CREATING WICKED STUDENTS

Designing Courses that Improve Student Authority

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A man walks into a bar . . .
Louise is going home . . .
Meanwhile, in a not-so-quiet neighborhood in Charlottesville, Virginia . . .
WHAT DO ALL OF THESE HAVE IN COMMON?

- The obvious logics don’t make sense
- They require lateral thinking, indirect approaches, creativity
WHAT DON’T THEY HAVE IN COMMON?

- The first two are riddles
- The third is real life
As often as not, these are the kinds of problems our students will face in their jobs and lives.
The workplace is changing

- New technologies
- New markets/new clientele
- New regulations
- New challenges
Students don’t always go into the fields they study

Or get the jobs they want

Or stay in the fields they start in

Or stay in the positions they start in
AND MOST IMPORTANTLY . . .

- Engaged citizens are barraged by data/information/opinions/complex problems daily . . .

- . . . and must find ways to sift through this information to find solutions that extend beyond any single lesson they’ve encountered in any single class.
WICKED PROBLEMS

- Dynamics/parameters are constantly changing
- Resistant to resolution
- Data is incomplete
- Data is contradictory
- The problems themselves are difficult to recognize
WICKED PROBLEMS

- Gulf Horizon
- Zeka virus
- FBI vs iPhone
- ISIS
What does it take to live in a wicked world?
POOR IGNAIUS . . .

- Mind
- Body
- Spirit
- Emotions
- Creativity
- ????
Perhaps instead:

- Not the line workers . . .
- Not the line managers . . .
- But . . .
WICKED STUDENTS

- Open to new challenges
- Deliberate and thoughtful
- Able to draw from multiple areas
- Able to adapt ideas/technologies to new settings
- Able to ask the right questions
- Not afraid to fail/able to try again
WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO CREATE WICKED STUDENTS?

The traditional answer:

Content knowledge

+ 

Skills
WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO CREATE WICKED STUDENTS?

My answer:

Content knowledge
+
Skills
+
A sense of our right and ability to engage in the meaningful questions of the day
WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO CREATE WICKED STUDENTS?

My answer:

Content knowledge
+
Skills
+
“Authority”
WHAT I DON’T MEAN BY “AUTHORITY”:

- Bossiness
- Confidence
- Arrogance
- Efficacy

“Authority” in this context draws from experience and learning—it must be earned.
Content knowledge

+ 

Skills

+ 

“Authority”
“Authority” relates to “authorship”: the construction of new realities and understandings of how the world works/could work.
Content knowledge

Skills

“Authority”
Okay, so that’s my introduction . . .

- Questions?
- Clarifications?
- Ideas?
NOW . . .

How do we create wicked students?
OR MORE ACCURATELY . . .

How do we create contexts that allow students to assume authority?
HIGH IMPACT PRACTICES

George Kuh

- First-Year Seminars
- Study Abroad
- Undergraduate Research
- Collaborative Assignments
- Internships
- Capstones
- Community-Based Learning
BUT WHAT ABOUT IN "ORDINARY" CLASSES?
A MOMENTARY PAUSE . . .

- Jot down a class that you’re currently teaching or that you’d like to teach where you’d be interested in shaking things up a bit.

- Keep this class in mind as we go through the next few slides . . .
RANDY BASS:

HIPs work because, among other things, they:

- Offer the opportunity to integrate, synthesize, and make meaning
- They ask students to make judgments in the midst of uncertainty
OKAY THEN . . .

Whatever we develop in our classes should ask students to:

- Integrate
- Synthesize
- Make meaning
- Make judgements/draw conclusions
- Particularly in contexts of uncertainty
THREE AREAS

- Projects/Papers
- Exams
- Day-to-day pedagogies
Projects/Papers
A topic discussed by experts in the field

A student with limited expertise

A professor with unlimited expertise (and a grade book)
MARINE BIOLOGY:

You are on an environmental policy board looking at the issue of land reclamation in Victoria Harbor. You are the sole marine biologist on the board. Your job is to make a recommendation with regard to the impact on marine life. What potential hazards do you see? How might you explain those hazards in a carefully researched way?
Create a proposal for a local public mural for possible grant/funding applications. Include: a description of project, several means of creating community input and involvement, the long-term goals for community impact, and a budget.
Create an informational pamphlet on an emerging infectious disease, pitched to PTO parents. Include causative agent and vector, threat to local population, and possible measures to reduce risk.
You are running for congress. In an address to your potential constituents, explain how the political, religious, economic OR social problems of Rome might inform policy in an American context.
AND WHAT ABOUT...?

- Posters
  - Possible audiences?
  - Possible purposes?

- Quantitative Projects
  - Possible audiences?
  - Possible purposes?

- Digital Narratives
  - Possible audiences?
  - Possible purposes?

