

Collaboration Project Design Exercise

This is a thought experiment in a project design for groups of two or three colleagues to work on together. The context is a hypothetical seminar for first-year students to introduce them to the joys of scholarly inquiry.

Choose the topic of the seminar from one of the following:

- Chicago's Lakefront--Forever Free and Open
- A Rat's Eyes view of Chicago (urban infrastructure)
- Pirates of Lake Michigan (contemporary local informal economy)
- Chicago's Emerging Entrepreneurs
- Greening the Lake Shore Campus
- Chicago's Arts & Performance Communities-New Wave or Backwater?
- Olympic Chicago (economics of mass events)
- My Old Chicago Farm (urban food production projects)
- Home and Homelessness in Chicago
- Language and Neighborhood in Chicago
- New Media in Chicago
- Underground Chicago (emerging sub-cultures)
- Chicago Water

Step 1. Your team should decide what course they will be teaching. Each will have his or her own section, but will collaborate with the other instructors in design the featured collaboration project. (If you do not find a course that fits the range of interests of your team, discover a topic that will. Disciplinary boundaries should be ignored.)

Step 2. Pose a problem in the form of an understandable question. The form of the question should be short, direct and firmly anchored in the here and now. The question can include a report form, such as "Write a white paper on ," "Prepare testimony on . . .," "Advise a decision-maker on whether . . .," etc., but the question itself is the key.

Step 3. Convince yourselves that the question is too large for a single person to answer. The problem should be approachable from a number of perspectives and vantage points. It should be open to experimentation.

Step 4. Have a discussion about how each of you might go about solving such a problem.

What sources of information would you attempt to find? The more variety in data sources, textual and human, the stronger the problem.

What are the differences between how an expert would solve the problem as opposed to a novice? The expert strategy is what you hope the students will eventually discover. How perverse is the problem?

Can you foresee points in the development of the understanding the problem where the problem itself will change?

Step 5. Be prepared to report on your team's choice of problem, if called upon to do so.