How the heck am I going to add a project to this class?!

Kris Wobbe
Summer Institute on Project-Based Learning
June 20, 2019
Common constraints

• Too much content to make space for a project
• Projects take time to develop, deliver, assess – I’m flat out!
• My students don’t have time for projects – they are working/commuter/parents/all of the above.
• My students aren’t ready for projects
• Will classroom innovation negatively impact Faculty PTR/student eval results
• Sequenced courses- need to make sure the students are ready for the next course
Do I need all that content?

Figure 12-3
Molecular Cell Biology, Sixth Edition
© 2008 W.H. Freeman and Company
Right-sizing content

• Who are my students?
  – Majors/near majors/non-majors?

• What will they need
  – For the next course?
  – For productive lives/careers?

• What are the essential frameworks, ways of thinking? What is ‘just information’?
Content + Project

- Student teams research different examples and teach the class
- Projects hit multiple learning outcomes simultaneously
- Project provides real-world application of theoretical content
- Make sure what we are teaching is essential - not just my favorite content
- Inclass work designed to target issues needed in the project
- Class develops content for the next class
Common constraints

• Too much content to make space for a project
• Projects take time to develop, deliver, assess – I’m flat out!
• My students don’t have time for projects – they are working/commuter/parents/all of the above.
• My students aren’t ready for projects
Faculty Time Constraints

• Start small
  — Create a short (week-long? one class period?) project
  — In one course

• Consider what you already do - some of it likely fits well with PBL (flipping a class)

• Use example projects as starter ideas
  — https://wp.wpi.edu/firstyearprojects/

• Use students for peer-review and feedback
  — Need specific guidance

• Share with others teaching the same course/different sections

• Ask students to come up with materials for next year’s class
Common constraints

• Too much content to make space for a project
• Projects take time to develop, deliver, assess – I’m flat out!
• My students don’t have time for projects – they are working/commuter/parents/all of the above.
• My students aren’t ready for projects
Student Time Constraints

- Use class time. Instead of lectures, assign videos or readings for out of class work.
- Assign teams on the spot (mitigate attendance issues)
- Use technology for sharing information, joint work - google docs/whatsApp/
- Use time available outside of class as one criterion for assigning teams
- If students are given class time to do group work, keep accountability by requesting (selfie, hand in something, 1 minute reportouts, visual representation of work done)
Common constraints

• Too much content to make space for a project
• Projects take time to develop, deliver, assess – I’m flat out!
• My students don’t have time for projects – they are working/commuter/parents/all of the above.
• My students aren’t ready for projects
Student (Un)Readiness

• Of course they are! Just need the right project, and the right scaffolding.
• Be super transparent about why you are doing projects.
• Spend time (I know, this is hard) on helping them know how to work in teams.
• Enlist their help in evaluating the success of the project.
• Rice University course workload estimator
• Leads to increased engagement, increased retention (class-to-class)
Credits

• Quinsigamond Community College: Gaelen Benway and Amy Beaudry

• WPI: Paula Quinn, Rick Vaz, Marja Bakermans, Lisa Stoddard