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How a Free Online Class Saved a Program in Crisis

and Raised New Questions about how Instructors Teach

September 10, 2018|1:00 PM - 2:00 PM Eastern

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Welcome, everyone, to today's E.L.I. webinar, "How a Free Online Class Saved a Program in Crisis and Raised New Questions About How Instructors Teach." This is Malcolm Brown, director of learning initiatives here at EDUCAUSE, and I'll be your moderator for today. We'd like to thank SurveyMonkey for their sponsorship of the 2018 E.L.I. webinars. SurveyMonkey powers curiosity and makes sophisticated research simple for everyone across campus. For today, EDUCAUSE is pleased to welcome as speakers from Kansas State University, instructor Ryan Klataske and associate professor of Cultural Anthropology Michael Wesch. Before we begin, let me first give you a brief orientation to our session's learning environment. This online room, as you can see, is subdivided into several windows. Our presenters’ slides are showing in the presentation window, the largest window on the screen. The open chat area is for all of us. Feel free to use this chat space to submit comments, share resources, or to post questions to our presenters. We'll hold Q&A until the end of the presentation, where we encourage you to type your questions into the chat throughout the webinar. We'll be gathering them up and presenting them to Michael and Ryan at the end, when it comes time to do the Q&A session. Also, if you have any audio issues or other technical questions at any time, you can direct a private message to technical help for support. Click the top right corner of the chat window to open the drop-down menu, then select "start chat with," and then select "hosts." You can also click on the link in the lower left-hand corner of the screen for quick, technical trouble-shooting steps. Now on to the team of today's webinar. We are all too familiar with the challenges and in some cases even existential challenges that higher education faces today. Today's webinar will tell the story of how such challenges descended upon a department at a public institution and how a pair of faculty members responded to those challenges. In 2016, a perfect storm of budget cuts, faculty exits, and dwindling enrollments placed the anthropology program at Kansas State University in a precarious position. The question that faced our two presenters was, would it be possible to turn a crisis into an opportunity to rethink and reimagine their anthropology course? So, we're delighted to welcome back to the E.L.I. webinars professor Michael Wesch and to welcome his colleague, Dr. Ryan Klataske, for his first tour of duty on our E.L.I. webinar. Called "the profit of education revolution" by the "Kansas City Star," Michael is a leader in teaching innovation. "The New York Times" listed him as one of the ten professors in the nations whose courses, quote, messed with the old models and gives students an experience that might change how they think, of what they care about, or even how they live their lives. Michael's videos have been viewed over 20 million times, translated into over 20 languages, and are frequently featured at international festivals and major academic conferences worldwide. Michael has won several major awards for his work, including the U.S. Professor of the Year Award from the Carnegie Foundation. The Wired Magazine Rave Award, and he was named an Emerging Explorer by "National Geographic." Ryan's recent dissertation research focuses on wildlife management partnerships in Namibia. In addition to southern Africa, he's also traveled through eastern Canada and western Europe, working on farms in Canada, Belgium, and France. For the past decade, Ryan has also worked for a nonprofit organization focused on the stewardship and conservation of land, wildlife, and other natural resources in Kansas and the Great Plains. An avid photographer, several photos have won awards and recognition. Ryan lives in Manhattan, where he enjoys working and spending time on his family ranchland in the Flint Hills. So, gentlemen, welcome to the webinar. Please begin.

>> All right, thank you.

>> Thank you very much.

>> I'm Mike.

>> And I'm Ryan.

>> Just so you know our voices. We're going to go ahead and get started. Now, we are just reminiscing as we were getting started that this room that you see here is a room that Ryan and I were both familiar with back in 2004, when I started teaching, and actually Ryan was in the room back then as a T.A., is that right? You were a senior at the time?

>> Senior. I was, I think, one of your very first TAs.

