

Curriculum Development Awards Winner 2018

Research & Practical Category

Research & Practical Category Winners: Yvonne Ryan & Seán Collins, University of Limerick

Course: Module ER4407: Environmental Management 1 as part of LM066 BSc. Environmental Science Hons. University of Limerick

Project overview

Integration of University of Limerick Smarter Travel (ULST) into a third year Environmental Management module. As module leader, Yvonne Ryan invited Seán Collins (ULST) to deliver a seminar on implementation of ULST. Yvonne felt that the implementation of the ULST reflected a number of environmental management best practice qualities and wanted the students to benefit from the experience of real life practice. Together they chose an afternoon session and location that would allow students to participate openly and allowed time for discussion and input. The resultant project work was graded as part of the module assessment and students were encouraged and facilitated to provide feedback to the module lecturer and ULST. As part of the module assessment the students developed a management plan for a sustainable campus. A key component of this included developing a travel plan to include relevant legislation, policies, and reflective experience.

Description & implementation of Smarter Travel curriculum project

Environmental Management 1 module aims to equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills to develop, implement and maintain environmental management systems. This is a key module for students of the BSc Hons Environmental Science Degree as it is delivered in the semester before the students embark on their 9 month co-operative work placement. The module is also open to international students and this year 3 study abroad students participated. Yvonne explains that all aspects of environmental management are included in the module “we consider not only environmental and health impacts, but also drivers and pressures that lead to these impacts. The students also explore policy responses to drivers, pressures and impact, as well as how these are implemented. The ULST programme is a prime example of this approach and as module lead I was anxious for the students to see a real-life working example that has direct impact in the student’s immediate community”. Yvonne is a long serving member of the UL Environmental Committee and UL Green-Campus Committee; she believes that student involvement and empowerment are crucial towards fostering sustainable environmental protection “a third level campus can function as a mini-city with stakeholders (staff and students), governing authority and democratically elected representatives (students and workers unions). The campus can, within reason; develop policy, infrastructural and training responses to a myriad of environmental and health related challenges”.

In designing the inclusion of ULST in the module, one of the first steps Yvonne took was to meet with Seán Collins. They discussed the module content, learning outcomes and assessment. They defined the key aspects of the ULST initiative that would be of most impact and interest for students. Once they had established these, Yvonne prepared the learning environment, by choosing an appropriate venue and time. Informing the students in advance and pointing them toward preparatory reading and policies meant that the students engaged with the subject matter before Seán spoke to them. It meant that key concepts did not have to be outlined and he could focus on the initiatives and impacts, thereby providing a management perspective on implementation. Seán started with planning for Smarter Travel – consultative phases, design and baseline data collection. He then outlined the various actions, initiatives, travel planning as well as supportive events such as awareness raising and promotion. The students could clearly identify how these steps aligned with the “plan, do, check, act” model of environmental management. A group discussion then ensued with relevant observations and questions coming from the students. The students then completed their assignment work on developing a sustainability plan for a third level campus. The assignments were graded and the students received detailed feedback on their work and encouraged to share their observations with the Buildings and Estates Department to further assist in the development of the Green-Campus and Smarter Travel Programmes. Finally, third level students benefit through learning from real life practitioners. They gain privileged insight into the processes and practice. By learning from a seasoned practitioner the students can then envision themselves fulfilling that role when they enter the workforce. Currently the students are on co-operative work placement. Yvonne has included a question on the student’s involvement in travel and transport management as part of the duties undertaken on the student work placement survey. The involvement of Seán Collins and the ULST programme gave the students a personal connection with the ULST programme. Many students contacted Seán with questions, observations and recommendations. The students now have a list of potential actions arising from the ULST that they can bring with them to their current work placements and indeed to their future workplaces, thus perpetuating and enhancing the Smarter Travel message and actions. Next semester the students will undertake a module on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Smarter Travel is a key component of travel plans developed as part of EIAs and have been referred to in numerous recent EIA submissions.

Results of project

28 students submitted completed the assignment. All of the students engaged with the Smarter Travel Programme through (a) the seminar, led by Seán Collins, (b) the information pack and presentations made available to students online (c) through the assignment, in developing a management plan students had to develop a deep understanding of Smarter Travel. As the class are predominantly Environmental Science undergraduates, their awareness levels are already high. In addition, from Yvonne’s observations of the class a number of them were engaged in active travel and from observations at Friday lectures, a proportion of them use public transport to travel home at weekends. For Yvonne the key to the success of this project, for the students, was a realisation of the challenges, opportunities and management strategies that must be employed to deliver behaviour change on a mass scale. Students are often shown case studies or theoretical models without the opportunity to interview a practitioner or live the intervention first hand. In this respect

Smarter Travel has provided students with a tangible experience which they could interpret, dissect and explore. Currently the students are on work placement with a number of well-known pharmaceutical, energy supply and technology companies, some of whom are participants in the Smarter Travel Workplaces Programmes. For example, ESB Network employees were winners in the Smarter Travel Marchathon 2017. We have students on work placement who now understand the importance and basis of these initiatives and are sure to be willing participants and advocates. A number of students are working in large pharmaceutical plants that have committed to undertaking travel plans as part of their planning applications.

Benefits & Challenges

- The Smarter Travel programme is very strong and visible on campus. The students got to appreciate the management science behind the public awareness campaigns.
- The level of coordination that Smarter Travel requires became visible to the students. As a learning exercise the students now view ST as a programme that doesn't just happen, it requires resourcing, planning and implementation.
- Meeting Seán and seeing what his job entails and requires inspires students to see mobility and travel management as potential career options. I would hope that some of these students would pursue further training or research in this field.
- The experience has prepared students for environmental management roles, and in particular has prepared them for their co-operative work placement experience.
- Yvonne tweeted the seminar from her personal Twitter account, which was then retweeted by UL and the Department of Chemical Sciences. This opened up conversations around travel choices in the department and she was able to relate many of the lessons she learned from Seán to friends and co-workers
- The standard of the research and analysis provided by the students was of very high quality and Yvonne would like to showcase their work in a more visible way. Next time she will host a student feedback seminar where the students present the findings of their research back to buildings and estates and ULST management.

Future plans

Yvonne plans to run this project again as part of the curriculum. She has plans to further develop curriculum links with Smarter Travel and her teaching responsibilities. When the students return from work placement there are a further 2 modules which will be considered– Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Management 2. Both courses have a focus on travel plan development, urban form, spatial planning and policy development. Seán and Yvonne agreed that the output and interest from the student body more than justified the time investment. Developing cross departmental, multidisciplinary links is also a key focus on learning and development on campus and with that in mind they will collaborate further.



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