

# A WALK IN THE PARK? ENGAGING FIRST YEAR BIOLOGY STUDENTS THROUGH AUTONOMOUS AUTHENTIC RESEARCH EXPERIENCES AND PARTNERSHIPS WITH INDUSTRY.

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Students enrolled in first year Life and Evolution (Advanced) at The University of Sydney undertake a research project in partnership with industry (City of Sydney Council) at Sydney Park, Sydney. To date, the Council has limited information on invertebrate biodiversity at Sydney Park. This experience offers mutualistic benefits to both stakeholders. Students are exposed to an authentic experience in urban biodiversity research and the Council gains data on patterns on invertebrate diversity. Students propose their own research question, design their experiment, design sampling *in situ* and do all identification of invertebrates and data analyses. They are then formally assessed via a full scientific report. We suggest that this approach provides multiple beneficial outcomes which increase the authenticity of the experience and assessment. This experience enhances student autonomy by promoting self-driven motivation, ownership and engagement and deeper understanding of the subject material. They understand through experience the complexities and challenges of conducting biodiversity assessments in urban environments. It provides real-life authenticity through partnering with management practices of the Council and provides clear links between University assessments and real world management outcomes. The creation of graduates with workplace ready skillsets can begin in first year, but it's no walk in the park...

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