>> Absolutely, actually my first TA I met. So he came in over the summer and helped me get grounded in what K-State students were like. We were E are -- reflecting what it was like in 2004, and this was a time when there was no WiFi in the room, there was no YouTube, Netflix, or other high-quality digital content. There were very few laptops in the room, fewer cell phones, and, in fact, no smartphones and the only technology in the room was represented by the glowing dot at the top, which I had total control over. So I was kind of interesting in the room, there was no real distractions around. Maybe flash forward to 2007, and I started to notice some things. The biggest thing was there was literally something in the air, and that was WiFi, and students were starting to get online and do other things while I was lecturing, so I made a video about that back in 2007. It's called "A Vision of students today." Students weren't into readings, buying hundred-dollar textbooks they ever opened, only 17% of teachers knew their name. These were some of the things they recognized back then. Fast forward in 2014, our room looks a lot better, but there's other issues, and those issues are, there are now extremely seductive distractions all around them. We see higher absenteeism, more mental health issues, alternative facts, ideological pluralism in the classroom, filter bubbles, and also dealing with economic insecurity and rising costs and shrinking budgets. We just wanted to pause here and maybe ask you guys, first off, do you feel the same pressures? Like, do you struggle with these same problems? We're seeing a lot of agreement here. 100% so far. Okay. So, just to get a sense of what people are doing and who's listening, can we just get a sense of what kind of classes people are teaching? So, if you teach large in-person classes or small in-person classes, or you teach online, and go ahead and check all that applies, so we just get a sense of what's going on. So very few. Nobody's teaching the big in-person class -- oh, there's one, but lots of people in small in-person classes. How about this one, one of the things that Ryan and I have been thinking a lot about lately is just how much things have changed, even in the last five years. And so this is a very tight time frame, but we get the sense that the challenges of teaching are quite a bit different than they were just five years ago, and we're curious if people agree with that or disagree. We're seeing a majority agree again. And then just to kind of explore what the reasons might be, let's say -- fill in the following sentence, teaching is different than it was five years ago, because -- is it because students have changed? Is it because the media environment has changed? Is it because the political environment has changed? Or is there something else? And you can write it in the chat room and Malcolm or somebody can maybe gather up some answers for when we start our discussion later. Yeah, it's interesting. So, we're going to talk about all of these in different ways. We're going to start by focusing on the media environment and students and how things have changed in that domain, and talk about, like, our response to that through anth101.com, but I think we both kind of got blind sided a little bit by the changes in the political environment and how that changed what we were teaching, as well. And we started to get some discussion and pushback and things that we wanted to address and we're going to come back to that, as well. So -- so, I guess one last question, do you feel that there's material available for free online that could cover the content of your course better than you can? And this has to do with the changing media environment. I think it's something that Ryan and I realized is like, wow, there's some really good stuff that covers things that we talk about better than we do. And it was a little -- it's like, kind of amazing, but also intimidating. Your lecture isn't as good as what you can get for free online.

>> Or the amount of time to create content that equals what we can find online.

>> Right, yeah. Especially if you're teaching online, you know, does it make sense to recreate content, or do you borrow content? So this is something that struck us as, you know, something to deal with, and we wanted to think about how to either deal with it or leverage it or something. So, all right, so what happened, basically, we saw these changes, this flurry of changes as coming together into a crises. One is the crisis of funding, which we feel very strongly here at K-State, where we've seen declining enrollments and declining state funding, so they've we've had a 5% cut every year for several years now, and that just leads to all sorts of problems for us. There's also a crisis of trust. Again, I think we feel that maybe a little more sharply here, because this tends to be stronger on the right, politically, than the left, and here in a red state we definitely experience kind of this crisis of trust of higher ed in the general public. There's also a crisis of significance, where students are looking for more pragmatic options and they don't really understand why they are in an anthropology class all the time. So, overall, this kind of creates this perfect storm, where a lot of people are losing faith in the institution itself, and meanwhile, they are also engaging online with all these new media, which are free, high quality, on demand, socially relevant, and personalized, and they represent potentially the promise of a cheaper and better alternative, and that just sort of loosens that trust even more. Like, why can higher ed not provide the same kind of amazing experience they can have online. It used to be said you could just get an education with a library card. Now, of course, you can just get online and get an education. So that leads to several new realities for us. One, there's more disengagement in the classroom. There's falling attendance, fewer majors, the budget callbacks, and more than anything, is an environment at the University, where numbers matter and numbers mean money. And so we're actually right now in the transition to, you know, resource-centered management, where things are actually counted, you know. So, essentially, SCHs are counted and at the same time we're sort of being audited to make sure we're providing certain SLOs, so suddenly it's not me and the students, it's a numbers game of having the right SCHs and having the right SLOs. And oftentimes, you know, we end up way out here with SLOs that are very measurable, but not very meaningful. Just to give you some sense of what this would look like, there's a really interesting article that came out in 2011 that did a great job of explaining kind of what anthropology is today, and it defined anthropology in this way, that it's holistic, it includes, like, a critical estrangement, where you map processes by which social realities are realized, you're always paying attention to context, which is always theoretical, you practice grounded theory and you try to be empathetic and reflexive. These are great ways of thinking about the world and being in the world, so if we are to create SLOs along those lines, multiple dimensions, connections, and casualties, think beyond appearances while attempting to transcend biases and assumptions. Understand how we co-construct the world, see the world as a big picture, as well as small, identify and apply and shift perspectives and sit in the immersive ambiguity and urn certainty of a messy problem for an unknowable length of time, while slowly giving birth to a meager little insight. Imagine their way into another's perspective, and understand themselves as culturally and temporally bounded entities mired in cultural biases and taken, and that's the trick, right, those are all really meaningful, but they are really hard to measure, especially if your one professor in front of 450 people in a Gen Ed class, and that kind of became the challenge for us, how do we get those big SLOs into something, into an entry-level class? So, I started restricting my class, I have this notebook where everything was up for grabs. I sort of rewrote the whole thing. This started a few years ago, and what I realized was there were these 16 topics that are always in anthropology textbooks, and, of course, there's 16, because there's 16 weeks in the semester, and I tried to break those down into kind of what you might call the ethos of anthropology, which is like what we're really trying to teach. We want them to ask new big questions. We want them to see your seeing and see big, see small. We want them to try new things. We want them to become masters of words and to understand how humans relate to tools and the environment. We want them to understand the realization of reality, the sort of social construction of reality. We want them to be empathetic, global citizens, reflect on their values and beliefs, and understand that we make the world. So, in the process of that discovery, then Ryan and I also created these ten challenges where you practice these things, so talking to strangers, and we'll go through some of these. For now, it's enough just to say we basically created an assignment and assessment for each one of these ten big ideas that we came up with. And that also then engendered the creation of a whole new textbook, which is free on anth101.com/book. This is really important to us to lower costs and kind of help students with their own budget woes. And so by 2016 things were going really well. This is me walking across campus with a couple star students, who received big scholarships and K-State was taking photos of us for their new promotion, and they started putting us up on stage, me and the two students, to lead their "Innovation & Inspiration" campaign. It's a $1.4 billion campaign to build new buildings like this beautiful College of Business, College of Engineering. Meanwhile, anthropology had water fountains like this, internet speed like this, and our faculty was disappearing at the same time, and the lines were not being replaced. At this time, as good as things were, there just wasn't any money to replace lines, and they told us we should teach online to increase enrollment and pay for lost lines. At the same time Ryan had finished or was just finishing up his dissertation and was entering the job field, and we grabbed him. He was teaching online for us, and he's going to share some of his experiences with that.

