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The Hungry Games: Tackling Wicked Food Problems at Black River Public Schools through a New Experiential Project Term Course

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THE HUNGRY GAMES: Tackling Wicked Food Problems at Black River Public School through a New Experiential Project Term Course



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Abstract

Join us in the fight against overly processed foods—may the odds be ever in your favor!

In the winter of 2014, a team of students from Lib 322 “Wicked Problems of Sustainability” identified the food system and its impact on children as a wicked problem, initiated a community partnership at Black River Public School (a K–12 GVSU Charter School in Holland, MI), and posited the development of an interdisciplinary, experiential project term course then designed by students in Lib 342 “Food Matters.” This new Black River course, “The Hungry Games,” will be piloted this spring to engage middle school students in experiential learning in order to foster understanding and empower agency in response to our current food system.

GVSU Courses

LIB 322: Wicked Problems of Sustainability

Sustainability, as a wicked problem, is an intractable, on-going and high-stakes issue. This course engages students in participatory research on the inextricably linked dimensions of sustainability, such as economics, environment and social equity. Students will work with community partners to address specific interdisciplinary problems of sustainability.

- Students conducted research, assessed issue, established community partner, developed initial action plan and crafted draft course.

LIB 342: Food Matters

An interdisciplinary exploration of the relationship between food systems and the food we consume everyday. Analysis of competing information and integration of evolutionary, historical, socio-political, cultural and environmental factors shaping our current food systems lead back to the basics of nutrition, agricultural practices and equitable food accessibility.

- Students conducted interdisciplinary research on food pedagogies, created course proposal, garnered approval for course, developed and revised curriculum with community partner.

The Hungry Games

Why should we care?

Where does our food come from?

Nutrition

Field Trip: Eighth Day Farm

Food Waste

Reflection & Synthesis

The best thing about the partnership?

Students' Perspective:

- Collaborative “chain”
- Models teaching-by-doing
- Professional Development
- Real-world skills

Community Partner Perspective:

- Generate new ideas
- Integrate multiple perspectives

GVSU Charter School Staff:

- Creative collaboration come to life

Instructor Perspective:

- Real-world relevance
- Empowerment & Reciprocity
- Integration & Innovation
- Bridge semesters, courses, instructors

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED???

	Lesson 1	Lesson 2
Partner	Innovation happens through motivation and collaboration	Students' work exceeded expectations
Students	Access to & limitations of “expert” knowledge	Empowerment through action; collaborative skills; Networks
Staff	GVSU students rock!	Enthusiasm + creativity + flexibility = ingenuity
Instructors	Time limitations of the traditional semester	Collaboration needs to be taught & practiced



What are the benefits?

- Instructors
 - Practice mentoring students: develop new skills, tips, & tricks for helping students
 - Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Successful bridge-spanning case study
 - Connection to Campus & Community
 - Dissemination of techniques to others
- Students
 - Impressive community-service and research work
 - Development of valuable skills for future employment
 - Relationships with community-partners
- Community Partner benefits
 - New community partners for Black River Public
 - The possibility for future development opportunities

Results: A New Middle School Course and a GVSU Student Publication



THE HUNGRY GAMES

Authors: Timothy Deters, Michael Garnaat, Isabel Gonzales, Megan Kupres, Evelyn Lago, Ashley Munniksmä, Jose Rivera & Nathan Spencer, Grand Valley State University.

Abstract

Environmental activist and culture critic, Wendell Berry states in “The Pleasures of Eating,” “When food, in the minds of eaters, is no longer associated with farming and with the land, the eaters are suffering a kinds of cultural amnesia that is misleading and dangerous” (Berry 2) The obesity epidemic, mass hunger, the invasion of overly-processed and GMO-contaminated foods are just a few of the frightful consequences of our society’s overall disconnect with the food system. With so many obvious shortcomings, how does one even begin to tackle the wicked problem of food? According to several culture critics, including Michael Pollan, the raising of awareness via the education of students is an excellent starting point (Pollan 2008). Following the vision of The Sprout Society—a Grand Valley State University student project proposed during the winter 2014 semester of LIB 322: Wicked Problems of Sustainability—our LIB 342: Food Matters class partnered with Black River Public Schools to create “The Hungry Games”—a nine day program that can be utilized by the school during their spring 2015 Project Term. The purpose of “The Hungry Games” is to develop food literacy and expose students to the corporate and industrial take-over of the food system. We have provided an overview of our research, design and collaborative process, a sample curriculum and an idea for the final project that instructors can use to develop, in students, the knowledge and tools to be active and critical consumers of food. “The Hungry Games” curriculum explores the following four themes: 1) Why should we care; 2) Where does our food come from; 3) Nutrition; and 4) Food Waste. Lastly, the program incorporates a variety of hands-on activities including a lesson on making green smoothies and a field trip to Holland’s Eighth Day Community Farm. Time proved to be a primary limiting factor in the development of this program. It is hoped that this program will prove successful enough for a second installment, so that these food issues can be further developed.

<http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/wickedproblems/12/>

How did we make it work?

- Caring and connected professional staff
- A committed community partner
- Dedicated and motivated students
- Bridging semesters and courses
- Sustained relationships
- Timely communication and collaboration
- Attainable goals & weekly action commitments
- A willingness to meet periodically and brainstorm together

