



INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY, KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

PROFESSOR Michael Wesch

CLASS SIZE 200 in spring, 400 in fall (10 to 20 percent wait-listed)

CLASS EXPERIENCE How did the world end up the way it is today? It's a big question, but Dr. Wesch makes it tangible as students plan and play in a world simulation. The 200-level class is broken into groups of indigenous peoples and colonizers. They get bins of limited supplies and must trade for other items to make weapons, following rules they devise in advance. Colonizers typically get blowgun-like tools to launch marshmallow-tipped straws while indigenous peoples may only use rubber bands.

Jordan Thomas, who took the course in 2012 and is now a teaching assistant, felt the impact of being colonized and made to string marshmallows on rubber bands. When you get "taken over and are forced to sit around and assemble and manufacture a necklace for the entire hour, you engage in the emotions that come with that," he says, adding that this was

something he never would have gotten from a book.

Dr. Wesch started the simulations in 2004 after growing frustrated that most student questions were about grades and how much something was worth on a test. "Those are terrible questions," he says. "I realized I needed to change everything."

Yes, there is a final exam, but it's only one question: Why are you here? (He's expecting you to tell the 12,000-year history of mankind *and* what you plan to do for the planet.)

TAKEAWAY LESSON In the first session, Dr. Wesch points out that if the whole world were the 200 people in the room, 38 would be from China, 35 from India and 9 from the United States. "Three of you would be dying, and six would be pregnant. The child born in the U.S. will have 10 times the chance of surviving until his fifth birthday." There's enough food for 2,500 calories a day per person, he said, but 30 suffer from hunger. There's no easy explanation for this: That's the lesson of the course.