>> And it was at this pivotal moment in 2013 that I started teaching online, and the online class, the first online class in Cultural Anthropology at K-State started small compared to where it is now, but we quickly realized that I was teaching a class not just for traditional 18 to 21-year-old college students, but for students of all ages and walks of life. And we had students that were returning to school after many years. We had military veterans and military personnel living overseas, and working professionals, and stay-at-home moms, and a cab driver in Cincinnati, and a night shift nurse in New York City, and a rancher in southeast Kansas. And we had all these different people of all different ages. And this really challenged me to think about this online class as anthropology for everyone, and to think about ways that we could teach anthropology and curate knowledge and information for a wide range of different people. We also started to think about how we could not only teach about the world but get students to learn in the world. And so we developed these challenges that would get students to practice anthropology in real-life situations. So one of the first challenges is to get students to talk to strangers, which is a basic fundamental aspect of anthropology, but something that's actually very difficult for many students. So we send students out in their very first challenge to talk to someone and to get into a deep conversation, and to really build a connection with that person. So these pictures that you see here come from that experiment of talking to strangers. One of the next challenges pushes students to see the familiar -- or to see the strange and the familiar, or to see the normal, and to really see our own culture and our own way of life from an outsider's perspective. So this is a picture, a snapshot, from a video created by this student, Donnell, who went to his motorcycle club and viewed it as if he was an anthropologist from another planet coming to understand his motorcycle club. And in the process, we begin to learn about community and the sense of place and a feeling of family that comes from these clubs for military veterans like himself. One of our other wonderful challenges, in my opinion, is the 28-day challenge, which pushes students to explore the power of routine and habit in our everyday lives. And so we encourage students, we ask students, to try something new for 28 days. And this picture, which you see here, comes from one of my favorite examples of this challenge, where a student created new, beautiful art every single day for 28 days and posted it online for everyone to see. And as we'll discuss later, students have tried all kinds of things. And so all of this really pushed us to think about this online class as online learning for offline living, to really merge the online education with live offline and not on their computers.

>> Right. And so if you go to anth101.com, we're going to show a few screenshots right now, anthropology for everyone, the world as a classroom, and then living it to learn it. And we're going to kind of come back to the anthropology for everyone in our last section today, but really we want to emphasize how wonderful it's been to think about the world as a classroom, and this is affected the in-person class, as well. So, one of the things that has happened is, you know, when you think about what it's like to lecture out in the world, there's no reason when you teach online just to record your lecture and put it up online. You can do so much more, and so in the process of that, I had to, you know, learn how to fly and dress and run at the same time, because I wanted to give this lecture how humans can run great distances and kind of the story of being human wrapped up, and I had to, like, experiment with where I could put lecture notes out in the world, so I tried a few different ideas. Then we started to realize our T.A.s don't have to have a room, they can go out in the world, so you see a student's little kit. They are getting ready to go to Zambia. This is Garrett Wilkinson, and we ended up sending 14 students in the last two years all over the world, and they actually teach from these places in the world. They upload their own challenges, they encourage students with challenges, and they get engaged in discussions and students can explore the world through their travels. And so, you know, it's just been a great thing, not only to get students out, but also to connect with the students who are back here. So, we've used Instagram for this and we used this one for the T.A.s traveling is #anth101adventures, and you can just look at that tag on Instagram or at anth101.com we have different pages that actually bring in the feeds of these different hash tags. The main hash tag is #anth101, and if you look that up on Instagram, you'll see several thousand --

>> 6,000.

