

Oct. 17, 2015,

*Hi everybody. Thanks for your provocative comments. Usually, I summarize the statements, respond, and then leave some quotations. However, this time I'll start with some quotations and then respond best I can.*

"I like how the class feel "improvised" yet there is a structure that always hold the components together."

"I can't believe I'm paying to take a class where I teach myself everything/most of what is going on. Class is not organized, you're trying to do too much, and I'm not getting skills to develop appropriate technologies that I could get on my own!"

"Favorite class I have taken at Cal Poly so far. I really enjoy debating/discussing/processing with the class as a whole."

"- A lot of articles suggest that development should start from gauging and addressing communities' needs. However, this class hasn't started with communities, it's starting with technology then trying to adapt it to a community (assuming a community needs this technology for a purpose....) Shouldn't this class start with forming a partnership with a community first, then assessing ideas for ways technology could help them meet their needs? CAN WE ADDRESS THIS IN CLASS?"

Implications that wealth isn't everything and who are we to tell someone else how to live. People should be allowed to develop at their own pace without us telling them how to live.

The class is unorganized. I don't understand the point of what we're doing. Where are the goals? Class could be taught much better – with organization and structure.

People enjoying the class, feeling they are learning a lot.

Frustration with the project. What are we supposed to do?

Excessive amounts of reading.

"I liked that the class is wide open. Structure is nice, but ain't nobody got a manual for helping developing nations."

"...Many times, I feel like there is no closure or 'right answer' and I'm sill trying to get used to that."

*In general there is a call to be more organized and provide structure. I'm sorry, I don't know how to do this; I don't know where we're going; I don't know how to solve the 'problem' of development; I don't even know if there is a problem; or if there is a problem, is it "us" or*

*“them” that needs to be “fixed”. So then what am I doing with this class? I think I’m opening a space for us to consider some things that are not given light in our usual daily quest for “success”. I’ve provided some thoughts and resources that I have found provocative, and am open to learn from you as well.*

*When I started the class in 2007 with several other faculty, I was pretty confident and knew what to do. Every year since then I learn more from my students, classes, research. Every year I am less confident and find myself less competent to “teach” this course. So, I keep this “space” open for addressing the world at large in the way we are doing it. And every year many students express that they have seen what they would not have otherwise seen.*

*I’m particularly grateful for the feedback that is critical, and in particular respect the position of the student asking that we not start with a technology when we don’t even know the community yet. My response to most of the criticisms and advice is “how would it look if I were to improve the class?” I’m interested to hear and learn.. and I’m willing to try something new. Two years ago, the students expressed that they were interested in something different from what was on the syllabus, so we changed direction somewhat.*

*Many students expressed frustration with the projects and not knowing what we’re supposed to do. In this regard, I am balancing two things:*

- 1) with more structure we will know what we’re doing and we will make more progress*
- 2) we don’t know what the right thing to do is. And when I say “we” don’t know, I mean that there is no definitive right or wrong. I have biases about what should and shouldn’t be done, and I likely express them to you. However, that doesn’t make me right.*

*For instance, one thing I really liked was that the biochar group enthusiastically jumped into promoting biochar, and then stepped back critically because there are arguments to be made that biochar is actually bad for a number of reasons.*

*I think it’s important to note for the projects – whatever your goal, it’s unlikely it’ll work out. We have a few weeks to take on a challenge that still exists after ~ 50 years of global effort to make things work. So why do we do it? In my opinion, we can look into a challenge and do our best, and meet some people, and pursue an idea and start some thought processes. Maybe we open some doors for future activity. Maybe we change something. Maybe we change ourselves. If we feel considerable frustration and failure, maybe this is a good introduction to development. Maybe there are better things we could be doing? I’m interested to hear other ideas.*

*Lastly, I understand that my commentary can be perceived as very negative and may leave a student discouraged. I am very sorry for this and don’t want to be this way.*