



OLD DOMINION  
UNIVERSITY

I D E A FUSION

*Wicked Problems in Public Administration:  
How I Changed Directions and You Can Too*



# Career snapshot



- Branch librarian, Virginia Beach Public Library
- Original catalog librarian, Michigan State University
- Science librarian, Collection Access Services, Old Dominion University
- Reader Services Chief, Joint Forces Staff College
- Chief Librarian, Joint Forces Staff College
- Adjunct faculty, School of Public Service, ODU

# Combining research skills and teaching interests



- So, why not go back to school at the age of 49!
- Instead of being a generalist, work toward being a specialist
- Refocus Department of Defense education experience into the broader public administration sector
- Pitch a course, and then another

# Totally unexpected consequences



- Two opportunities to lecture in Russia as a guest of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow
- Nishnii Novgorod, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Ekaterinburg
- Civic engagement, public art
- Oral history



# Background and Course Inspiration



- Exposure to “wicked problem” analysis at the operational level of war planning
- Personal experience:
  - Sea level rise: Land subsidence (depletion of aquifer) and rising sea levels
  - Plight of those experiencing homelessness
  - Very low turnout in local elections (10% or less)

# Sea level rise and ground subsidence



Backyard, pre-rain garden

# Briefly: Rittel and Webber



- “Planning problems – societal problems – are inherently different...” Ten distinguishing properties:
  - No definitive formulation; no stopping rule; solutions not true or false, but good or bad; no immediate/ultimate test of solution; every solution a “one-shot operation;” no set of potential solutions; each is essentially unique; symptom of another problem; discrepancies can be explained in multiple ways; planner has no right to be wrong.

# Briefly: Weber and Khademian



- Effective management includes the transfer, receipt, and integration of knowledge across participants (**This is what we do as information specialists!**)
- Unstructured: Consensus hard to achieve; unanticipated consequences; causes and effects hard to pinpoint
- Cross-cutting: Multiple perspectives & stakeholders, interdependence, politically/socially complex
- Relentless: No 'finish' line, no long-term solution

Weber, E.P. & Khademian, A.M. (2008). Wicked problems, knowledge challenges, and collaborative capacity builders in network settings. *Public Administration Review*, 68(2), 334-349.

# Course Organization: Modules 1 - 6



- Theory (two weeks)
- Sea Level Rise
- Disaster Planning
- Public Participation in Government
- Environmental Justice
- Homelessness, Affordable Housing, Poverty (two weeks)



