Creating Wicked Students
Designing Courses that Improve Student Authority

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Before we begin . . .

- Jot down a class that you’re currently teaching or that you’d like to teach where you would be comfortable experimenting.

- Keep this class in mind as we go through the next few slides.
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
What’s my point?

As often as not, these are the kinds of problems our students will face in their jobs and lives.
Because . . .

Life is changing . . .

- New technologies/social media platforms
- New communities/relationships
- New understandings of power dynamics
- New realities of “The American Dream”
Because . . .

- 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
- The workplace isn’t divided into “PSYC,” “ENGL,” and “BIOL”
Wicked Problems

- Dynamics/parameters are constantly changing
- Resistant to resolution/previous solutions
- Data is incomplete
- Data is contradictory
- The problems themselves are difficult to recognize
Wicked Problems:

- FBI vs. iPhones
  - Zika
  - Opioids
  - Immigration
  - Education
- Rohingya Refugees in Myanmar
- 2016 Election and its aftermath
Please jot some notes . . .

- Think about the course that you chose at the start of the workshop
- What are the wicked problems related to that course?
- What are some "unrelated" wicked problems that the skills and content learned in your course might help a student solve?
- What are some of the wicked problems that students in your major more generally might/will face?
So . . .

What does it take to live in a wicked world?
Wicked Students

- Deliberate and thoughtful
- Able to ask the right questions
- Able to know *when* to question
- Open to new challenges
- Able to draw from multiple areas
- Able to adapt ideas/technologies to new settings
- Not afraid to fail/able to try again
What does it take to create wicked students?
The Traditional Answer:

Content knowledge

+ 

Skills
I would like to suggest:

Content knowledge
+
Skills
+
A sense of our right and ability to engage in the meaningful questions of the day
Content knowledge
+
Skills
+
“Authority”
What I do **not** mean by “Authority”:

- Authoritarian
- Arrogant
- Controlling
- Overly confident
- Self-efficacy
“Authority” in this context draws from experience and learning—it must be earned.
Content knowledge

+ 

Skills

+ 

Authority
Authority relates to “authorship”:
the creation of new realities and understandings of how the world works/could work.
Wicked
is the new
Whole?
How do we develop a sense of **AUTHORITY** in our students?
Or more accurately . . .

How do we create contexts that allow students to assume Authority?
How do we create contexts that allow students to assume Authority?

Thoughts?
- In general?
- Already existing in your course?
- Things you *could* include in your course?
- Common—or not so common—practices in your major?
- Jot some notes . . .
High Impact Practices

George Kuh

- First-Year Seminars
- Study Abroad
- Undergraduate Research
- Collaborative Assignments
- Internships
- Capstones
- Community-Based Learning
- ePortfolios
But what about in “ordinary” classes?
Randy Bass:

High Impact Practices work because, among other things, they:

- Offer the opportunity to **synthesize** and **make meaning**
- They ask students to **draw conclusions** in the midst of uncertainty
Whatever we develop in our classes should ask students to:

- Synthesize
- Make meaning
- Draw conclusions
- Particularly in contexts of uncertainty
Three Areas

- Major Assignments
- Exams
- Day-to-day teaching
Major Assignments
A student with limited expertise

A professor with unlimited expertise (and a grade book)

A topic discussed by experts in the field
Subject

Student

Less informed Audience
Biology:

Create an informational pamphlet on an emerging infectious disease, pitched to parents of small children. Include causative agent and vector, threat to local population, and possible measures to reduce risk.
Nutrition:

The government of New York State is developing a list of recommendations regarding the lifestyles of primary-school age children. Choose a particular region of the state and develop an appropriate menu for breakfast, providing a carefully researched rationale that takes into consideration BOTH nutritional and cultural factors.
The medical school faculty is revising its curriculum. Provide a rationale for the inclusion of a literature course in this curriculum, citing and carefully analyzing three particular poems.
And what about. . . ?

- Posters
  - Possible audiences?
  - Possible purposes?

- Oral Presentations
  - Possible audiences?
  - Possible purposes?

- Short Films
  - Possible audiences?
  - Possible purposes?

- Websites
  - Possible audiences?
  - Possible purposes?
Exploring Alternatives:

1. Go back to your course topic
2. Choose a genre (paper, oral presentation, film etc.)
3. Develop an assignment (or two or three) for your course. Think about bringing synthesis, meaning making, and uncertainty into play.
4. Clarify the audience, the genre, and the purpose.
5. Share the assignment/question with a neighbor, offering and receiving feedback.
6. Revise
Exams
Exams

- 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?
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.
BIOLOGY (PHYSIOLOGY)

- Argue for or against the feasibility of a Pegasus, drawing on our work this semester.
Imagine social media stays exactly the way it is now for the next fifty years. Based upon our work this semester, how might our brains evolve? Cognitively? Neurologically?
And what about those pesky multiple choice exams?

- Is there any way to take students 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?
  - ??????????
1. Go back to your course topic
2. Develop a wicked exam question (or two or three) for your course. Think about bringing synthesis, meaning making, and uncertainty into play.
3. If necessary, clarify audience and purpose.
4. Share the question with a neighbor, offering and receiving feedback.
5. Revise
Day-to-Day Teaching
Consider:

- The kinds of authoritative thinking/tasks we’re asking students to do are complex . . .
- And counter to many of their educational experiences thus far . . .
- Further, it’s problematic to engage high-stakes grading without first making sure students are familiar with 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
DON’T read drafts before conferences!

In conference, student makes three lists:
  - Changes for sure
  - Changes maybe
  - Questions for instructor

Instructor skims

Conference proceeds with student’s list

Ungraded
▪ 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
▪ Four “mini-essays” written in groups
▪ Apply the day’s reading in a complex way to life beyond the classroom; use “real world” examples
▪ Each mini-essay worth 5% of the final grade
▪ End of semester essay worth 25% of final grade
▪ Minimally Graded
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
Please:

- Brainstorm a few teaching methods that **CURRENTLY** exist in your course where students have an opportunity to practice in preparation for projects/exams.
- Now explore 1 to 2 **NEW** tasks where students in your class might practice essential skills/ways of thinking.
- Share both lists with a colleague and discuss.
- Choose the best task and revise/polish.
Remember:

- Synthesis
- Drawing conclusions
- Meaning-making
- Uncertainty
A few cautions:

When adding new assignments or pedagogies, remember to:

- Not overwhelm yourself
- Adapt pedagogies to your own style
- Take a few risks
- Revise/adapt after early failures
Final thoughts?

Questions?
# Assessment (Dr. Kim Filer)

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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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<tr>
<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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<tr>
<td><strong>Authority</strong></td>
<td>Reliance on external authority and sources</td>
<td>Actively working on constructing new way of making meaning—including questioning of self and others</td>
<td>Trust the internal voice sufficiently to craft a <em>philosophy</em> of life…and to contribute (to the field, society…)</td>
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Thank you for your hard work!

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