Teaching Naked Is More Than a Game [A Review by Elizabeth Sutton for Teaching Naked: How Moving Technology Out of Your College Classroom Will Improve Student Learning, by José Antonio Bowen]

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Teaching Naked Is More Than a Game [A Review by Elizabeth Sutton for *Teaching Naked: How Moving Technology Out of Your College Classroom Will Improve Student Learning*, by José Antonio Bowen]

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José Antonio Bowen. *Teaching Naked: How Moving Technology Out of Your College Classroom Will Improve Student Learning.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012.

Reviewed by Elizabeth Sutton. "Teaching Naked Is More Than a Game"

1. The title of José Bowen's book, *Teaching Naked*, is meant to garner second looks. Indeed, his title follows a premise of his book: marketing matters. But selling a book is different from selling the value of an education. The latter is what Bowen suggests technology can help us do. Bowen does not want to eradicate technology from teaching. Far from it. He makes the case that technology should be used to enhance student engagement and should be used outside of class time so that classes can be focused on the face-to-face pedagogies that he identifies as the strength and market niche of traditional colleges and universities in a world of for-profit and online higher education products.

2. Broadly, Bowen identifies what he perceives to be an unalterable and inevitable truth: that higher education has become a product that we, as faculty and administrators, must refine to better advertise to and attract new consumers (i.e., students). He believes that "to add value and compete in the next centuries, universities will need to do much more than just deliver content: that will be done more efficiently and cheaply online. To provide the sorts of critical thinkers that employers, governments, and the public now insist on, universities need to rethink both the use of technology and the design of the liberal arts education."[1] Throughout the chapters Bowen outlines how technology should be used to enhance the traditional university's distinctive feature of face-to-face time.

3. This focus on technology in teaching builds on the current trend to "flip" the classroom by moving lectures and video content online and pursuing in-class discussion and active learning tasks. Indeed, Bowen sets out to convince the professor and administrator that technology is not only a useful tool, but that how it is used will be what distinguishes individual colleges and universities in an increasingly competitive market of higher education. Citing the Association of American Colleges and Universities essential learning outcomes, Bowen suggests that these outcomes are achieved through "interaction with faculty in small group situations" and that

technology used outside the classroom is what opens up class time for such meaningful faculty-student interactions.[2]

4. The book is organized into three parts. In the first part, "The New Digital Landscape," Bowen sets the stage in chapter one, "the Flat Classroom and Global Competition," by discussing the current state of higher education. He identifies four higher education models: free, elite, for-profit, and traditional-residential. Bowen believes the modes used to transmit information in the traditional-residential university classroom are outdated, given the proliferation of MOOCs and online degrees. Bowen identifies the skills participants learn playing online games and says that these are necessary in today's globalized world. These include systems thinking, sequential problem solving, lateral thinking, distributed knowledge, cross-functional teams, and production. Gaming, he says, is beneficial for students because it allows for customization, risk-taking, performance-before-competence, pleasant frustration, interaction, agency and identity, challenge and consolidation, and situated meaning, all on demand.[3] Providing an example from his own jazz history course, Bowen demonstrates how games can quiz students on basic content. (Here is a demonstration on youtube: **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqTFvvBgNMo**) He provides urls for other educational gaming sites to assist instructors interested in developing them for their own courses. As an art historian, I found these sites interesting, but not directly applicable. I would have to spend a lot of time customizing them.[4] It is worth noting that many textbooks (at least in introductory art history) now provide similar kinds of quizzing tools with their online textbook complements. Some publisher resources are better than others in that regard, but it is also significant that not all students are eager to engage with such online resources either. Bowen seems to assume that if the assignment is called a game and available on an ipad or smartphone, every student will play/engage with it.

5. Throughout the subsequent sections, Bowen builds on these ideas by promoting gaming as a model for customizing university offerings to contemporary student expectations and needs. In the second part, "Designing 21st-Century Courses," Bowen provides strategies for using technology for information delivery, engagement, and assessment. In addition to the syllabus and LMS (Learning Management System, an example of such a system is Blackboard), Bowen recommends using email, Twitter, and Facebook as motivational tools that can be used to ask questions of students outside of class, remind them, and prepare them for upcoming class discussions. It is probable that many faculty members already use elearning and email to put content online (especially content "happening in real time that is applicable to class") and to send out a reminder or prompt to prepare for discussion. While allowing "your students to spend more time connected to you…each other, and to your subject" is laudable in terms of engagement, using Twitter or Facebook outside of class to constantly check in and tweet news to students seems counter to developing an independent individual.[5] More problematic is the assumption that students *need* or even *want* this kind of professorial helicoptering. Such action denies a student's ability to manage her time—itself an important skill. Many faculty members already email or post on elearning links or notes on relevant issues in the news for students to review as they see fit. Connecting students to timely events and news through social media can be done

more generally at the departmental level. Students can choose to read these posts, just as they can choose to read assignments.

6. Part three, "Strategies for Universities in the Future," expands the ideas Bowen laid out in the first two parts for application on a university-wide scale. He suggests that interactive, online technologies used to engage students with course content outside of the classroom (part two) must align with core course objectives and, ultimately, a university's re-envisioned and redesigned identity and mission. He reiterates his premise of identifying how to create and market a university's particular kind of product in a globalized and internet-dominated era. A university must distinguish its product from its packaging. Not all universities can be the "spa cruise" model with high-end recreation centers and apartment complexes. Instead, universities need to focus on what they have to offer that is unique, experiential, local, and that can be hybridized with existing (worldwide) online courses. Faculty become curators in a flexible system where students can choose courses based on a matrix of experience and cost. He gives examples of various models for how university students of the future might pay for classes and credits.