>> 6,000 or so posts, and those are just from students who have taken the class or even people who aren't in the class who just thought the challenges were cool and wanted to take one of the challenges themselves. So, that's the world as classroom. And then moving on to sort of this idea of living it to learn it, you know, we went over this earlier, these typical topics and sort of this ethos of anthropology that emerges out of that, and we created these challenges specifically to address those sort of big ways of thinking like an anthropologist, so as mentioned earlier, lesson one is, people are different, and the first challenge is, go talk to strangers. These are just a few of the Instagram posts of people going out to talk to strangers. This is all based on "Humans of New York," and some of these are quite beautiful. We can also use a repost app on Instagram, and then we just can repost things but say #anth101 best of challenge one and showcase the ones we think are the very best, and they'll serve as examples to other students and also kind of a neat little window into human life. And so it's been really cool to see, you know, students go out and meet people in their community and showcase them and write these great little stories. Lesson three is being human and sort of the art of being human, which is all about asking questions, making connections, and trying new things. So that's where we have the 28-day challenge, so students do all kinds of things for that and have to do it for 28 days with the effort of trying to build a new habit or break an old habit. This is kind of reflecting on our evolutionary history and gives them a chance to review some of the material we talk about in the evolution part. Ryan and I actually decided for 28 days we were going to pick up instruments. He tried the banjo, I tried the violin, and then we actually performed live in front of the in-person class with a bunch of other students as part of the 28-day band. Lesson eight is all about globalization, so challenge eight is to find someone in a foreign country who made something you own. Also, I think really useful for students to try, so, for example, the lecture for this one is, I have this suit that's made in Vietnam, and one of the old T.A.s from the first time we taught online is Ben, who then moved to Vietnam, so I just took my whole family and went to see Ben in Vietnam and we went and found a guy who made suits like the one that I had, and bought a suit from him, and he took me out to the place to meet some of the people actually making the suit and were able to put together a mini documentary for the students. And the students do a really good job, as well. So if you look up #anth101 best of challenge 8, many students succeeded in reaching out across the ocean to meet people who have made things that they own, which can be a really powerful experience. This is a student that got on Skype and talked to some students, actually people, about things they made.

>> I'll just say that we often hear from people outside of our class, wow, that sounds fantastic. I wish I could take your class. We say, well, actually, you can. You can do these challenges. Just check it out online and use the hash tag and you can join in, too.

>> Right. I think that was one of the biggest goals we had starting off, was we wanted to make every challenge so engaging and interesting that people would want to do them. And I don't know, I think we could do better than we have even, but we're getting there, and it's been really great. Just a real quick note on students, and we'll get to some of these questions. We, of course, have been surveying student and getting the teaching evaluations and what not. The students have loved the class so far. Really impressed with how much they loved the online class and how much they got out of it. I'm often just out, you know, around or I get an e-mail from somebody saying how much it changed their life, and we've even had a few students put together little videos where they piece together some of the challenges they did. This is one of them. This student is -- these are all stills from a video that you can see on anth101.com, if you click on highlights, but she says, talking to strangers is very difficult, because you have to make a connection, you have to have a conversation, you have to make a connection. And just immediately it opens your mind. You start to see the world as something to be interested in, not something to close yourself off from. Compounding these ten challenges into ten weeks is just super awakening. I didn't expect that to happen. I'm 27. I've been out in the world, but this 200-level anthropology class has given me tools to deal with things I either did not know I was still dealing with or have not dealt with completely or in a healthy fashion. So really fantastic results, I think, from the students. We've been really happy with that. And by the numbers, this is what happened in the last couple years. We increased our enrollment by 825 SCHs. That accounts for $378,000 increase in annual revenue. That was able to fund 14 study-away experiences for students. The student evaluations have been 4.7 to 4.9 on a 5.0 scale. We increased our majors by 10%. We were able to higher one and a half new lines with a piece of that money that we get back to our program, and we have fresh water and WiFi. Pretty great. So we wanted to stop here and address some of the questions that have come up now. Looking at some of these. Median age of those taking class. Online class, what would you say is the median age?

>> Shifting a bit.

>> Shifting downward recently.

>> Gotten bigger.

>> Right.

>> Yeah, so I would say -- I think when we started the median age was probably 30. Would it be that high?

>> I think that high, yeah.

>> And then now I think it's shifted down into the lower 20s, because we do have a lot of students who are kind of somewhat on campus, you know, they could be -- they probably could take it in-person, but they are working a lot and can't find the time to get to class, that kind of thing. It's definitely a different group than what you get in the in-person class. They tend to be working more often. What are some of the other things that you found?

>> I would say we still have many nontraditional students, working professionals, veterans who are returning home. Stay-at-home moms. We still have a number of nontraditional students that are busy throughout their days and can't come to campus.

