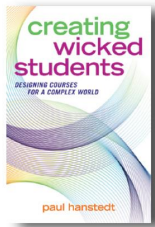


COURSES FOR A COMPLEX WORLD



I consider myself an experienced professor, and I put a lot of work and time into designing and redesigning my courses every semester; however, *Creating Wicked Students: Designing Courses for a Complex World* opened my eyes to how I can improve my classes and better prepare my students to be creative, critical, and contributing members of a particular field and of society at large; in other words, how to be “wicked students.”

In this book review series so far, the progression of texts has moved from general concepts of rethinking higher education, creating new university models, and revisiting historical missions to adjust for modern times to this current book on designing courses that prepare students for today’s expeditiously dynamic world. Through this series of texts, one thing is constant: What we’ve done in the past does not work today; we must educate students in ways that prepare them to deal with today’s “wicked problems, that is, situations where the parameters of the problem and the means available for solving them [are] changing constantly” (p. 3). Most educators want students to participate in life in “thoughtful and constructive ways” (p. 4), and Paul Hanstedt provides readers with valuable resources and guidelines for doing just that at the course level. He focuses on giving students authority through “authorship, the ability to write and rewrite, shape, and create” (p. 5). Our courses, he contends, must be training grounds for students to practice authority while they are learning, not delaying the practice for when they graduate. Thus, this book is intended to help instructors design courses that “develop students’ capacity to be engaged and deliberate citizens” who “engage in meaningful dialogue with the larger sociopolitical contexts beyond college” (p. 9).

Chapters are scaffolded to address course design issues as a progression: goals, course structure, assignments, exams, pedagogical techniques, and assessment. There are even two stopping points in the book, Intermission chapters, that encourage readers to pause, reflect on previous chapters, the exercises they’ve worked through, and prepare for the next section. *Creating Wicked Students* is craftily written to allow readers the option to read and work through the chapters and exercises in order or skip around as they see fit.

There are many helpful qualities about this book that bear mentioning, such as the multiple boxed

exercises in each chapter with step-by-step instructions to work on new or existing courses all the way from goals to assessment. Resources like Krathwohl’s revision of Bloom’s taxonomy help to develop course goals that push students to assume authority, and numerous examples that show readers how to take a seemingly good goal, assignment, or exam question, and move it into contexts of uncertainty that allow students to synthesize information and “make decisions in the midst of uncertainty” (p. 66). Hanstedt does a superb job of not locking assignments into certain disciplines; he explains and shows how one assignment in social sciences, for instance, can be modified to fit an English class. By the time readers reach the end of the book that includes six appendices with six different assignments, it is easy to see how those assignments can be revised for almost any course a reader may teach.

Like the Intermission chapters, the conclusion offers a final breath to reflect on *Creating Wicked Students* as a whole, and Hanstedt offers four cautions about course design that are worth considering. I wonder if that advice might be better put up front because the book can be overwhelming if read cold and worked through one chapter at a time. Readers might consider reading the book through one time and then going back and working on the exercises gradually. Both veteran and new teachers—and subsequently their students—will benefit greatly from either a quick or in-depth read of this book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diane Martinez is an associate professor of English at Western Carolina University where she teaches technical and professional writing. She previously worked as a technical writer in engineering, an online writing instructor, and an online writing center specialist. Diane has been with STC since 2005.