Tackling Wicked Problems of Sustainability

LIB322 students
LIB322 students would like to thank:

Professor Lisa Sisson, HGI Director
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Want to learn more?
Check out:
http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/wickedproblems
Contact Lakeda@gvsu.edu

Interested in this class?
Winter 2015: Wicked Problems of Sustainability
LIB 322 (01)
TTH 2:30-3:45 pm
Lake Ontario Hall 168
Contact ParkerK@gvsu.edu

LIB322 Students

present

Tackling Wicked Problems of Sustainability

April 10, 2015
Grand River Room, Kirkhof
Phoenix Farms

Sustainable Illiteracy: Educating the Community

Recognizing the dimensions and complexity of wicked problems, Phoenix Farms has decided to address the issue of sustainable illiteracy in Western Michigan. Thus, with the goal of engaging our local community about sustainability, we have partnered with Sonder Farms, a self-sustaining farm located in the Grand Rapids and Allendale communities, in order to put our skills, knowledge, and values to use. Sonder Farms practices sustainable farming practices as well as aquaponics and their hope is to empower the community by tackling local issues of environmental injustice and sustainable illiteracy (and much more). They plan to offer classes to the community, covering subjects such as diet, the environment, finances, sustainable agriculture and many more.

Seeking to develop ideas of mutual benefit, we worked closely with Sonder Farms in order to co-create and implement compelling and relevant action-plans. For instance, we have developed promotional materials illustrating the dimensions of sustainable illiteracy, highlighting Sonder Farms mission, and conducted surveys in order to assess the needs and desires of downtown Grand Rapids residents. We have also sought to make sustainability education accessible in the greater Grand Rapids area along four dimensions, including (1) poster and (2) guerrilla advertisements, (3) the development of monthly newsletters, and (4) a plan for increasing the accessibility of Sonder Farm classes.

The following describes our ultimate efforts, the process by which we came to this work, and the challenges we confronted. Through detailing our work, we hope to engage others interested in implementing and extending our work.

Danielle Lake is an assistant professor of Liberal Studies in the Brooks College of Interdisciplinary Studies. Her Ph.D. is in public philosophy at Michigan State University, with a dissertation entitled “Working With: Expanding and Integrating the Pragmatic Method for a Wicked World” (2014). Her area of focus is in the field of wicked problems, American Philosophy, and Democratic Deliberation. Her current courses include LIB322: Wicked Problems of Sustainability, LIB312: Dialogue, Integration, and Action. This fall she will be teaching the new LIB323: Design Thinking to Meet Real World Needs. For a list of her publications see: http://works.bepress.com/danielle_lake/
Teaching Apprentice

**Dana Eardley** is the teaching apprentice for “Wicked Problems of Sustainability.” In her own education, Dana is working towards identifying ways that we can work across the boundaries of public, nonprofit, and private sectors in order to resolve social inequities, specifically those relating to food justice. She believes that in order to do this we need to create more courses that provide our students with the skill sets to collaborate, integrate, and think systematically. “Wicked Problems of Sustainability” employs a methodology that helps to build these skill sets, thus giving students a better understanding of how to begin creating positive change in our community. She has thoroughly enjoyed mentoring students through this process!

Student Presenters

**Hannah Swanson** is a junior, adventuring toward a Liberal Studies degree with a focus in “Creative Community Development and Social Justice.” She is secretary of the GVSU Beekeeping Club, a nonprofit management intern at The Creative Youth Center, and a Local Storyteller intern for FoodCircles. She believes in random acts of kindness, dancing, and singing, and has a serious love for music.

**Samantha Blumer** is a Public and Nonprofit Administration Major. She is in love with the outdoors, and spends much of her time hiking, camping, and rock climbing.

