

OLTC Report: RELG3311 — Religions of Japan

Preface

From July 26th to August 6th, students from Acadia, Bishop's, Mount Allison, and St. Francis Xavier completed two weeks of intensive training for the Online Learning and Technology Consultant (OLTC) Program. These students were provided with foundational training in pedagogy and edu-technologies in order to work with course instructors as co-designers for 2021-22 courses. As part of their training for this work, they were grouped into Student Working Groups (SWG) and worked with a Faculty Mentor (FM) to test their new knowledge and skills when collaborating in a Student-as-Partners model. At the end of the orientation, they shared what they created with their FM, other faculty members, all the OLTCs, and other community members; they also produced written reports that are a testament to the phenomenal work they created during their orientation and how the OLTC Program can help your in-person, online, hybrid, or hyflex courses, if you choose to [join us on this innovative and learner-centered journey](#).

Below you find the report from Shannon Goguen and Emma Yee from Mount Allison University who worked with Dr. Susie Andrews. I thank Shannon and Emma for sharing their work as OLTCs and Dr. Andrews for allowing us a glimpse behind the curtain of her course.

~ Matthew Dunleavy, Program Director, OLTC Program

Intro

Partnering with Emma and Shannon to recreate “Religions of Japan” as an online course was an energizing and deeply satisfying experience. From the redesign of our Moodle page and syllabus to the inclusion of an online, interactive map and a tech-guide to support my students and me, Emma and Shannon have helped design a radically welcoming and easy to navigate to online course. As my students and I collaborate in bringing Heian Japan to life this academic year, we will benefit from Emma and Shannon's creativity, their knowledge of edu-technologies, and their commitment to constructing courses in which all learners can succeed. I am grateful to have had this opportunity to participate in the OLTC program, which far exceeded my high expectations.

~ Susie Andrews, Department of Religious Studies, Mount Allison University

Report

Upon our first meeting with Dr. Andrews, she made it clear that her general focuses were making students feel engaged with the material and organizing the course in a way that will be clear. We wanted to make sure the Moodle page and syllabus reflected those needs. Dr. Andrews is a very inclusive and friendly professor so we wanted her Moodle page to reflect that by making the students feel welcomed as soon as they clicked on her course. One of the key ways we assisted was by facilitating organization on her page. We wanted the student to feel supported and immediately engaged with material while also getting a snapshot of the course story.

Additionally, this course was unique in its delivery: in addition to being completely online, the course is built around blog-based assessments, with students creating blogs based on characters

and interacting with each other. We wanted to make sure that this assessment was clear while allowing for collaboration and creativity.

Landing Page

The landing page is the first thing that students see when they enter a course, so we made sure it was inviting, organized, and gives students a sense of what the rest of the course will look like.

A large welcome banner, requested by Dr. Andrews, greets students as they enter, before moving directly into important information for the course, like the syllabus.

During our Orientation, we were introduced to the work in culturally responsive

pedagogies through the Teaching and Learning Centre at St. Francis Xavier University. In engaging with culturally aware and responsible learning, we suggested adding a land acknowledgment clearly at the top of the page, to recognize that we live and learn on unceded territory. A barrier we ran into with this idea was the fact that, as an online delivery course, many students will be attending this course remotely, and not be located at Mount Allison. Therefore, we also included a link that directs students to information on land acknowledgements wherever they are, not just in Sackville.

A suggestion that we had that Dr. Andrews was very enthusiastic about was an introductions forum in order to create a class community and start informal discussion. We placed this on the landing page on the Moodle page in order to stress the importance of these values in this course. The forum creates a space where students can get to know their peers as well as Dr. Andrews. We also encouraged this by leaving some sample information students can provide, such as pronouns, year of study, major/minor, etc.

We also utilized Moodle blocks on the right side of the page to highlight important information and resources for students. The first of these was the contact block for Dr. Andrews, showing office hours and email. We will soon be adding a profile picture for Dr. Andrews to add the feeling of a real person behind the screen. Additionally, we placed a block for student support resources, such as writing resources, accessibility sources, research help, and first-generation student support, so that students clearly know the supports that are available to them.

Overall progress % 3

WELCOME TO RELG3311

Land Acknowledgment

I would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather to learn is the traditional unceded territory of the Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) and Mi'kmaq Peoples. This territory is covered by the "Treaties of Peace and Friendship" which Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) and Mi'kmaq Peoples first signed with the British Crown in 1725. The treaties did not deal with surrender of lands and resources but in fact recognized Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) title and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations.

If you are not in Sackville right now, take a look at the Indigenous territories of the land you are currently on using this link.

