

# Online Teaching Across Geopolitical Borders: Preparing Ahead for Scholars at Risk

## FESTIVAL OF TEACHING 2021

DR. TONI SAMEK, 3M TEACHING FELLOW 2012  
SCHOOL OF LIBRARY & INFORMATION STUDIES  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

### THE EXPERIENCE

The phrase 'scholars at risk' came to full life for me over a decade ago when I began online teaching LIS 592: Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility in Librarianship. Some of the students were in different geopolitical locations outside of Canada; others were living in Canada while maintaining part-time lives in different geopolitical locations. I have taught students who were: prevented from accessing eClass when the 2011 Internet kill switch happened in Egypt; unable to access required readings externally blocked by international government-imposed Internet filters; and, self-censoring from discussion forums, because of the nature of the digital tattoo and implications for life. Few of us were teaching online then and issues were not widely explored.

### THE 'SO WHAT?'

Today, with the pivot to remote teaching, the stakes are increasingly more distributed across our populations in a charged world and a fast rise of AI in the global education enterprise. Encountering intercultural stories about networked learning helps us in the open task to develop and share strategies conditional for supporting quality education and quality educational experience now and into the future. I offer below select (of numerous) exploration topics that have motivated me to practice online teaching with my eyes wide open. Benefits include: internalizing anyone of us can be a scholar at risk, and maybe not even know it; and, developing deepening compassion and conviction for the varied conditions that shape our students' pursuit of education through our eClass system.

### SOME SMART STEPS TO TAKE

- Explore the basic question: to what extent are students on a level playing field the day the eClass opens?
- Prepare to teach relatively freely, knowing you cannot guarantee eClass is 100% secure.
- Learn about how eClass is archived. Know for how long forum postings live on after course closure. And who has access.
- When selecting required readings, anticipate potentially limited access to perceived controversial topics. What are work-arounds?
- Be mindful your digital tattoo could be used as an archive of intimidation. Maintain intention.