7. Bowen provides a good balance of fact-based arguments assessing the current landscape of higher education and student engagement with potentially applicable ideas. Part two is most useful to the individual instructor in this regard. While some of his proposals seem preposterous (here's one example: he insists that note-taking is ineffective and should not be emphasized), his arguments for creating student-centered activities and focusing on face-to-face time are well-made. Still, while I am sure many faculty seek more strategies for engaging students, developing games is especially labor intensive, and we are well aware of how budgets, curricula, and course-based teaching assignments (i.e., the typical teaching load) limit our ability to provide these experiences. The benefits for students that Bowen identifies with gaming, such as low-stakes risk-taking, continuous feedback, and student agency, can be achieved with other methods, and indeed, are not new ideas for effective pedagogy. Peter Filene and Ken Bain, among others, already have noted the effectiveness of faculty that have high expectations, provide constant feedback, and make connections between the discipline and everyday life to engage students and enhance learning.[6] An internet search or visit to the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at UNI would quickly provide resources for such strategies to use in class. Bowen's contribution is to frame these well-known characteristics of engaged teaching and learning in gaming terms, and expand the principles of customization and flexibility to the university structure as a whole.

8. More promising, yet also more pragmatically difficult, are Bowen's ideas for institutional reform. Indeed, it is in this section where Bowen's strength as a former dean and current college president shine. In order to address any of the symptoms of student alienation and instructor ineffectiveness, the system itself needs to be changed, at the very least at the university level. Some of his ideas include: administrators promoting the scholarship of teaching and learning; providing innovation grants for course design and for faculty to redesign their teaching; offering flexible work contracts (recognizing that not all courses are alike); requiring the inclusion of

learning outcomes on every syllabus; requiring faculty to engage in evidence-based pedagogy; supporting teaching risks; changing the reward structure.[7] He proposes rethinking altogether the curricula and curricular review process, the units of learning (could there be modular courses, certificates for certain skills, badges?), and corresponding fee structures.[8] The funding models Bowen provides, such as learning-based pricing (guaranteed learning for a fixed price) or price discounting would be a challenge to implement, especially for a public institution.[9] All of his suggestions require nimbleness in the administrative structure we currently do not enjoy, in part because the administrative structure is bureaucratic.

9. To be sure, there are obstacles to both individual and institutional implementation of Bowen's ideas. Many of these were discussed by the group that convened to read *Teaching Naked* at UNI. Individually, we instructors would need more time to prep and plan than we currently have to give. We also need professional development both to learn how to implement student-centered strategies, and to educate us on how objectives and scaffolding in course and curricular design matter. Faculty also identified many bureaucratic and structural obstacles to implementing team teaching, curriculum changes, course re-design, and risk-taking in teaching, not least of which is the ever-present specter of enrollment. At the end of the day, every faculty member here knows that the bottom line has become the number of students enrolled in any given class. Finding room for releasing faculty for professional development, team teaching, experimental courses and the like is increasingly difficult under this pressure.

10. Clearly, Bowen's finger is on the pulse of contemporary issues in higher education, and he raises important and provocative questions that are worthy of consideration and discussion. At the same time, it is important to challenge the underlying premises of the problems he seeks to solve. I am uneasy about his assumptions about the inevitability of a capitalist-corporate university model, as well as the seemingly impoverished profile of dependent and unmotivated students who can't possibly be asked to *work* and *engage* without technology and games. As one participant in the UNI book discussion-group put it: "It feels as though he doesn't believe students will find value in some of the hard work that self-improvement requires…But all the time I have spent at UNI has taught me otherwise. I believe our students are more than willing to put in a lot of work, if you can demonstrate to them the value of those activities. If we trust them to behave like adults, and we explain to them the reasons for our educational choices, they will honor reasonable requests."

11. Perhaps we should be asking what, exactly, is causing the alienation, disengagement, anomie and retreat of our students into their phones and why some instructors also have disengaged. Bowen seems to think technology, specifically gaming, is the panacea for student alienation, instructor ineffectiveness, and ultimately, university student enrollment. Certainly technology can and should be used as a tool, but not a cure-all. "Teaching naked," as Bowen defines it, does not fully address the systemic, inherently alienating model of the consumerist, growth-only based economy of which we all are part. If we really want to get naked, we should strip down and examine ourselves in front of a mirror and ask not only what makes us distinctive in the market,

but what our purpose and responsibility is as a public institution. That reflection might engender real social and civic connections.

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[1] José Bowen, *Teaching Naked* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 21.

[2] Bowen, 21.

[3] Bowen, 59-61.

[4] Some institutions (Arizona State University, Barnard College) are focused on supporting game development, customizable software for it, and faculty training. See for example **https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/10/10/emerging-adaptive-software-puts-faculty-members-charge-course-creation**, and Barnard College's "Reacting to the Past" history simulation games, workshops, and publications **https://reacting.barnard.edu/** .

[5] Bowen, 138.

[6] Peter Filene, *The Joy of Teaching: A Practical Guide for New College Instructors* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), Ken Bain, *What the Best College Teachers Do* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[7] Bowen, 247-51.

[8] Bowen, 254-65.

[9] Bowen, 275-279.