>> Yep.

>> For various reasons.

>> So, Cindy wants to ask about grading. Hi, Cindy, nice to see you on here. Twitter friend. Cindy wants to know how student grades are -- in other words, how do you determine what they learn? What is the evidence they provide? Okay, so there's really two parts to that. One is, they submit their challenges on Instagram, and then there's usually like a reflection part of that, which sometimes takes place in a discussion online that's hidden from the rest of the world, so we try to divide the class kind of into a public space and a private space, and the public space the students know they are sort of performing in that space. They know that it could go viral, you know, they understand that that's a public document. And they have an option there, as well. I noticed somebody asked about FERPA. There's an option they can post on Instagram. There’re layers of options. They can choose to be pseudo-anonymous by using a fake Instagram account, or their regular Instagram account, in which they are not anonymous, and finally, they can just bypass Instagram altogether and just submit on canvas, which is our online system. Regardless, they post and then they also have a reflection piece, which is usually taking place in a discussion with the group, although sometimes we have like a special space for them to reflect.

>> But we often really try to prioritize choice and flexibility and to make the class accommodating for different preferences. So people can become as public as they want, or more anonymous if they choose.

>> Yeah. Yeah, so, okay, I'm going to -- another question real quick here is, what kind of barriers/pushback have you experienced in opening up what has traditionally been a paid credit course in this way? Well, I think when you went to explain it to -- I remember we had a meeting on campus and I think some of them are probably on this line right now, I think it was hard to kind of describe why we thought this could actually work and why it could still make money, but they bought in really fast and were very supportive right from the very beginning. And, I mean, maybe it helps we're a land-grant institution, so we have this kind of mission of wanting to spread knowledge as widely as possible and make it practical and pragmatic, so I feel we really fit into that land-grant institution mission in that way. And there's also a long-term plan here of lowering costs in whatever ways we can by providing free materials. So that -- I think that's been really good, and we've seen nothing but support. Would you agree?

>> Yeah, I would say the support we've received from the very beginning has been, I think, an essential component.

>> Definitely. We should actually say that our -- like, our global campus office, they've given us $60,000 at this point, so quite a bit of money to help out with -- to give us time in the summer to develop by paying us a salary, by allowing us to hire Tom Woodward, who helped a lot with the development of the site and helping with the programming of it, the coding. So those were great. And I think it's been, like, a great win for everybody, because, like, when they tell the story, they gave us $60,000, but then the University earned all this money because of this new class. I hope it's also, like, a model for other programs. We're starting to hear from other programs who want to kind of emulate what we've done, so that's been good. I see another question that I wanted to pick up on here. Yeah, so let's see here. How do we prepare students to go abroad? So, actually teach an upper-level class, it's really intense, only 15 students in it, and we usually draw our T.A.s from that class, so they have a whole semester where they learn how to make videos and how to do basics of field work and engage with people. And that's pretty much the foundation for that, although sometimes the students we pick don't go through that class, but for whatever reason have had experiences that we think have prepared them to do that job. It is a hard job that we asked them to do.

>> The other one -- let's see. All right, other faculty members in your department follow your footsteps? That's happening. Everybody's very busy, so it's hard to develop this kind of content, but there are some people in our program that are interested in developing their own sort of spin-offs of Anth 101 and they'll be woven in together, and I also saw some questions about other faculty. That's one of the things we like about this the most is we have this back end with about 38 faculty around the country on it. I guess around the world. There's a couple people outside the U.S., and we imagine that some day we hope that this will be a few hundred people teaching anthropology and having this back channel, where we can share ideas about what we're doing for the week, how we're, like, working on challenge one, how we can make it better. How we can provide more options for more students. You know, bringing a lot of people together just is a good idea.

>> Also creating and producing new and interesting content that we can add to the course.

>> Yeah, and that's one of the things we're most excited about is the course does bring in quite a bit of money, and in time we'd like to use some of that money to provide small grants to faculty in other institutions who have expertise that we don't have to create little modules and things we can plug back into the class. So we kind of see this as a, I don't know, like a connected course that lots of faculty in a way are contributing to and teaching together. That's the long-term goal. Yeah, and I want to answer this one last question from Tina, and then maybe we should move on to the next section we want to talk about. Tina asked how do you respond to the naysayers that say online classes and their content like anthropology can never be as good as face-to-face options? What do you think, Ryan?

>> Well, personally, I don't think I've really experienced that. I remember when Ryan was teaching online, I was one of the -- I think I was -- I wouldn't have said it to your face, but I was nay saying in my head, come on, can't be that good, but then he started showing me content and the things students were producing and you started to realize there's really something going on here. I think what you say to them is one thing, but I think if you can show them, that's a whole other thing. I think that's what really won me over, when Ryan started showing me some of the content that his students were producing and the types of discussion he was having and, honestly, just the teaching evaluations. The students aren't just writing, like, you know, giving a 5.0 and saying that was fun. They were writing, like, this is life-changing, this is, like, you know, doing this online actually was useful in these ways. You start to realize there were some real virtues to being online.

