

Research Days: connecting research with teaching

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Background

- Sears & Wood (BEEJ 5.4) - general perception that Teaching & Research are linked in BioSciences.
- More generally – Jenkins et al (2007) “teaching-research nexus” central to HE.
- Problem is "How?"
- “Effective teaching research links are not automatic and have to be constructed” (Jenkins et al, 2007)

Background

- Sears and Wood and Jenkins et al describe many case studies.
- Our approach - a small contribution to that linkage
- But one that has proved popular and beneficial for staff and students

Background

- BEB small group (n = 7) in a large school (BCHS) with other priorities.
- But, BEB are active researchers
- Very successful MSc programmes (>20 years) – recruitment by word of mouth
- BEB are innovative in L&T – driven by resources and desire to improve student experience

Background

- MSc project includes a critique of research talk.
- Difficult for some students to attend external conferences
- Final year Conservation and Biodiversity unit shares lectures with MSc students
- 2005 introduced research day to satisfy 3 main needs in an efficient manner.

Aims

1. Provide local research meeting for MSc students.
2. Allow students to see what we do in our research.
3. Provide a novel UG assessment possibility.
4. *Build links outside of BEB (attendees and speakers) - open meetings*

First meeting Autumn 2005

Dr Henry McGhie, University of Manchester
Research and university museums- what, why and for whom?

Dr Dave Roberts, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
What have biological collections done for us? Their role in conservation assessments.

Dr Alan Fielding, MMU
Complex effects of habitat loss for large predators.

Dr Matthew Sullivan, MMU
Predicting extinction risk: new priorities and approaches.

Assessment opportunities

- MSc: a source for their critiques.
- BSc: write abstracts following the rigid format from “Bird Study”
- “Less than 300 words. First sentence (capsule) should encapsulate the essence of the paper, then four short paragraphs, headed: Aims, Methods, Results and Conclusion.”

Evaluation

- Very positive from students (BSc & MSc) and external attendees.
- Highlighted by students as a high quality feature of the unit.
- Assessment provides robust link between research and teaching.
- Decided to continue and expand to Animal Behaviour Unit (also joint lectures)

Autumn 2006

Dr John Bailey : University of Leicester - Invasion of the Killer Knotweeds?

Dr Matthew Walker : University of York - The Population Biology Network

Professor Anne Magurran : University of St Andrews - Biology and Behaviour of the Trinidadian Guppy

Dr Koos Vijverberg: NIOO-KNAW Centre for Limnology, Nieuwersluis - Comparative food web studies in nine Ethiopian Lakes in relation to temperature and productivity

Katherine Causer (ex-MMMU MSc) : Ecological Appraisal Team Leader, Environment Agency - An interdisciplinary approach to scientific research

Spring 2007

Dr Alison Fletcher : University of Chester - Behavioural development in gorillas.

Anne-Marie Houghton : MMU - Context-dependent social behaviour of sanctuary chimpanzees.

Gary Griffin (ex MMU MSc) : Wi Life Sciences Ltd - Social ethics and animal welfare.

Dr Emma Shaw : MMU - Impact of pesticides on spider behaviour.

Dr Steven Ramm : University of Liverpool - Sperm competition and its evolutionary consequences in rodents.

Dr Michael Thom : University of Liverpool - Mate choice and genetic heterozygosity in rodents.

The future

- Meetings getting larger (programme and audience, typically 70+)
- All presentations (from 2005) available on VLE – a growing teaching resource
- Feedback continues to be very positive
- Better attended than Faculty Research Meetings!
- School Research Committee recommended other groups to adopt this approach.