# Respondent 15 Interview Summary

Field of Research: Ecology

## Question 1 (1, 8, 9,7,

* Yes
* Struggle to get UG student numbers in the program
* Done understand the importance of plants
* Lack of awareness of the career opportunities with regards to doing a degree in PS
* Lack of awareness about how the study of PS links to other fields of interest such as entomology or microbiology
* They have seen that despite their students saying they have a heightened degree of awareness to the importance of plants after their first-year class, it isn’t enough to keep them in PS and they all continue to study other degrees such as biochemistry or microbiology

## Question 2 (1, 12

* Yes, it is an ongoing problem
* In first year, course they have a lot of students, they tend to take botany and zoology as the general basis class because they can’t take the specialist classes they are interested in yet like biochemistry or entomology
* Their BOT course in firs year is compulsory for a biological science degree
* When it comes to second and third year then there are substantially less students and most years they do fall short of their targets

## Question 3 (3, 4, 11, 9, 15

* Both, we need to hit the sweet spot in the middle
* There needs to be a good enough overview that students have a good idea where they can go with this but also a degree of depth to make sure that you don’t just gloss over everything
* Try to touch on the main topics that we continue with in the rest of our curriculum
* Curriculum also based on the expertise of the lecturers, all ecologists, not a lot of plant anatomy or medicinal plant sciences because there is no one to teach it
* Teach some depth of theory and then illustrate it with case studies and how the knowledge can be applied to the real world
* Curriculum based very much on the expertise of the department staff
* Try to emphasise the areas that you can continue with in PG in their department

## Question 4

* Evolution absolutely
* Pathways can be introduced but go into more depth later on
* Photosynthesis and respiration are really some of the basics
* Don’t touch on things that they have already done in S1, should complement it and not repeat it
* Structure and function is really important
* Structure and function can be linked quite well with evolution and physiology
* Systems is also a nice way of tying all the other sections together because it illustrates how it all works together
* Top two: evolution and structure and function
* These two are fundamental
* Understanding other things like ecology can rely quite heavily on understanding these basic topics
* We really try to show how everything links together in terms of evolution, ecology and structure and function
* Having a logical flow between first and second and third year is also really important

## Question 5

* Process of science is important and should be introduced but built on in second year and third year
* Interdisciplinary nature doesn’t need that much emphasis
* Try to create awareness on the integration of science and society
* All these things are all more for creating awareness as appose to being something that is formally assessed
* Communication is important but we only focus on it later in the curriculum
* The idea of process of science and being able to work with data we put a lot of emphasis on because in the field of ecology it is absolutely core
* Collaboration we touch on in the form of group work
* Need to be careful how much work they are getting though, they only have so much time to spend on your module and you don’t want to overload them or make them spend less time on content than they should be so it’s a real trade off
* Top two: process of science which includes the ability to work with data and then communication
* The others are nice to have but not crucial

## Question 6

* Information flow, it touched on in first semester
* Interdisciplinary nature of science
* Nothing should be left out altogether, doesn’t have to be in depth discussion but students should be aware of everything

## Question 7

* Not really no
* Glanced over it and broadly agree with it regards to a way to approach a curriculum

## Question 8

* At Rhodes there aren’t a lot of formal barriers to changing the curriculum but other universities might have this issue
* Being a small department can limit how much expertise you have and therefore what you can really teach and on what level
* Other barriers could be from the institution or the dean or staff that aren’t interested in changing
* Student numbers and student preparedness can also be an issue, in terms of poor maths skills or poor English skills
* Large student numbers can be an issue in terms of practicals and field trips

## Question 9

* Need to have a discussion within the department and cognate departments to determine what the priorities are and how you can implement that in the most constructive way given the constraints you are under
* Adapt to the students and what they are lacking
* Based on what you are working with, how do you go about building the foundational core skills

## Question 10

* Lecturers might not agree with what should be priority or not
* There may be cultural differences between departments, especially if you are teaching in that kind of setting where you are working with different departments
* Lecturers are often concerned about the dumbing down of content, where we shouldn’t be dumbing it down, we should just be doing it differently or more effectively
* Some lecturers might not like the idea of doing things differently

## Question 11

* Increasing student numbers is important but so is getting students into the various PG degrees
* This helps fill up research programs etc
* More competent students benefit the department in the long run
* Have found that getting them to stay for hons is easier than getting them to stay for second and third year

## Question 12

* Absolutely critical
* Covid has shown us just how much we have missed by not being able to have them
* We want students to get experience in doing science not just reading about it or watching videos on it
* Online learning and big classes make it really hard
* Pracs and lecture content should be linked