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: in our last six weeks, we will aim to do the following:

- continue to get acquainted with different scholarly approaches to and modes of analyzing “landscapes,” especially historically;
• continue to explore how the presence of “nuclearity” in the Cold War years affected built and “natural” landscapes;
• think comparatively about the multiple effects of the Cold War on the built and natural environment;
• use this material to think about how a heightened sense of “emergency” changes the way we think about the spaces around us and the places where people reside;
• reflect meaningfully on the material of the course both in short writing assignments and as part of our collective efforts as a class.
• give you the chance to explore your research interests in these kinds of questions at whatever level is possible, given our new circumstances

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 Tuesday at 12:00 PM.

**You may subtract a response for each non-required RP you did before you all left campus.** For instance, if you wrote an RP on Plutopia, you may choose any week in which to not write a response over the next 6 weeks.

2. I'll offer two discussions each week via either Zoom or Google Hangouts (we'll figure out which works best). These discussions may last as long as 60 minutes each. One will start at 1:30 on Wednesday afternoons. I’d like to offer the other on Wednesday mornings at 10:00 if enough of you can do it; we will have to see. There will be a sign-up sheet available each week. Sign up for either, though each discussion will hold a maximum of 6 students. Please note that I'll assess the format of these as we go along and may need to change how we do them; I may need to change the format as early as our first week!

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 afternoon at 5:00 PM 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.

FINAL RESEARCH PROJECT: you will have a choice when it comes to your research project. You may either a) write an 8-10 page paper (or longer, if you choose) that is simply a downsized version of what you'd originally planned; or b) an 8-10 page paper that gives an historiographic assessment of your topic, exploring what seem to be the most promising directions for future research. This paper will be due on Saturday, May 23, by 5:00 PM.
VIRTUAL OFFICE HOURS: my designated virtual office hours for our class will be Thursday afternoons from 1-3:00. 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](#)

**Wednesday, April 8**

**Plutopia**

**Response for this week only** may be turned in by Wednesday at 10:00 AM. Future responses should be turned in by Tuesday at 12:00 noon.

**Wednesday, April 15**

1. For context (visual and historical), take a look at either "The Berlin Wall in Pictures, 1961-1989" here [Berlin Wall in Pictures, 1961-1989](#), or watch the brief video, "History Brief: The Berlin Wall Explained" -- or look at both!

2. Peter Schneider, *The Wall Jumper*
Wednesday, April 22

**This week may present particular trouble if your internet access is limited or intermittent. If that's the case, please let me know, and we'll come up with other options.**

1. "Wings of Desire" (2 hours, 7 minutes long)
   
   https://glow.williams.edu/courses/2648034/external_tools/360731

2. Spend some time looking at and analyzing Berlin's website on the Berlin Wall, here: https://www.visitberlin.de/en/berlin-wall (Links to an external site.)

   You'll find there's much to look at and much to think about in terms of how the history of the Wall is represented on this site. How does the website articulate and frame the Berlin Wall as a **tourist site**?

Wednesday, April 29

1. Kate Brown, "Dispatches from Dystopia," Brown Dispatches from Dystopia.pdf

2. Further material TBA

Wednesday, May 6

You help design this week's reading! My thought is to find mostly primary sources for this week.

To get you started, here are a couple ideas:

- Cartographies of disaster -- we might think, for instance of the different ways that the Cold War appeared on maps and think about how the Coronavirus has been mapped;

- Cultures of emergency -- we might think about how the repeated nuclear crises of the Cold War were portrayed / talked about, and the parallels / disjunctures with the pandemic we're in.

- Other ideas that have absolutely nothing to do with the pandemic?!

Wednesday, May 13

Wrap-up -- talk about class and drafts of your final paper.

**If you can't make one of the video discussions on Wednesday this week, please send me an email in which you write about anything you'd like related to the class (a kind of end-of-the-semester thought-piece).**
Schedule for Final Paper

_All deadlines are 5:00 PM, in whatever time zone you find yourself._

**Monday, April 13:** please email me with a one-paragraph description of your final project -- in particular, letting me know if you're going to do it as a research paper or as a "directions-for-future-research" paper.

**Monday, April 27:** submit two pages of draft-writing from any part of your paper. I'll put you in pairs or groups of three to exchange feedback (over email or other forms of communication) about your writing.

**Monday, May 11:** submit paper drafts (as much as you can write). You'll again exchange feedback with your peers this week.

**Due Saturday, May 23, by 5:00 PM: your final paper.**