- Announcements
- Syllabus DRAFT
- Syllabus OLTC edit
- Office Hours
- Welcome! Introductions
- GRADING RUBRIC: September 18, 2019 BEFORE MIDNIGHT

Contact
email: sandrews@mta.ca
Office Hours: Wednesday 1pm-3pm in Hart Hall 114 and by appointment

Calendar
August 2021

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

- Hide site events
- Hide category events
- Hide category events
- Hide course events
- Hide group events
- Hide user events

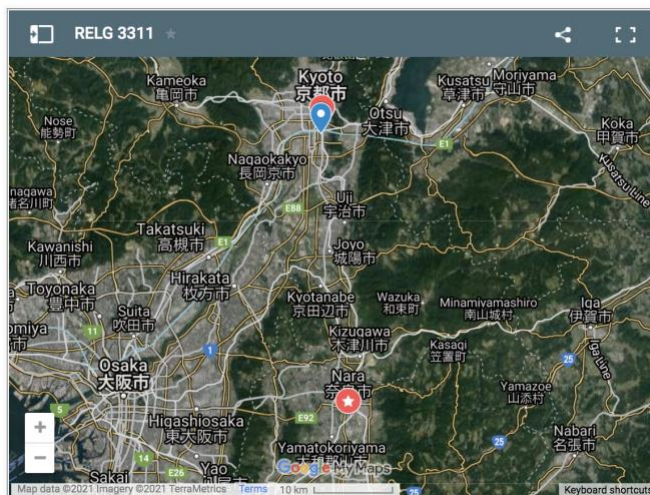
Student Support Services

In addition to reaching out to me via email and in person, please consider connecting with other Mount Allison University support services include the following:

- The Writing Resource Centre
- The Meighen Centre
- The Student Success Course
- The Firstgen Den for first-generation students and faculty mentorship program
- Research Help, Mount Allison University Library

Bringing in New Technology

In our preliminary meeting with Dr. Andrews, we asked what a dream concept for her course would be. She mentioned having the idea of an interactive map to show social organization and patterns as well as providing an optional participation bonus for students. A map is a great visual tool, and interactivity and collaboration can only aid this. She brought up a couple of ideas that she had, such as sending paper maps to students for them to be able to use separately or bringing up a software called Tableau. Neither Dr. Andrews or we were familiar with Tableau, and after some research, deemed this an interesting software, but one that was fairly inaccessible to students, as it would require downloading an additional program. Additionally, we wanted to use a technology that would be straightforward and easy to access from the Moodle page, since there was already so much technology integration in this course, and we didn't want anything to overwhelm students. Our solution was to use Google My Maps, as this tool can make, edit, and share maps. Students and/or professors can add destination markers with different colours, symbols, descriptions, and photos. Additionally, this map was easily embedded into the Moodle page itself, so that it will be a clear visual and way to edit for students. Knowing this technology may be new to students, we also included a simple guide so all students can fully engage with the course.



Syllabus

During our Orientation, we were introduced to learner-centered syllabi (Palmer, Bach, & Streifer, 2014). We completed a syllabus audit on Dr. Andrews's syllabus and it was already learner-centered, so we just made minor organizational suggestions. We wanted to organize material in a way that is inviting and helps communicate Dr. Andrews' course story. Another goal was to eliminate extraneous elements by limiting any superfluous elements and marrying the content together. By creating charts, it helped indicate expectations and follow a structural layout with a simpler appearance.

