

Web-based case studies help students develop career skills

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This is a small pondless water feature design. Photo by M. D. Vaden of Oregon

A survey of employers in the landscape industry revealed the importance of arming landscaping and horticulture students with technical knowledge, practical application, and problem-solving skills. Teaching students the skills necessary to solve complex landscape management decisions is crucial to their career success.

With the rapid advancement of technology over the past two decades, tools are now available to present students with virtual case studies via the Internet. These case studies contain a variety of components, including scripts, photographs, web page links, audio, and video. The purpose of these studies is to give students practical experience in solving many different scenarios, integrating their understanding of plant

science, environmental and physical site constraints, and the human impact on built and natural landscapes.

In an article published in the July-September 2008 issue of *HortTechnology*, authors Ann Marie VanDerZanden, David Sandrock, and David Kopsell presented the results of their study that measured student attitudes and perceptions of online learning case studies. Students at three universities (Iowa State University, Oregon State University, and the University of Wisconsin-Platteville) completed an assignment that involved summarizing information about a scenario, diagnosing a problem, and making a recommendation to the homeowner on how best to manage the situation.

After completing the scenario, students were asked to complete a 20-question survey evaluating the case study. Overall, students reacted positively, saying that they felt comfortable using the web-based format. "They felt it was an effective way to deliver information," researchers said.

While there was a significant investment of time and money in developing this case study, the framework is now in place and additional problem-solving scenarios are being created. As a result of the positive response by students, these case-study scenarios will be used in future courses.

The complete study and abstract are available on the ASHS HortTechnology electronic journal web site:
horttech.ashspublications.org/...nt/abstract/18/3/520 .

Source: American Society for Horticultural Science

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