Name(s) and department(s) of applicant(s)
Alastair Bennett, Department of English

Title of innovation:
Embedding site-specific video lectures in teaching for EN2001 and EN3021: Middle English Poetry.

If your application is successful, would you like us to add your case study to the Teaching and Learning space?
Yes

Please describe how your teaching innovation is distinctive in one sentence:
I created original, site-specific video resources for my Middle English Poetry course, and embedded them in the course alongside flipped lectures that were structured around student questions.

Please describe how your teaching innovation has a specific focus on inclusivity in one sentence:
The videos allowed everyone on the course to access places, objects, and materials from medieval London, while the flipped lecture created opportunities for all students to direct the discussion according to their needs and interests.

Please describe and evaluate your teaching innovation (for example creative, novel, original) in any aspect of course design (teaching, learning, assessment) and include reference to inclusion and engagement. Please write this in a form that can be published unaltered on the Teaching and Learning space.

I produced a series of lecture videos to supplement my teaching for EN2001/3021: Middle English Poetry, a half-unit course available to both second- and third-year students. Rather than recording a talk with slides using Panopto software, I used an iPhone camera to record myself delivering lecture material, and then added in images, and annotated texts, with voice over, using video editing software. I filmed these video lectures in locations that would allow students to visualise the world of late medieval England, where the poems on the course were written and read: at the tomb of the poet John Gower in Southwark Cathedral (with special permission); at the site of the Tabard Inn (where Chaucer’s pilgrims set off for Canterbury); at the ruined church of St Dunstan in the East; the bishop of Westminster’s Palace; the Tower of London; and Eltham Palace. The videos were brief, generally no more than 10 minutes long (analysis of MOOC videos by Guo, Kim and Robin in 2014 suggests that student engagement diminishes significantly after this point); I posted two or three videos on the course Moodle site each week, and captioned them using the RePlay captioning tool.

The original impetus for these videos came from the college’s pandemic response: they were intended as pre-recorded resources to supplement the on-line live lectures. This year, I wanted to think about the role these videos might play in future, supporting student learning and fostering inclusivity on this course. I redesigned my lectures as ‘flipped lectures’, where students were expected to ask questions about the video content (guided by questions embedded in the videos themselves, and by instructions on the course Moodle site each week). I would then incorporate elements from these discussions into subsequent videos, so that the pre-recorded content reinforced the content of earlier discussion, and was clearly responsive to the pedagogical needs and intellectual interests of the seminar group. Using lecture videos in this way allowed students to access introductory material, contextual discussion, and discussion prompts as part of their own independent study, so that their lecture contact hour became a space for discussion and reflection, shaped and directed by their own needs and interests.

Site specific videos make physical spaces and archival materials accessible to students who might not otherwise be able to visit them. A report by the Sutton Trust (‘The University of Life’, 2020) argues that working class students face barriers to participation in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, including off-campus trips. Meanwhile, heritage industry partners on the school advisory board report difficulties in attracting BAME graduates for new positions, in part because BAME students do not necessarily see themselves in these spaces. Filming at heritage sites, and in museums and archives, not only enhances students’ understandings of the texts on the course, but also works to break down some of these barriers, with implications for students’ graduate employment. Students are encouraged to think about how their developing knowledge of this literature might provide an entry point to these spaces, even as an introduction to the spaces informs their understanding of the literature.
My work this year has produced an archive of video material that is available to colleagues to use and adapt. Future plans include developing a tool-kit for the production of video resources in collaboration with colleagues in other departments. I am also developing new relationships with heritage sites and archives that will allow me to build on the material I have already produced: I am currently in discussions with the British Library about filming resources for next year in the manuscript reading room, and with Senate House about recording videos using some of their medieval manuscript material.

Links:

Moodle Site for Middle English Poetry
RePlay videos for Middle English Poetry

Word guide: 500 words

Please describe the actual or potentially beneficial effect on student learning and include discussion of some source of external evaluation and/or (ideally), student feedback.

Please write this so that can be published unaltered on the Teaching and Learning space.

The statistics tab on Panopto allowed me to track students’ engagement with the video content throughout the course. I could see that a high proportion of students watched the videos each week (declining in the final weeks of the course), and that most watched the videos through to the end; I could also see that some students watched the videos more than once, returning to them as the course progressed, and in preparation for their final assessed essays.

Student feedback for this course was very positive. In their written responses to the course survey, students praised the quality of the videos themselves, and also the interactive discussion that followed them in the live lectures. They wrote: ‘The lecture videos on this module are incredibly well done and laid out, they’re really engaging compared to any other module. What’s more, the online lecture discussions provide extra lecture content to solidify what we have been introduced to, and this is really helpful.’ ‘Alastair’s teaching methods have been outstanding. He prepares two online videos each week before the lecture. During the online lecture, we start by asking questions that relate to the video which makes it interesting and interactive.’ ‘The pre-recorded videos with all the different locations were fun to watch and really effectively gave a lot of info in short bursts.’ ‘The pre-lecture videos allowed for both flexible learning (time-wise) and a more in-depth appreciation of content (the online lecture hour focused on a Q+A followed by supplementary material).’ ‘I found the pre-recorded lecture material highly engaging, and think this has been one of the most enjoyable courses I’ve completed at Royal Holloway’. Students also described returning to the videos later in the course, and as they prepared their assessed work: ‘I have really enjoyed the pre-recorded videos as you can watch these back to help with learning’.

Word guide: 250 words

Please describe any help which you have received from professional support staff (e.g. Careers, CeDAS, Educational Development) in developing, implementing or evaluating your initiative.