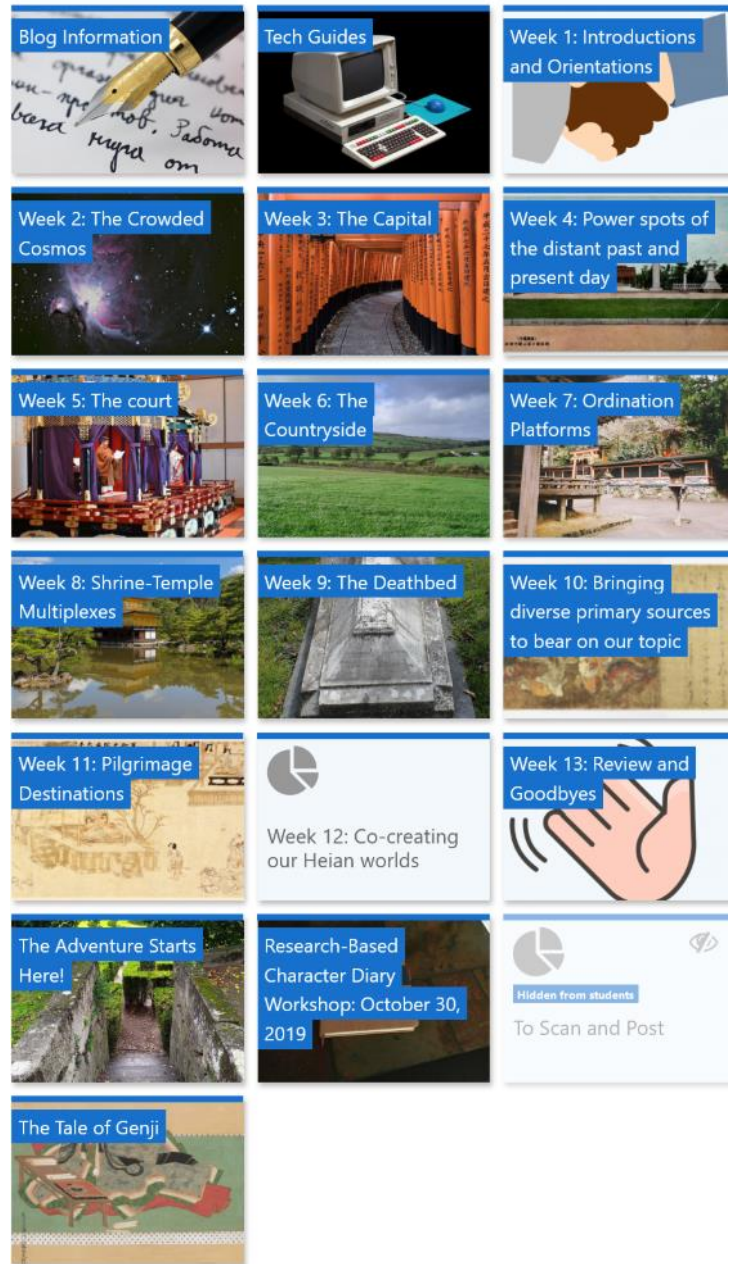
Course Content on Moodle

As mentioned previously, our main aim with this course was to overhaul the overall organization to help students more easily navigate the course. Our first suggestion was to change the Moodle configuration to a “Tile” format. This was to provide course material with a “home” while, simultaneously, reducing the need for scrolling to access material. Under the “Topics” format each category was under a subheading and needed to be accessed by scrolling down to find more content. As this course utilizes lots of primary source material and readings, it was vital to organize in a way that would be more accessible for students. If that wasn’t enough, tiles can be a way to make students more engaged with the material with the inclusion of photos.

The primary assessment and interaction in the course are based around blog posts and comments. We made sure that all of the blogging information was easily accessible in a tile right at the top: “Blog Information.”

Something that was apparent throughout working with this course is the focus on technology, and this could definitely be something overwhelming to both professors and students. We created a “Tech Guide” tile—next to the “Blog Information” tile—to ensure all students had easy access to the tools they needed to be successful in the course. This is especially useful for some students that may not have as much technological knowledge and require some assistance in navigating tools. We used a mix of written and video tech guides for different learning styles and added descriptions in order to link each tech guide with the assessments they would be useful for.

Another suggestion we had was using the Moodle activity tracking feature. Due to the number of readings for this course, this helps students to stay on top of material, as well as give students a sense of gratification and accomplishment when completing tasks and assignments. When we suggested this, we were affirmed by Dr. Andrews mentioning this was something she thought would greatly assist student success.



Reflection journals were included in the syllabus, and we highlighted that part of the course directly on Moodle. At first, we used the "journal" activity where students typed into an online text box, but we changed that after the second meeting with Dr. Andrews. She wanted to have the flexibility to allow students to use a different processor or write out their journals on paper, so we changed the reflection journals to an "assignment" activity to allow for uploads or typing directly into Moodle.

A large portion of our organization was in the "choose your own adventure" readings. There was a lot of source material on different subheadings, and when we converted the page to tiles, there were a lot of tiles that we had to merge. We did this by using a mix of pages for online sources, folders for pdfs, and labels to help to create a sense of organization and clarity for different topic readings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, after listening to Dr. Andrews' needs during our initial meeting, we feel that we were able to achieve her desired goals and, after our recommendation meeting, were able to offer our own suggestions to create a very organized and engaging course Moodle page. Dr. Andrews was very open to suggestions for her course and embraces the Student-as-Partners model of the OLTC Program with warmth and encouragement. This course is blog based and very interactive, we wanted the Moodle page to reflect that, especially by adding some new technology. With the elements we added to the Moodle page we feel that it helped contribute to a feeling of engagement with hopes that students will feel excited about the journey they are about to embark on in RELG3311!