# Affordable Housing, Norfolk, VA

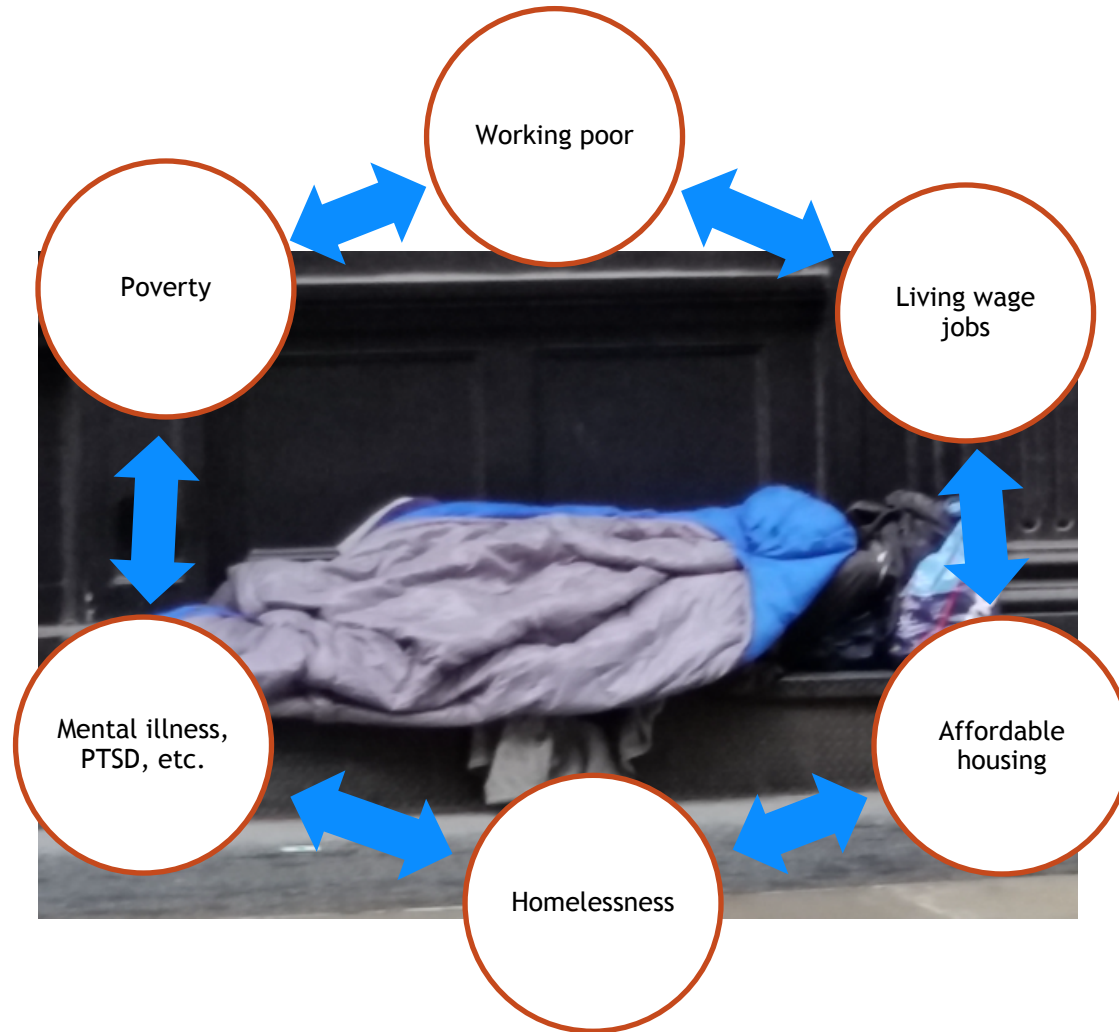


- Population: 246,000
- At or below poverty rate: 19%
- About 20,000 affordable housing units available

Source:

<https://www.norfolk.gov/DocumentCenter/View/30139>

# A Very Complex Problem



Sleeping on a stoop in New York City, 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue & 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, 2018

# Course Organization: Modules 7 - 11



- Immigration, Trafficking, Refugees
- Opioids, Methamphetamine
- Community Policing
- Mass Incarceration
- Food Insecurity, Food Deserts





# Introductions, Standards of Conduct



- First discussion board: Narrated introductions
- Experience with complex social problems
- Sector experience ; previous graduate degrees; undergraduate major
- Course expectations; topic sensitivity guidelines
- Setting the stage with gun control

# Recurring Assignments and Extra Credit



- Discussion boards - 11 total - 15% of grade
  - Hurricane Katrina
  - Sanctuary cities
  - OxyContin
- Reflective essays
  - Six, lowest grade dropped
  - 25% of grade
- Extra credit
  - <http://odu-gis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=b671f417edf146aba58210092aa06718> [bit.ly/resiliencemap)

# Mid-term exam and final project - 30% each



*Peck Iron and Metal Superfund Site, Portsmouth, Virginia. 33 acres bordering a tidal tributary, Paradise Creek. Elevated levels of lead, PCBs, arsenic.*

Mid-term exam: Fairly traditional, covering theory and the first five modules.

Final exam: Each student selects a wicked problem not covered during the semester and analyzes it (Cyber security, bullying, fast fashion, domestic terrorism)



# In Lieu of Expert Speakers



- Podcasts
- TED Talks
- Frontline (PBS) documentaries
- U.S. Government (EPA) case study (DVD) Spartanburg, SC citizen scientist
- Canadian Broadcasting Corporation documentary on opioids
- Instructor's narrated presentations



# Lessons Learned



- F2F discussion in class and discussion online are very different!
  - Time on topic; focus on one aspect of topic (online) vs. more wide-ranging in classroom; eloquence (or not) online; introvert-friendly online; deeper “dives” into topic
- Instructor presence in discussions
- Web links; YouTube

