support they typically do. They're working incredibly hard, so please be patient and generous.

For all projects, you'll need to provide a 300-600 word (1-2 pages) description of what your aims were in your project.

1. Video project -- using any video platform available to you, including Adobe Professional Premiere (you will need to download it). Aim to create a video of about 3-5 minutes.

2. Audio project, including a podcast -- honestly, I don't know anything about making podcasts or doing audio projects, but I bet some of you do! I will try to get up to speed as quickly as I can. If you want to go this route and have some idea of how to do it, I strongly encourage you to do it!

3. Visual project -- use any visual media you'd like to explore your topic. For instance, you could do a "photographic" essay that focuses on petroleum in your life; or do paintings or drawings that look at that question.

4. Written project -- document your topic in any written form you'd like. You may, of course, decide simply to write an essay on a topic, but please don't feel constrained by the typical structure of a college essay. For instance, you could also write a more personal essay, a short story, or even a series of poems (or an epic poem!). Those of you who choose the written project, I'll work with you to determine how many pages of writing you should aim for.

Finally, if you can imagine other kinds of options (perhaps a blog or a website?), please propose it, and we'll see if we can figure it out.

FINAL PRODUCTS

I will set up a gallery that will allow you all to see each other's work in the end! Whatever you're doing, then, think a bit about your audience of classmates (and me).