- Websites
  - Possible audiences?
  - Possible purposes?
First Year Seminar on Travel Literature:

- In groups, develop a 3-7 minute YouTube video for students about to study abroad, providing tips for a successful year.
  - The film must demonstrate complexity of thought about international and intercultural experiences and their relation to learning and personal development
  - Must include list of sources
Individually, write a carefully researched rationale. This should include:

- A clear thesis that unifies all of the tips you include in your film
- An argument for EACH of the tips you included. What research and/or class reading caused you to design this tip?
- A close and careful analysis of both your in-class and your researched sources
- A bibliography
EXPLORING ALTERNATIVES:

1. Go back to your course topic
2. Brainstorm a list of *less informed* audiences appropriate for this topic
3. Brainstorm an assignment (or two or three) for your course.
4. Clarify the audience, the genre, and the purpose.
5. Share the assignment with a neighbor, offering and receiving feedback.
6. Revise
Certainly it’s essential that our exams test both content knowledge and skill levels . . .

But isn’t there also room to test integration, synthesis, and meaning making, in contexts of uncertainty?

. . . particularly as these more challenging tasks carry within them basic knowledge and skills?
EXAMS:

Humanities course in literature:

- Here’s a poem you’ve never seen before; analyzing both style and content, make an argument for which poet most likely authored this work.

- Ezra Pound and William Wordsworth are in a bar getting drunk and talking about poetry. By the end of the night would they: a) end up arguing with each other to the point of physical violence? Or b) end up in an eternal bro-mance? Base your answer on a careful analysis of both their stated views on poetry and the poetry itself.

- Argue the necessity of teaching poetry (both content and poetics) to Pre-med students. Provide a rationale using at least three works or theorists we discussed this semester.
EXAMS:

Biology course on physiology:

- Argue for or against the feasibility of a Pegasus, drawing on our work this semester.
EXAMS:

Course in evolutionary psychology:

- Something related to ... digital natives?
And what about those pesky multiple choice exams?

- Is there any way to take them beyond knowledge and language nuance into unchartered waters?
- I dunno . . . something
  - Without distractors, where all answers are plausible?
  - That asks for ranking rather than selecting?
  - That requires synthesis and/or meaning-making?
  - ?????????
EXPLORING ALTERNATIVES:

1. Go back to your course topic

2. Brainstorm a list of radical exam questions that you might ask your students. Think about bringing integration, synthesis, meaning making, and uncertainty into play.

3. Share an exam question or two with a neighbor, offering each other feedback and advice.

4. Revise
DAY-TO-DAY PEDAGOGIES

Consider:

- The kinds of authoritative thinking/tasks we’re asking students to do are complex, challenging, and counter to many of their educational experiences thus far . . .

- Further, it’s problematic to engage high-stakes grading without first allowing students to practice the kinds of skills and ways of thinking we value.
That in mind, students need to practice authoritative tasks *throughout* a course . . .

- In increasingly complex ways
- In ungraded, minimally graded, or proportionally graded contexts
- Early data analyses: minimal noise, one (or two) clear conclusions
- Middle data sets: moderate noise, two or three possible conclusions
- Final data sets: heavy noise, multiple possible conclusions that must be constructed by students
- Proportionally Graded

Example: Geo-Science
- Four “mini-essays” written in groups
- Answer a question about the day’s reading posed by a group member
- Each mini-essay worth 5% of the final grade
- End of semester essay worth 25% of final grade
- Minimally Graded
- 10 lab reports throughout the semester
- The science is graded; the writing is responded to in a limited way, but remains ungraded
- At midterm and end of semester, students revise and turn in two lab reports, along with a rationale
- “Ungraded”
Brainstorm a list of moments/pedagogies that currently exist in your course where students have an opportunity to practice the kinds of thinking that would prepare them for their larger projects/exams.

Remember:
- synthesis
- integration
- meaning-making
- uncertainty
Brainstorm 1-2 new tasks—in class, out of class, or both—where students might practice these skills/ways of thinking.

Share both lists with a colleague and discuss.

Choose the best task and revise/polish.
Final thoughts?
Questions?
Limericks?
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<th></th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Demonstrating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competence</strong></td>
<td>Developing the foundational knowledge and skills in the discipline</td>
<td>Demonstrating consistent foundational knowledge and skills</td>
<td>Not intimidated in—to the point of actually seeking out—new competences</td>
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<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
<td>Focus on individual ideas as interpreted through “me” (i.e. “my ideas”, “my interpretation”)</td>
<td>Showing understanding of ideas positioned in contexts (time, political, social)</td>
<td>Ability to transfer and adapt ideas into new and appropriate contexts.</td>
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<td><strong>Authority</strong></td>
<td>Reliance on external authority and sources</td>
<td>Actively working on constructing new way of making meaning—includes questioning of self and others</td>
<td>Trust the internal voice sufficiently to craft a <em>philosophy of life</em>…and to contribute (to the field, society…)</td>
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Thank you for your hard work!

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