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The Association of American Colleges and Universities Selects Brownfield Action as a Model Course

New York, June 20, 2003. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) has selected *Brownfield Action* and its curriculum as one of its four SENCER models for 2003. The SENCER models are defined as a “course or program [that] teaches science that is both challenging and rigorous.” The SENCER, Science Education for New Civic Engagements and Responsibilities, program is an NSF-funded major activity of the AACU.

Brownfield Action is an interactive simulation developed with Professor Peter Bower for use in his course “Introduction to Environmental Science” at Barnard College. The simulation and Dr. Bower’s curriculum will become a national model that will benefit other science educators over the next five years.

Brownfield Action was first deployed in the fall of 1999. A major revision based on evaluation results was completed in time for the fall 2000 semester. The simulation enables students to conduct investigations of a suspected contaminated land site. The interactive study space captures much of the experience of an actual field investigation, including citizen interviews, financial constraints, and use of investigative and data-collecting tools. Students, working in pairs, assume the roles of environmental consulting companies and research the site to determine the presence, extent, and probable cause of any contamination. According to Dr. Bower, the *Brownfield Action* curriculum allows students to retain ideas, concepts, and information more efficiently than traditional textbook methods, resulting in more authentic student reports. Moreover, the inquiry-based approach of *Brownfield Action* challenges students to integrate different forms of knowledge from the fields of geology, chemistry, physics, biology, history, civics, and law; at the end of the semester, Dr. Bower’s students have an increased appreciation of the complexity of real-world environmental problems.

For more information on *Brownfield Action*, visit <http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/services/showcase/bfa.html>. Information on the SENCER program can be found at <http://www.aacu.org/SENCER/>.

About CCNMTL

CCNMTL (Columbia Center for New Media Teaching and Learning) is a service of Columbia University whose goal is to enhance teaching and learning through the purposeful use of new media. We form partnerships with faculty, providing them with as much support as they need in everything from the construction of course Web sites to the development of more advanced projects. CCNMTL is committed to remaining a leader in its field, engaging with its faculty partners in the reinvention of education for the digital age.