

Rigour or rigor mortis: a challenge for physiology

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The education sector is in ongoing turmoil with debates around the “difficulty” of the proposed national curriculum in maths and science with potential flow-on effects to the tertiary sector. Physiology as an independent discipline is also under ongoing threat, often seen as primarily service teaching for medicine related courses. Together with the massification of the tertiary sector and fiscal pressures, does this lead to dilution and less rigorous teaching in physiology? The mantra of multidisciplinary is also a potential threat in that it may encourage a shallower-broader educational approach rather than directing disciplinary depth. Is physiology just too hard for the “average” science student? Or do the current methods of physiology delivery simply fail to engage and excite the students to strive for academic excellence through an inherent curiosity about how the body works? In response to the 2003 BIO2010 report on undergraduate biology curriculum, Dee Silverthorn issued a “call to action” to restore physiology to its true place in the science curriculum as “the integrative discipline in biology”. Since then, there has been an increasing recognition within the physiology family of these issues. Our challenge is to capitalize on the forward movement in this area and enact this essential change. We need to build critical mass to reinvigorate the physiology curriculum in a way that recognizes and contextualizes prior knowledge and challenges students to actively participate in the learning around the fundamental concepts that are the foundations of modern physiology. Encouragement, tangible support, teamwork and academic output and recognition are key enablers that will place physiology in the centre of biomedical curriculum of the future.

Committee on Undergraduate Biology Education to Prepare Research Scientists for the 21st Century. BIO 2010: Transforming Undergraduate Education for Future Research Biologists. Washington DC: National Academy Press, 2003.

Silverthorn DU. (2003) Restoring physiology to the undergraduate biology curriculum: a call for action. *Advances in Physiology Education* **27**: 91-6.