Turning Learning Objectives into Projects

Five Steps to Designing a Sustainability Student Project Module or Class

A *project* is an individual or collaborative enterprise that is carefully planned to achieve a particular aim – Oxford Dictionary Online.

Project-based learning is a dynamic instructional approach built on authentic learning activities whose purpose is to engage student interest and motivation. The activities are designed to answer a question, solve a problem, investigate an issue or respond to an opportunity.

Five Steps

1. **Craft the Driving Question**
2. **Develop the Big Picture**
3. **Fill in the Details**
4. **Get it Done**
5. **Assess the Outcomes**

Step 1: Identify the Opportunity, Issue, Challenge, or Problem (Craft the Driving Question)

Brainstorm ideas regarding the opportunity, issue, challenge or problem you could address in your class through project-based learning to integrate theory and praxis (*Praxis* is the process by which a theory, lesson, or skill is enacted, practiced, embodied, or realized. Paulo Freire defines praxis in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it". Praxis is action which embodies a commitment to human wellbeing and the search for truth, and respect for others.)

Examine your list and select a project you feel committed to and confident about addressing.

Conceptualize the learning outcomes desired – how will this project help integrate theory and practice?

Step 2: Define the Project and Project Scope (Develop the Big Picture)

Determine the following:

- background – history of the issue/challenge, including the cause and other individuals and programs that have tried to address it
- objectives of the project (ex: increase fresh produce available to economically challenged populations in urban centers) including learning objectives (ex: understand the challenges of urban planning and how to meet the needs of everyone in a sustainable manner)
- benefits of the project itself – other than the learning objectives (Is it truly needed? What problem will it solve? What questions will it help students address in your class?)

- who is the target audience of the project? (ex: students on campus, women in the arts, engineers working on sustainable design)
- tentative time frame (ex: Spring 2013)
- general resources needed: budget; staff; space; equipment; supplies; expertise

Step 3: Plan the Project (Fill in the Details)

Determine the following:

- specific activities to complete the project, including a timeline (ex: deliverables such as 10 vegetable gardens will be established in the community or 20 individuals will be surveyed)
- members of the project team, including particular skills needed (Are outside experts needed? Is collaboration with other departments/colleges desirable?)
- roles and responsibilities of project team members
- specific resources needed including details of the following as applicable: budget; staff; space; equipment; supplies; expertise.
- method(s) for gathering and tracking progress and results (ex: student papers or presentations – reports to funding agencies)
- success criteria (what does success look like – how will you know the project has attained its objectives?)
- contingency plans: identify problems that are likely to develop and develop a plan on how they will be handled (ex: if the experts needed are not available – if it rains on the day you plan to launch the project)
- communication plan, including how, when, and to whom project information will be reported
- methods of evaluation/assessment

Step 4: Implement the Project (Get it Done)

- implement project as set out in plan
- review progress and communicate according to plan
- reassess and modify project plan and timeline as needed

Step 5: Evaluate the Project (Assess the Outcomes)

Determine and evaluate the following:

- success of project in relation to goals and desired outcomes including any planned deliverables
- areas for improvement or enhancement
- lessons learned
- summarize and report out as needed
- what to do with equipment/supplies purchased through project, if any