**Joseph Neikirk** is Communications Studies major with a minor in Environmental Studies. He is very interested in building relationships with individuals within the community and collaborating on projects to make a positive impact on the greater Grand Rapids Area. He hopes to get involved with a local community organization in the near future.
The Heartside Gleaning Initiative (HGI) is a powerful example of place-based social justice work fostering both sustainable and healthy living in our area. Partnering with the HGI has provided us—an interdisciplinary team of students in LIB322—with a grounded and experiential understanding of the complexities of wicked problems and fostered collaborative discussions within the Heartside community. In collaboration with local businesses and farmer's markets, the HGI gleans produce that would otherwise go to waste, redistributing these foods to local food pantries, soup kitchens, and community members. Through our partnership with the HGI and Heartside residents, we had the opportunity in the winter of 2015 to put our knowledge, skills, and values to work in order to search for an idea that would help the HGI further its mission to provide healthy food and education to residents in the Heartside area of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Initially our team's goal was to solve a wicked problem, but after further research, it became obvious that there is no one solution to wicked problems; instead, there are only better or worse responses. Armed with the methods for meliorating wicked problems and insights from the Heartside community, we chose to help the HGI in its mission through positing the creation of The Glean Ride: a mobile food cart that allows the HGI to store and transport gleaned produce to local residents. The Glean Ride will increase the accessibility of fresh produce in the Heartside community where access is limited. Working collaboratively to increase access to local and healthy food and provide the HGI with a reliable source of transportation will further the HGI’s work within the community, foster effective networks, and empower Heartside residents.

Jennifer Scholl is a junior at GVSU studying Natural Resources Management with an emphasis in environmental science and a minor in Biology. This summer she plans on volunteering with the Bear Lake Watershed Alliance to work on various storm water drain projects and educate local students on how they impact with the watershed.

Madalyn Sienicki is a Liberal Studies major with an emphasis in Environmental Sustainability. Last summer she worked on a farm in Colorado, learning about the connection between personal health and wild lands through growing, harvesting, and preparing local, wild, and living food for the community. She now seeks to educate others about the great value of the wild edible abundance available all around us.

Julia Dinverno is a senior at Grand Valley State University. Her work at GVSU has provided her with a foundation for better understanding and engaging with this globalizing world as well as the tools needed to make sense of the shifting and conflictual social world. With a strong appreciation for community service and environmental conservation, it is her hope to utilize her strengths in order to increase sustainable and healthy lifestyles.

Hannah Fernando is a junior studying Sustainable Food Systems with a minor in Entrepreneurship and Environmental Studies. She believes that food, and healthy food systems, can bring vitality to communities. Last summer she worked as a farm hand getting a genuine understanding of what it takes of the land and the farmer to grow a community healthy, local food. Currently, she is interning in the City of Grand Rapids, learning about how a city is structured, and what it takes to make one flourish.

Brent Warren is a senior at GVSU studying entrepreneurship, business management, and environmental sustainability. He has held several internships in regards to financial services. His education has given him both the skills to be of value to companies while helping them be conscious of their social and environmental influences.
You Know, You Grow

Facilitating the community conversations that shape sustainable food system development in Grand Rapids.

As we have studied the nature of wicked problems and connected with local case studies, our team has come to the conclusion that in order for communities to grow and develop deeper connections, healthier neighborhoods, and happier residents, there must be inclusive dialogue and participatory action. Addressing a neighborhood’s nutritional needs is messy, involving many stakeholders, and social dynamics. Through community connections we have begun to recognize needs related to the local food system by engaging in healthy dialogue.

We strive to empower residents to pursue self-directed, neighborhood oriented change. Our team first worked to develop a model of community engagement that can be adapted, copied, and spread to any community setting. The model explained how to conduct inclusive, participatory dialogue that aims to encourage story telling and camaraderie rather than debate or opposition.

Secondly, our team has engaged with several community members over the course of the semester to practice having these dialogic conversations in order to learn, change, and grow as individuals better equipped to understand and progress the dialogue on local food systems. We have analyzed our findings from these conversations, reflected on what we have learned, and improved our model for healthy community conversations in order to drive locally directed growth.

