Let's design a learning-centred course–a brainstorming session

by David Newman, Oxford University

<david.newman@bsg.ox.ac.uk>, http://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/, @davidrnewman

The problem

At Oxford University, the new Blavatnik School of Government, is starting a new degree: a Masters in Public Policy. On 20th September 2012, around 35 students will leave their jobs in government and NGOs and come to Oxford to do a one-year intensive taught masters, aiming to become leaders in 5 years time.

We are set up to use technology in teaching and learning. Every student will get a free iPad[1], every lecture can be recorded.

The curriculum has been designed around public policy. What do professionals need to learn about public policy? But the students have to develop the skills needed when working in public policy. Policy makers suddenly have to investigate an issue, gather evidence in areas they have never explored, make sense of what they are told by specialists in different disciplines, analyse it fairly, and present it to a senior civil servant in a one-page policy brief and a 10 min. talk.

So we need, over the next two years, to turn this into a learning-centred degree.

The process

In this session, participants in the large-scale curriculum redesign event, brainstormed ideas that might help redesign this curriculum in ways that make it more learning-centred.

We used the WebIQ Group Support System. Unlike earlier Group Decision Support Systems, it does not require setting up dedicated clients on a network. 12 participants logged in to the system using a web browser, on behalf of a group on their table.

The groups went through two steps of a series of exercises. First they were asked to come up with as many ideas as they could to help our students reach their learning outcomes. Whatever they typed appeared on all the browsers, including the projected display at the front of the room. Then they were asked to pick out the 3 most interesting ideas from the whole list.

These are just two steps in the kind of process-led agenda used in creative problem-solving. Back in Oxford we will be taking the next steps.

The results

I have combined the first and second stage reports into Table 1. The headings refer to the different learning objectives. Under each heading are the ideas generated. On the right, the scores show how many groups included this idea in their 3 favourites.

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1   1/75th of their fee.

Ideas Activity Title: Activities to reach learning outcomes

Idea	Score
Outstanding and differentiated writing ability (inc. policy briefs)	
Set a group the task of editing a wiki page on a policy	2
Create a blog/wiki	2
Frankenstory	2
Ask to write on same topic for different audiences	2
Create resources for diverse audiences	1
Critiques of each other's policy brief	1
run a book sprint	0
Able to verbally present whatever answer they have in a clear and memorable way	
pecha kucha	4
Tweet a summary of a scientific paper	3
have a dragons den	3
Present recommendations to a policy expert	1
second presentation	1
Create mindmap	0
sports matches (games your not familiar with)	0
Tweet a summary of a scientific paper	0
Research poloticapresenters	0
Learned how to work in teams, and how to best harness the different strengths in the group	
tweet a summary of a scientific paper	0
Blavatnik	0
Skills audit in advance of a role play or sscenari	0
Team building activities	1
Outward bound	0
An increased ability to absorb new information and evidence in unfamiliar surroundings	
Complete Hidden Talent online quiz	0
Making use of mobile technology to take in infomation	0
Orienteering	0
Become part of a lifelong collaborative community of practice	
Social Media and reflective practices	2
Twitter hash tag for course and or cohort	1
Encourage use of blogs and forums, wikis	1
Add a Wikipedia entry and explain	1
Mahara e-Portfolio Group	0
Third party wiki	0
Become a critical consumer of a range of academic disciplines	
Create a news feed (egzite) of different disiplinary output	1
Social Media content curation aggregation	0
Evaluate and compare multiple perspectives from different disciplines on one concept, or event or issue	0
Improved critical thinking (inc. assumptions, values, judgements)	
play devil's advocate with your own views	1
Given a scenario identify the underlying theoretical perspective	1
Get approval for an oil pipeline	1
Analyse marketing and tv adverts	1
collaborative peer-assessed critique of a paper	0
probem-solving scenario in competitive groups	0

Table 1: Ideas from brainstorming session in Birmingham