

PRACTICES EXCHANGE

NEWSLETTER

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Issue 4

Institutional Resources/Practices

Project Based Learning

At **Mercy College** in New York, Project Based Learning (PBL) is used in biology courses to engage students in science, promote deep learning, and help students acquire critical skills and perspectives. In June 2016 a group of seven Mercy College faculty attended the Project Based Learning Institute at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. This institute provided expertise on how to implement and assess PBL in a specific discipline. Mercy College faculty have since piloted PBL in various biology courses. In PBL there are a number of elements that come together to provide a transformational learning experience, including a focus on a challenging problem, sustained inquiry, authenticity, student voice and choice, and a public product.

In one PBL exercise students collaborated to design and execute a research project as a module in an upper level biology course. A critical aspect of this model was the use of a trained and capable peer learning assistant. Students were able to work on four separate complex projects with the help of the peer learning assistant. The valuable learning and acquisition of 21st century skills that occurs throughout the project is the key outcome, not the final results or data produced. In Cell Biology, a model of PBL was piloted in which student projects were focused on the current research efforts of the faculty. Student feedback has indicated that this model promotes interest in research and contributes to student confidence and the ability to pursue undergraduate research in other contexts. Survey data pointed to a common suggestion for the future, which was to allow considerably more time for students to execute projects. For further information, contact Anthony Canger, Associate Professor, Biology, acanger@mercy.edu.

First Year Travel-Learning Experience

In 2012, **Coker College** in South Carolina implemented a four-year plan called “Trans4mations,” a structured sequence of curricular and co-curricular experiences designed to progressively foster the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for personal and professional success. This fall the first year of the Trans4mation Program is expanding to include a three-day travel-learning experience in Washington, DC, involving all entering first year students, their instructors, sophomore assistants, and college staff.

First year seminar groups will be assigned to one of several themed experiences, material from which will be integrated into their classroom material upon their return. Examples include: *Make A Difference: The Sociological Impact of Giving* (focusing on the impact of philanthropy on society, and including volunteer work at the Sarah Bruce Youthwork House with homeless youth, as well as relevant exhibits in the National Museum of American History); *All About the Balance* (focusing on the three branches of government, with visits to the White House and the Supreme Court); *Read All About It* (focusing on the history of American Journalism, with visits to the National Archives and the Newseum); *In the Life* (focusing on multi-cultural

aspects of American life, including a tour of Howard University and visits to the National Museum of African American History and Culture and the National Museum of the American Indian); and *Finding Our Place in Intergalactic Space* (focusing on the emergence of cosmology and the study of the universe and its origins from the perspectives of both Old and New World cultures; visit sites will include the National Air and Space Museum, the Albert Einstein Planetarium, and the National Museum of the American Indian, at which the latest exhibition focuses on indigenous cosmologies and the spiritual relationship between humankind and the natural world).

The DC Experience was developed as part of Coker's strategic plan, with most of the costs integrated into the general operating budget, bolstered with donations from the Board of Trustees. For further information, contact: Joe Flaherty, Associate Professor of Biology and Director of Undergraduate Research. jflaherty@coker.edu.

Submissions for Future Issues

YWM members are encouraged to submit examples of practices and/or resources to share with your YWM colleagues. We are particularly interested in examples of teaching and learning strategies you have found to be effective in promoting student success. Send brief descriptions and any accompanying materials to Nia Chester, YWM Program Manager. niachester@gmail.com.