

LABS DON'T HAVE TO BE WET

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It is difficult in large non-majors biology courses to stimulate discussion and debate, yet today there are so many issues open to debate. My attempt to expose students to some of these issues is to devote a lab session to bioethical issues. This is accomplished with a poster session. Midway through the semester the students form groups of two to four students. The group picks an article from *Due Consideration, Controversy in the Age of Medical Miracles*, by Arthur Caplan. There are fifteen articles from which to choose. In each lab section, each group must have a different article. The articles deal with bioethical issues that have been in the popular press such as genetically altered food, celebrities and transplants, cloning, olestra, infertile men, AIDS vaccine, sperm from the dead, comatose patients that have been raped, and abandoned embryos.

The group assigns members to take sides on the issue. For the next three weeks they research the issue. They may use the internet or popular press articles. They then design a poster that contains an abstract of the issue, the reasons to favor the issue, the sides against the issue, and their opinion, as a group, on the issue. One lab session is used for oral presentations of the posters and class debate on the issues.

I use a 30 point grading system. Fifteen points are for the poster appearance, five points for the presentation of pros and cons, five points for the oral presentation and stimulation of classroom discussion, and five points for peer assessment.

Many students rate the poster session as their favorite and most educational lab session for the semester. The lab instructors say they learn a lot from the poster sessions.

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