

MAKING SCIENCE RELEVANT: A FACULTY-WIDE INITIATIVE TOWARDS ENHANCING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE THROUGH AUTHENTIC LEARNING ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

Authentic learning describes an educational approach in which students are presented with problems of real-world relevance within an environment that mirrors professional practice (Herrington & Herrington, 2006). There is substantial evidence that authentic learning is a powerful tool with which to encourage deeper learning and improve learning outcomes (Newmann, Secada & Wehlage, 1995). Our project aims to improve student learning outcomes and engagement by embedding authentic learning practice into the curriculum across our large and diverse faculty. We are employing a hub and spoke model of project management: the project team forms the hub, with discipline participants as the spokes, firmly connected to the rim of school-based colleagues. We have devised checklists that allow evaluation of units or learning activities against the principles of authentic learning articulated by Herrington and Herrington (2006). To date, we have run two workshops with discipline participants, who have received peer feedback on teaching initiatives they will trial in semester 2, 2010. In addition, we have initiated a faculty-wide scan for examples of good practice in authentic learning. Outcomes of this project will include: broad dissemination of the concept of authentic learning; a web-based resource of exemplars of authentic learning activities; and increased engagement of our students.

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