PROMOTING TEAM WORK IN UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH PROJECTS

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KEYWORDS: Research, First Year, Biology

Group research experiences encourage problem-solving and critical-thinking. They foster independence by providing an experience where problem-solving is completed in a group, making a smoother transition to independent research.

Good practice in guiding undergraduate research projects includes explicit teaching of group-work and research skills. The use of self and peer-assessment can ensure that the group-work does not become a vehicle for ‘free-riders’, students who make minimal contribution to the project, yet are rewarded equally with their peers.

In a first year Biology topic, students in small groups investigate a cutting-edge field of molecular research, propose a hypothesis and design an experiment. Research is presented via a poster and an oral presentation. The majority of the project is carried out independently in small groups with minimal teaching support. Self and peer-assessment is used to encourage reflection and evaluation of the process.

To evaluate the student experience of the research project, a survey was administered at the conclusion. Students reported that the research project helped them to learn about the scientific method and develop communication skills required for group-work. Students further reported that the research project challenged them intellectually and gave them an understanding of what is required to undertake independent scientific research.

Proceedings of the Australian Conference on Science and Mathematics Education, The University of Sydney and University of Technology Sydney, 2 - 4 October 2019, page 99, ISBN Number 978-0-9871834-8-4