



Linking Teaching with Research in the Disciplines

Case studies for Departments and Subject Groups

Origin: publishing undergraduate student research in an extra-curricula house journal

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Classification Category:

- Departmental organisation and resources other than staffing
 - Departmental culture
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What does the department do?

The Department of Biological Sciences operates an undergraduate journal, called Origin, to publish research work completed by students. Origin was devised to offer a genuine experience of research publication to students in response to a perceived need as a significant proportion of students go on to further discipline-specific study or research when their degree is completed. Publication does not accrue academic credit. The benefits of publication to the student are considered to be the genuine experience of completing the full research cycle and the end product, a professionally produced article, which student authors can include with their curriculum vitae. Feedback from student authors also indicates that they gain a great deal of personal satisfaction and learn a great deal about scientific writing and the research and publication process.

Although Origin is extra-curricula, it has been developed within the context of the undergraduate curriculum. Links have been explicitly created to a number of research-based or experiential modules. These aim to both promote the potential for students to publish their work and also to avoid conflicting expectations between the delivered curriculum and publication in Origin. For example, the handbook developed for the level 3, dissertation module carries information about Origin and explains the timetable for publication in relation to the delivery of the module. At level 2, a team-based inquiry module has adopted the instructions for authors developed for Origin and current links are being forged to improve the connectivity of Origin with the level 2 double module work-based learning.

Origin was developed in 2001 with funding from a LTSN Bioscience Teaching Development Grant. Financial support has also been obtained from other sources but has never covered the costs of staff time: these costs are borne by the Department. The current success and the continuing development of Origin are in large part due to the administrative infrastructure put into place for its delivery. An editor oversees the process and is given time to undertake the task. Administrative support is provided to maintain the database, field email enquiries and to support the editor, for example, by co-ordinating the flow of information to students, supervisors, reviewers and others. All other staff

involvement is monitored informally by an annual evaluation and has rarely exceeded 4 hours per individual per year. Reviewers are invited on a one-to-one basis to ensure that all the manuscripts are considered by someone with appropriate subject-specific expertise. All staff and postgraduate students are invited to contribute to the process by editing, supporting students, attending meetings. To date, all staff have been willing to contribute their time and expertise to the journal. Origin sends an annual report to the Biological Sciences staff meeting and there is a genuine sense of Departmental ownership of the journal and pride in its development and delivery. There is an Origin notice board in the Biological Sciences department to maintain student interest in Origin and other extra-curricula research-related activities. The editor maintains a website on the Chester College internet site to publicise the journal and publish abstracts. The journal has a full ISSN number and is available from the British libraries. On campus, Origin is available for Chester students to view and use in the journals section of the College library. Copies are available at cost price.

Hot tips and things to look out for:

- Have a clear rationale for delivering a student journal and keep telling people what it is.
 - Ensure the wholehearted support of all staff and managers.
 - Debate openly the mechanism of delivery.
 - Explore carefully and resolve any issues of IPR.
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Does it work?

Student journals can be extremely effective ways of learning for students: both for students who write for the journal and for students who read them. They can improve the curriculum by encouraging a research-focus and may improve the coherence of the approach to research-based assessment across modules.

They require effective organisation and delivery and a clear focus.

What problems/issues have arisen?

None yet.

Relevant references (to published articles / web sites by you or others that describe this way of organising the department)

The ORIGIN website:

<http://www.chester.ac.uk/origin/>

LTSN Bioscience Bulletin 7 Autumn 2002

<ftp://bio.ltsn.ac.uk/newsletters/ltsn7p12.pdf>