Student Presenters

**Paige Eisen** is a junior from Zeeland studying social work at Grand Valley. She has a growing interest in sustainability and environmentalism and plans to take more courses surrounding these topics in her final year at Grand Valley. She enjoys hiking, reading, kayaking, and generally spending time outdoors.

**Joseph Godfrey** is a transfer student from Alpena Community College. He received an Associates in History there then took a year off of school to work full-time on his family’s dairy farm. He is currently a junior and Majoring in International Relations. He has extensive experience in many aspects of commercial agriculture.

**Regina Lopez** is a forthcoming Liberal Studies graduate. Her interests lie in living more sustainably and simply. Being involved in this semester’s Wicked Problems class has inspired Regina to become more involved within the community. When she isn't training for a running event, practicing yoga, or being creative, Regina can be found working in her backyard garden and raising her egg-laying chickens.

**Steven Smith** is a marketing major, who had no idea what wicked issues were prior to this class. Once his eyes were opened to these ideas he was intrigued with the complexities and work that goes into dealing with wicked issues. Steven likes playing golf and spending summers outdoors, preferably near water.

**Selina Dorking** is a Liberal Studies major with an emphasis in food justice, sustainability, & small businesses. She works at the Grand Rapids Downtown Market on a grant program called Healthy Living for All, and is also a barista at Madcap Coffee. These outlets have allowed her to build relationships within the community. Selina is passionate about connecting with those outside her comfort zone to create sustainable community spaces.
With our interdisciplinary skills and goals in mind, we sought to partner with the Heartside Gleaning Initiative (HGI) in order to help this new non-profit become more sustainable in its work to combat the wicked problems surrounding food, diet, health, and environmental sustainability. The Heartside Gleaning Initiative is a Grand Rapids-based non-profit that collects unsold produce from the city’s two farmers markets and distributes it to low-income residents of the Heartside Neighborhood. The Gleaning Initiative is working to combat the wicked problems surrounding “the food desert” surrounding the Heartside Neighborhood.

Thus, our work with the HGI is focused predominantly on two vital aspects of any non-profit business, promotion and funding. We established three courses of action for this goal. Our first course of action was to create a comprehensive guide to crowdfunding for HGI, and hopefully an array of other nonprofits. Our second course of action was to develop a storyboard for a short promotional video for the HGI. Lastly, we wanted to contact local film professionals to aid the initiative in carrying through with the video. We initially hoped to complete the promotional video for the HGI ourselves, but with the time constraints of the academic semester, and our limited film capabilities, we determined these three courses of action to be the most practical and beneficial for the initiative. We believe that our work will provide value in both exposure for the Gleaning Initiative, and providing them with the tools to most efficiently utilize this exposure.

Cody Gallagher is a Liberal Studies major, with an emphasis in sustainable food production and small business management. He has worked at a variety of locally based food establishments in the community, such as Field and Fire Bakery, Uncommon Coffee Roasters, and Lyon Street Cafe.

Jonathan Neracher is a Liberal Studies Major with an emphasis in the Environment, Society and the Self. He currently spends his free time volunteering with various event greening efforts and is very passionate about getting others involved in environmental issues. Jonathan is committed to promoting a sustainable future and working to address the wicked problems associated with it.

Emily Miotke is a Liberal Studies major studying the ethical implications of our food choices. With a passion and commitment to animal liberation, the environment, and optimal health and wellbeing, her current focus is in plant-based diets. She deeply values speaking and learning about agricultural practices.

Kara Cook is a Political Science major with an emphasis in political thought. She is President of the Grand Valley College Democrats. This position has allowed her the opportunity to plan events and educate Grand Valley Students on critical environmental issues. Kara is passionate about community development and environmental policy.

Elliott Holzman is a Liberal Studies major with an emphasis in Sustainability and a minor in Environmental Studies. His intellectual areas of interest include educating people on healthy eating and creating healthy, sustainable lifestyles. His hobbies include weight training, hiking, and lounging in his hammock.