Expected Outcomes:

- Increase research experience
- Practical experience implementing the scientific method.
- Gain an appreciation for what graduate research expectations are.
- Have the opportunity to attend a professional meeting

Related typical general education outcomes:

2 Analytical and Critical Reading
7 Written Communication
11 Scientific Literacy

Assessment methods

Method:
- Student and faculty evaluation on Special Problems (FISH 4960)
- Faculty who taught Special Problems provided informal feedback to the curriculum committee chair
- Students were asked to fill a questionnaire containing the following questions:
  1. You took special problems as: undergraduate, MS, or PhD
  2. Did you find special problems a useful course? (scored as 5= extremely useful; 1= not useful at all)
  3. What was the main learning outcome of the course?
  4. Did the course satisfy your expectations? (scored as 5, it totally did; 1, not at all)
  5. Was your professor engaged in your learning experience? Yes/No
  6. Do you think special problems was a good complement to regular courses? (5, excellent complement; 1, did not make a difference)
  7. Please, provide us with any comments that would help us to improve the quality of our courses (not just Special Problems) and programs.

Findings:

Four undergraduates took a Special Problems class during the academic year 2011/2012. The four faculty members offering these classes felt that Special Problems were a positive learning experience for students as well as the faculty. By working closely with a professor in a research environment, undergraduate students soon realized the complexity involved in conducting biological research and the attention to detail needed. The undergraduate students got a feeling for what being a graduate student would be and after taking Special Problems they were better prepared to decide if they wanted (or not) to pursue a graduate degree in Fisheries or related fields. The students found that a Special Problems class gave them the opportunity for practical application of the classroom knowledge. All the students found Special Problems to be extremely useful.

How did you use findings for improvement?

Several students mentioned the value of the Mentor relationship established through a special problems class and wished for more opportunities for such classes. Results of the survey will be made available to the Departmental curriculum committee for discussion as how more Special Problems opportunities can be made available to our students. Since Special Problems courses are not subjected to formal student evaluations we don’t have a common method to assess these courses. We plan to develop a normalized evaluation form for Special Problems.
that the students as well as the instructor will complete at the end of the course.

Additional comments:

None