

Uncovering the Past: Using Human Demography to Promote Civic Engagement

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Cemeteries are excellent places to study human demography. For decades introductory ecology labs have taken students to the local cemetery to collect data, learn about survivorship curves and look for trends in our history. This lab works, it is investigative and can be done in all weather conditions but it also has the potential to do so much more. By foregoing the manicured lawns and rolling hills of the prestigious historical landmark cemetery we normally use for a forgotten plot of land on the other side of the city, our lab on demography allowed them to literally uncover history and transformed into a discussion of community succession and human segregation. As universities are focusing more and more on engaging with their local communities, the cemetery lab can be a way to connect your science students to the world around them in a very real and tangible way.

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