Mentored Research at a Community College

PVCC’s Science Capstone Course

Piedmont Virginia Community College
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Why Mentored Research?

“Undergraduate students who participate in hands-on research are more likely to pursue advanced degrees and careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields…”

-- National Science Foundation

A Community College’s Challenge

Mentored research with constraints on:
• Faculty time
• Funding
• Physical space
• Curricular space
• Student preparedness

PVCC’s Science 299 Capstone Course

• Graduation requirement for A.S. in Physical & Natural Sciences at PVCC
• Students choose discipline (biology, chemistry, geology, physics)
• Students plan and conduct an original research project during one semester of their second year (2 credits) with guidance from faculty in chosen discipline
• Students gain professional skills and expand scientific skills

Administrative Structure

• One faculty member carries teaching credit for the combined Science 299 course each semester and facilitates group instruction and discussion (faculty drops one lab section)
• All full-time science faculty members are available to mentor 1-3 students a semester in their discipline
• Faculty members receive one credit of tuition per student mentored ($154 in 2019-20)
• Lab managers receive one credit of tuition per student mentored

Semester Structure

Seven meetings for all students completing course. Topics covered:
• Proposal development
• Laboratory safety
• Experimental planning
• Progress reports/updates
• Data analysis
• Poster construction

Students encouraged to build on lab activities from intro courses, on prior student projects

Poster Presentations

Figure 1. Campus-wide Poster Session 2019

Table 1. Markers of Success for Capstone Course Completers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Success Markers (2012-2015)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Success in Capstone Course (C or better)</td>
<td>82 %</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capstone students who graduate</td>
<td>76 %</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates who transfer to 4 yr school</td>
<td>73 %</td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total who transfer (includes graduates and non-graduates)</td>
<td>84 %</td>
<td>41</td>
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Figure 2. Spring 2019 cohort: 26 students plus faculty attend first group meeting

Figure 3: Left: Student conducts biology lab work during semester in biology prep room. Right: Student with physics project (bicycle water pump), delivered to local middle school garden

Figure 4. Poster session builds confidence and creates community

Figure 5. Increase in feelings of belonging to community of science in 2019 Capstone students (pre n=24, post n=21)

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