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Getting Your Hands Dirty in Linear Algebra.

I freely admit it: my worst grade in college was in linear algebra. This was probably because I did not understand what the numbers meant. I think that if I had been able to "get my hands dirty" by working on the applications of linear algebra, I would have connected more to the subject. I now know that my students have the same frustration.

To help the students get their hands dirty, they complete application projects and we hold a poster session. We invite the entire science division, and the students in the class must also peer review each other's posters. In this way, the students do not work on the applications in isolation, yet we do not have to take up class time with presentations.

The students say that the application poster session is the best part of the class, because it answers the questions, "How will I ever use this?" and "What does it all mean?" I like the poster session because the students take ownership of the subject, and they talk about mathematics to a general audience. I will talk about the structure of the project, how the students choose their applications, what the students are required to do, and how the poster session is organized and administered. (Received September 15, 2008)