# Lessons Learned



- Library research and required readings; tailored LibGuide; wonderful partner librarian
- Instructor feedback to students: Reflections, discussion board posts, other graded assignments

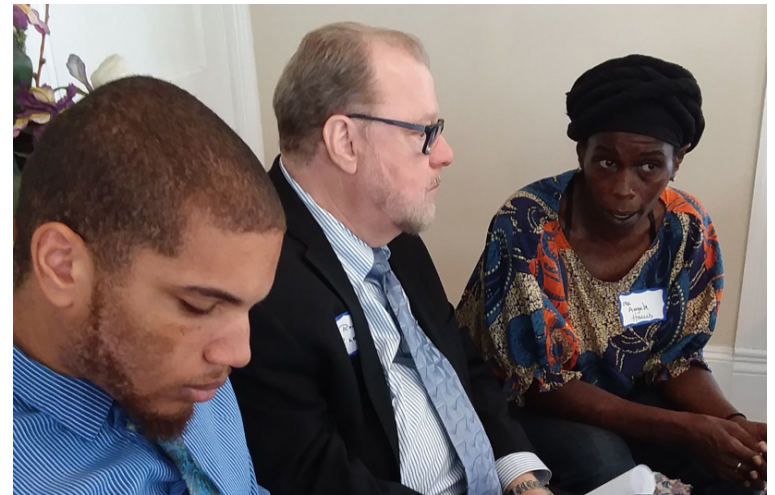


Habitat restoration,  
Norfolk, Virginia

# Summary



- Methodical, iterative
- Flexibility and spontaneity
- Discussion boards
- Student expertise varies
- Honest reactions (sad)



Grassroots  
environmental  
workshop, Newport  
News, VA

# Final thoughts



- Get out of your lane!
- Consider taking free courses that your agency offers.
- Stop being a resident of your community, be a real citizen.
  - It's not enough to vote in national elections
  - Volunteer, participate, get involved





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# Community Policing



- Officer Josh White, Community Resource Officer, Norfolk, Virginia:  
<https://www.13newsnow.com/article/news/local/mycity/norfolk/beyond-the-badge-norfolk-officer-connects-with-youth-through-video-games/291-573060056>

# Timeline for Course Production



## ■ Months 1 - 2:

- Pre-planning (faculty developer and instructional designer meet once or twice, discuss terminology, purpose of course)
- Frequent F2F meetings (bi-weekly)
- Course design analysis
  - Objectives
  - Assessment methods
  - Course outlines; copyright issues; graphics
- Build course prototype (first three modules - theory; sea-level rise; disaster planning)

# Timeline for Course Production



## ■ Months 3 - 6:

- Meetings (Every 3-4 weeks)
- Faculty developer continues module preparation
- Passes modules to instructional designer
- Designer analyzes & clarifies
- Designer & team build modules in Blackboard

# Timeline for Course Production



- Course Wrap-up: Month 7
  - One or two final meetings
  - Studio sessions to video lectures for each module
  - Faculty developer reviews materials, completes quality assurance, and signs off on course
  - Completion of instructor guide
  - Publish course to CMS (Blackboard)
  - Open course to students
  - Celebrate!!

# Instructional Design Partnership



- *Foundational Strategies for Effective Online Teaching* - a six-week course “suggested” for all new course developers at ODU
- Simulates an online learning community
- Weekly mini-tutorials
- Assignment of Instructional Designer (Dr. Kayla Jiang)
- Always focused on the six-month timeline (I did not meet the deadline)

# Design and Prototype



- This aspect was the most challenging
- Analysis of face-to-face course in detail and translation to online
- Development of course design matrix
- Linking course objectives to module objectives, activities, assessment methods
- Writing module overviews and summaries; developing rubrics
- Estimating student workload requirements
- Review, revision; quality assurance

# A Forbidden Word...and Bloom



- Why can't I use the word “*understand*?”
- Module objectives: Calculate, inventory, construct, categorize, formulate, design, differentiate, identify.
- Using Bloom's Taxonomy\*
  - **Analysis**: *Diagram* existing examples of environmental justice sites in [region].
  - **Synthesis**: *Construct* a notional *cross-sector/cross-boundary* team charged with reducing the impact of street flooding during “normal” rain events

\*The original taxonomy, 1956