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Course Development Assignment #1

COMMUNITY BUILDING PLAN

Start of the semester activities
- Orientation module with plenty of time set aside for introductions during synchronous sessions, introduction forum on the course website, sharing interests and motivations, hopes and goals for the course
- Online agenda setting forum: invite students to share ideas about what content/activities might be added to the course, and what questions they would want us to address as a team in different sessions
- Set up thematic interest groups and allow students to join groups as the basis for future collaborations: encourage students to specialize in questions that they are particularly keen on exploring and then be able to rely on these groups as a resource for the entire course community during class discussions – the modules of the course can serve as the basis for determining the thematic interest groups; for each module, the group who has expressed interest can then lead class discussion with me when relevant sessions come up
- Set up a news sharing forum so students and I can read and comment on the latest news together, and think about how we can use course material to develop a more nuanced, sophisticated take on what is happening in the present; use comments and news stories as ice breakers for each class

During the semester
- Encourage students to show up a bit early and stay a bit after our Zoom session
- Play music or relevant videos
- Allow students to submit music and video suggestions for a course playlist (I really liked that idea – thank you for suggesting, facilitators!)
- Get students to put together an "underground" syllabus that they design themselves for the future iteration of the course – this can include all sorts of materials from academic articles and books (an alternative bibliography) to artwork/poems/movies/memes/documentaries/ podcasts etc.
- Have a one-on-one mid-semester check-in after the first few weeks of class to see how everyone is doing
- Highlight any relevant online events (conferences, webinars, live performances) that might be happening in the Amherst community and outside, and encourage groups of students to attend and share their experiences with the rest of the class
- Team work in group assignments; give students the space to assume ownership over the material we cover and discuss; incorporate peer feedback and workshopping exercises
- Have students post questions and comments about the materials assigned for each week before the synchronous session, and have them engage with each other's ideas in preparation for our weekly meetings

- Organize a guest speaker series in which students have the chance to chat informally with experts/authors on the topics we cover; debrief as a team after each of these events to gather impressions and extract takeaways

All these are strategies resilient to changes in teaching modality. They work for an on-campus course, and they transition well to remote/hyflex learning.

These strategies open up opportunities for students to learn how to make the most of the time we spend together and reflect on how to maximize the fruitfulness of our course experience with their own goals and priorities in mind. I want students to pursue the course and work on developing knowledge and communication skills in ways that they feel comfortable and in ways that benefit them in the long run (professionally and personally). Students should feel like their voices and interests matter to me and to our learning community, that we are all in the same boat, trying to use the social sciences' toolbox to navigate uncertain seas and make sense of the current situation and contemporary politics. While I cannot fully personalize their course experience, I can make space for them to be present, engaged, independent, and creative, and allow that energy to sustain our work together. I want them to know that I am the first person who wants each and every one of them to succeed, to do well in this course, and find uses for what they learn in my class for the rest of their academic experience and their future career. I hope to get them to see how they are resources for one another, and want them to think ambitiously about what they can achieve, individually and as a group. I want them to aim high and use this course towards that goal. I want to learn from them and I want us to learn from each other as a community. Students can come out of a course feeling empowered, feeling like they are not only consumers of knowledge, but they can also become producers of knowledge, that they communicate ideas in various formats and engage with different parts of the polity and society to make a difference.