>> When you hear and see students changing their lives and telling you how much this online class has contributed to their education and goals, which they wouldn't have been able to accomplish without online education, that is really meaningful.

>> Definitely. Yeah. So one last question there from Nancy, what percentage of the students complete the course? It is about the same as the face-to-face class. For those who pay. So I should mention there's actually like two levels here of engagement. Some people, it's a free course in the sense that all the materials are online and you can sort of run yourself through the class. And we'll engage with you on YouTube and Facebook and that kind of thing, but there's a whole other level of the class, which is a paid class where you get credit, and those who paid for the class were probably at least a 90% success rate or finished rate. Which is pretty normal for a big gen ed class.

>> And in that big class we really prioritize and focus on building relationships and a sense of community, and connections among students and ourselves as teachers.

>> Yeah. We want to move on to the next section, which is something that really just caused this summer or maybe the last six months or so, and that's this anthropology for everyone. So we have this goal of really being able to speak to everyone about anthropology, and I think what started to strike us was after we had one go viral, and it was a video about racism in Kansas City, so this was produced with a student of mine, and we wanted to look at this line of segregation that you see in Kansas City, so this is me with my former student, who now actually works in Kansas City and works on race issues in Kansas City. So we walked around Kansas City and sort of showed where the dividing line is and talked about the history of how it came to be, and this was really good in a way, and we shared, you know, over 13,000 times, got over a million views. And you also see, though, on YouTube there's a bit of a split on, you know, likes and dislikes. I should say that basically everybody who dislikes a video has a very strong opinion about why they dislike it, and to be honest, it blindsided me and I feel like I'm naive that it blindsided me, because within the bubble of anthropology, structural racism is an important thing to teach about. It's real. And it's just essential to understanding racism in America today and how to move beyond racism today. So, that's, obviously, why we teach it. What struck me was, you know, these people were in the general public who -- well, there were two kind of types, I suppose. Some were, obviously, just ignorant and I felt bad because somehow my video didn't reach them. And I didn't quite put it in the right words or didn't explain it quite well enough that they understood structural racism, and the other one, the other category was a much smaller group of people. That actually had a really interesting, intelligent responses to structural racism. It was clear they understood structural racism but had reasons for pushing back against the idea that we should be teaching that on the front-end of discussion about racism. So that led me down a rabbit hole of studying, you know, alternatives to structural racism, as well as, like, more sort of right-wing intellectuals, so I read a lot of stuff from Thomas Seoul and other things and Ryan at the same time was kind of getting interested in where the right was coming from on these issues, and do you have anything to say about that?

