Introduction

Horticulture is an ‘art of science’. As such, it attracts people from a very wide background of personalities and therefore learning styles. The current generation of learner is inquisitive, technically savvy, and while being a team player is also confident enough to tackle the unknown alone with some ‘hand-holding’. How do we as instructors facilitate learning for these students?

In recent years, students in HORT 2372 ‘Greenhouse Vegetable Production’, have been asked to undertake a research project. This has been:• on a topic of the student’s choice• performed by an individual, or as a pair• completed in one semester or linked in with another HORT course from a previous semester• presented as a poster at a mini-conference

What do students learn?

Students clearly become familiar with the subject of their particular project topic. In addition, students learn a number of important skills, irrespective of their individual project topic, for instance:

• Keep the topic simple – investigate a single question
• Research is often fraught with problems to be solved – critical thinking skills and problem solving skills are developed
• Asking questions is part of the process – not knowing the answer is not a bad thing, its OK!
• Even if the results are not what was expected, there are always successful lessons that can be learned
• Therefore, each student can achieve success through their project, even if they learn that they do not want to do research.

What else happens?

There are a number of other important benefits:

• Students become ‘experts’ in their chosen subject area
• This makes them feel good, and they gain in confidence
• They rapidly gain respect for industry researchers and the “trials of trials”
• Students bond together through the challenges of working through problems and ‘talking things over’

So what?

One of the burning issues for all teachers is how to ‘get through’. How to make that connection with students and their learning. Plus, in a large institution, there is always a question of how Faculty can help make a connection between courses, ideas and concepts across a program – joining up the dots to avoid ‘in-the-box’ course thinking. I believe that such research projects given a public setting such as the Poster Conference, can help students identify issues, instill motivation and provide a forum for success. In addition, it provides a natural setting for Faculty to reach out to each other and support colleague’s teaching.

Over to you

What’s next! Have a go! Identify some possible areas for your students to work on and encourage them to develop their own projects. You will have lots of work to do, but you will equally be rewarded watching people learn through their own efforts.

Useful stuff


Purrington, Colin. (2006) “PowerPoint Template for Scientific Posters.” Department of Biology, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. cpurrin1@swarthmore.edu

Thanks to…

Thank you to all those students who have so enthusiastically undertaken their research projects in HORT 2372. Their enquiring minds and challenging questions have enlightened all of us and re-educated all of our life-long learning. Thanks too to colleagues at Kwantlen who in turn have supported all those students in undertaking these projects.

Got Questions?

Contact Gary Jones at 604 599 331 lor for further information.