

Activity 2.3



Research effective implementation

Research the origins, development and implementation issues associated with an 'innovative new course' at your university. This may give you insight into some of the issues to think about and consider if you are planning to implement a new course.

Look at this example and identify your research questions.

Environmental Awareness and Training at UCT

The International Relations Office of the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, South Africa, sourced funding for an environmental innovation from Danced through the South[ern] African Consortium of Universities on Development and Environment (SACUDE). In 2000 the funding was used to appoint a co-ordinator against a post-doctoral fellowship. This person has been responsible for the development of a cross-disciplinary course called Environmental Awareness and Training for first-year students. Students from any faculty can choose to do the course for some of their first-year credits. Staff from a range of departments teach on the course, which offers, among others, modules in:

- Environmental Law
- Environmental Education
- Biodiversity Conservation (from Botany and Zoology)
- Environmental Physics
- Environmental Chemistry
- Earth Sciences
- Geography (includes a component on Environmental Impact Assessments).

The course has had many positive spin-offs. Many students seem to be highly motivated by it. They are interested in forming an environmental club on campus, volunteer for environmental outreach programmes, and choose to study further in the environmental field.

On the down side, the course has been criticised by some staff in the Science Faculty



for lacking academic rigour, and the environmental programme for being a 'soft option' compared to other science courses. Some also complain about having increased teaching loads. Others pointed out that academic rigour is not necessarily defined as continuing to teach the same body of knowledge that has been taught for decades. This is particularly so in the sciences, where knowledge is regarded as contingent on the continuous advancement of our understanding of the world (the basis of the scientific method). Having to teach on the environmental course can also provide lecturers with a new angle and substance to what they teach in other courses.

A more serious concern with the innovative EAT course is that the number of credits it carries fall short of the number of credits students can get for the other options they can choose in their first year. This puts students who choose the EAT course at a disadvantage, as they now need to find a "filler" course of the right number of credits, which many not be relevant to their study paths. This design issue will need attention, highlighting the fact that no matter how innovative an environment and sustainability programme may be, it serves its own purpose best if it fits with the university structure and provides students with a credible education.