>> I think that's where this started, and it kind of got us thinking about the moment of teaching politically and what it means for teaching anthropology sort of in the public space. So we came up with this, you know, this basic issues that we're dealing with, political polarization, filter bubbles, alternative facts, the creep of politicization, everything is political, how you eat, shop, your lifestyle, your education. Whole disciplines can become politicized and majors. I don't know if you call it the work of Jonathan Haidt, but he pointed out that some disciplines are 5-1 liberal to conservative or even more liberal to conservative, and in the meantime there's also a lot of high-quality digital videos, podcasts, et cetera, on all sides. So the extent our students are getting an education outside the classroom, that education can be very diverse and come from a lot of different political perspectives. So this is one example. A lot of our male students mostly, but some females as well listen to Joe Rogan as a podcast with 20 million downloads a month, 20 million views on YouTube every month, and to give you a sense of his top 20 here, you can see a lot of them are explicitly sort of on the right and interviews of people on the right. And actually, interesting and well done and, you know, so I guess we're trying to suggest there's actually a lot of good content out there that's actually speaking directly against some of the things we teach. So another space is Steven Crowder, all very popular people and they are hitting on these politicized topics in our field, social science, so things we teach about, things like privilege, institutional racism, gender differences, gender equality, number of genders, history and progress, like are we to see history and progress as real and a good thing, or something to be criticized? Economics and the virtues and vices of capitalism. And I think looking at our course, about 60% of our course is now in politicized space in one way or another. And that means we have to have some nuance about how we go about teaching it. We have to be aware of it. So I just want to present, like, three different ways of thinking about this space and how to teach in it, and this is going to be kind of a nerdy way to do it, I guess, but this is like -- I'm going to be using a model of discourse, so he has this idea everything that can be said is in this field of discourse, and within that field of discourse, you might have an orthodoxy emerge and people will hold on to that orthodoxy and try to, you know, sort of state the truth within this field of discourse, and everything outside of that is somehow not in line with the orthodoxy or wrong. Outside of that is the heterodoxy. That's where all the debate happens and everybody's arguing over, you know, this and that. And when you're teaching, one option would be to teach the orthodoxy, and because our discipline leans so far to the left, at least in the social sciences, there's a sense that orthodoxy is a little blue, this blue, and it's a little to the left, which is why I put a little blue dot towards the left. And that can actually make sense, because sometimes you're actually teaching about something, and you know a bunch of your students are kind of clustering over on the right, and you just want to open their mind to a different view and introduce them to some of the concepts in your field. And that can feel like you're drawing them to the left. Another option is to just let your students talk, and there you get a wide range of perspectives, left and right, and maybe you don't really state anything final about it. You just let them talk. But I also want to mention a third option, which is this model that was come up with, suggests the orthodoxy and heterodoxy is inside the field of discourse. There's also this thing called doxa, which is all the things taken for granted. They are not discussed or debated, because they are not even in your awareness, and I think one way to think about teaching, especially in anthropology, or in social sciences, is to think about sort of enlarging the world of the heterodoxy into the doxa, so that they actually see things they never saw before. Some of what they've taken, have taken for granted, is now up for discussion and up for debate. And in the meantime, maybe then they actually start to see a lot more nuance within the field of discourse. They see a wider range of perspectives, and they also are aware of more doxa. Like, I think one of the great things to teach is actually that you don't know everything, that, you know, be kind of humble in the midst of these really big questions. Because a lot of these politicized questions are really big questions, and that's why we disagree about them. So, I think we're kind of aligning now and we want to discuss this, because we'd love to hear from everybody else, too. I think we're sort of being humble in how we're approaching this, right, we're not really sure, but we do think a plurality of viewpoints is a feature, not a bug, of a healthy democracy, and we're kind of moving forward with these basic principles, one, we don't want to make any strawman arguments and I think looking back at our course in the past we had made some, because we weren't aware of sort of like the stronger arguments coming from other -- sometimes other disciplines, as well as other right-wing intellectuals, things like that. So we want to sort of stand up to the iron of different approaches and arguments. We want to embrace open debate and diverse perspectives, hoping that this will open up a new doxa for individuals that are trapped in filter bubbles. Everybody in a sense takes different things for granted and by opening up debate and diverse perspectives, we hope that that puts people inside maybe arguments they'd never heard before. We want to enhance the discussion with exploration of the doxa that we all share in common, these things that people maybe never considered and that expands the doxa for all and most students. And then we want to use disagreements to cultivate these five things, intellectual humility, growth mindset, critical thinking, empathy, and understanding. And we think the payoff for faculty is we also get intellectual humility, growth mindset, critical thinking, empathy, and understanding. So that's where we're at right now. And we've had -- maybe we're kind of -- we can get into some questions, but we also had like a little survey just to see where people are at here. So just a question, how politicized are topics in your field? I noticed somebody already said something about how maybe it's more politicized in some than others. So I see -- all right, almost everybody has at least a few topics that are political, and then the majority are in some or money. And then just curious who's in the audience. Politically, let's get a survey of people in the audience. Politically, I am, and let's just see where we all stand here. And you can see we're actually leaning pretty hard left here. There’re a few moderate conservatives. But this is actually pretty close to what Haidt suggested. It's typically 4-1 or 5-1, and that's almost exactly what we're getting here. So, what about your field, as you think about your field, in general do you think your field leans one way or the other, or do you think it's pretty well balanced? So there again we're seeing that the field itself is sort of leaning left. Not everybody, but a slight majority. And then --

>> Hard right.

>> That's interesting. There are some fields that, I think, lean hard right. I don't know if we can see or somebody could write in which one leans hard right, I'd be curious to see. What about -- this is an important question, I guess, do you ever feel like it's difficult to make a claim or state a position because of the dominant politics of your field? And this is one I think ideally, we would see, like, all noes, right? So the fact there are a few yeses, it's interesting to think there are people out there who are kind of hesitant to say what they think. Okay, and then finally, how do you keep politically sensitive topics, and this kind of comes back to the model I just showed there. Do you stick to teaching your discipline's core perspective, which is highly controversial? Do you teach a wide range of perspectives, including some from other differences? Do you let students discuss and debate their opinions openly? And click all that applies. I see we're getting very high levels of letting students discuss and debate their opinions openly. And then we put a couple in there just talking about, you know, the triggering and microaggressions. I think this is, yeah, kind of represents the way we feel, as well. It's a hard -- kind of a hard time to teach. It's hard to, like, navigate some of these issues. And I think it's, you know, we really want to have open discussion and debate, but sometimes you worry about what another student might say that could be like a micro-aggression to another student. Things like that.

>> Yeah, and especially when we're dealing with increases in mental health issues.

>> Yeah.

>> And PTSD and issues like that.

>> Yeah, yeah. You know, we are actually -- I don't know if you saw, last week Jonathan Haidt and I forget his co-author's name just came out with "The Coddling of the American Mind," the book, and they came out with a book and I can talk a little bit about the book. I read it last week, if you're curious. Yeah, so let's start, see if we have any questions or thoughts.

>> So this is Malcolm. You know, those questions that you posed to all of us were very, very pertinent, so I'm grateful you did that. I'm curious, too, this is a question not just for our presenters, but those who are listening, and speak up in the chat space if you want to respond, but even the politicization that's going on, does that impact the way you design your course? This might be a little different in anthropology where you're trying to mix things up, but are there taboos or things you just don't want to go near? Does it impede course design and structural design, do you think?

>> Mike, Ryan, do you have thoughts on that? What are you seeing on your campus?

>> So, I think for the last several years it's definitely affected my course design. And some of the topics I bring up or don't bring up, and it's always been a bit of a challenge, you know. I think lately -- maybe I walk through, this is me sort of thinking out loud here, I think I've kind of gone through this evolution of when I started teaching I was really afraid to bring up certain topics, because I didn't want to alienate students. And then later I became, like, really kind of overconfident in a way, and I was just like, I'm just going to tell you how I think now, because I started to feel like really confident in my own stance on things. And that was an actually really bad way to go about things, to have a sense of I know all the answers. Even if I was right, it just isn't a good way to teach, you know, to sort of force it upon them. And now I'm in a space where I really like the idea of recognizing that a lot of these questions, like, for example, the big ones in anthropology would be things like "what is the nature of human nature?" Which is a big question, and who would be smart enough to know the exact answer of that, and yet that answer does have really strong political implications. If you look at people on the right, for example, tend to have a model of human nature which states that we need a strong institutions and social rules to hold people back from doing the sort of evil things that humans are want to do. And on the left there's a sense that society itself is in a sense corrupt and if we could only recognize that so many of our ills are actually socially constructed, and we should fight back against them and create a better society. Those actually, within those, are two different ideas about humans, and I think I used to for a while in my career I was on the tact of just, like, I'm going to teach you the sort of liberal side of human nature and I'm going to convince you this is the right model of human nature, and now I think it's much more interesting to open it up and say this is too big for anybody to know, and we should probably recognize that it's kind of a little bit of both. And let's work together to kind of think about what this means and how do we create a better future together? Given this.

>> So, let me pose another question here. I think a lot of us when we think back on our own experiences as undergraduates really appreciate what I would call kind of life-changing moments, when we're introduced to new ideas, new concepts that really altered our thinking in powerful ways. And I recall at the beginning of the presentation you and Ryan were talking about these three crises, and the third one was a crisis of significance or perhaps it could also be a crisis of relevance. And yet the feedback from the students you presented from Anth 101, seemed like a fair number of students had this life-changing or kind of deep impression from the course helping to author thinking in constructive ways. Seems almost a contradiction, you did achieve relevance in this Anthro 101 course.

>> Yeah, I think we did, but only because we completely changed the class, you know? And I think that crisis, you know, that was -- that I could really see in 2014, you know, students coming in and wondering why they had to study anthropology and if you teach, I think if you teach anthropology as a discipline and you try to introduce them to the discipline and only to the discipline, then there can be a problem, and that's one of the reasons why we came up with this idea of thinking about it as a science of human beings and the art of being human, with a sense of, like, let's take this science of human beings and actually show how it's relevant to being human, no matter what you do.

>> And let's practice that in our everyday lives.

>> Right.

>> And let's raise questions about all the things we do, and do those things have to be that way? Do we have to parent this way? Do we have to interact with our neighbors this way? Do we have to continue with the habits that we have? Can we change all these things, and can we think about them all really differently? And then practice that and make our lives actually different?

>> So, I think the answer in a way is we recognize there was a crisis of relevance, and then this worked really hard to help students find their own relevance, and I think that was the key and maybe the difference was I think I had in my mind for part of my career I thought I know what's relevant for you and I'm going to tell you what's relevant, and the change was to open it up so that to let them find relevance within a certain framework, you know, we provide a framework that helps them find it.

>> Great. Well, unfortunately, we're out of time here. This has been a marvelous session, so Ryan and Mike, thank you so much for joining us and sharing with us your experience around this Anthro 101 course.

>> Thank you very much. Thanks, everyone, for joining us.

>> Yeah, thanks a lot, and feel free to join us at anth101.com and join the challenge some time.

>> Great, thank you, gentlemen, very, very much. Okay, to all our participants here, before you sign off, if you could take just a minute and click on the session evaluation link, which you'll find at the bottom left corner there with the red banner. If you do that now, it's a very, very short instrument, so it's great if you could do it now while your memory of the session is fresh in your mind. Your comments are very important to us. Thank you very much in advance for doing so. The session's recording and presentation files will be posted to the website later today. Please, feel free to share it with your colleagues. And finally, please join us for the next E.L.I. webinar on Tuesday, October the 9th to hear a session on supporting student success at the community colleges. So, on behalf of EDUCAUSE, this is Malcolm Brown. Thank you so much for joining us today and have a great week.

**End of Webinar**