

# Collaboration and innovation create interesting undergraduate studies

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**In the past three years, the Department of Information Science has put a great deal of effort into integrating innovation into its research and teaching activities. The popular academic slogan, “publish or perish”, has contributed to this impetus. Demanding circumstances have led to creative solutions.**

One of these was the reinvention of the course curricula to contribute to research in undergraduate modules. There is a broad scope of opportunity for research and publications on teaching methods at university level, as well as possibilities to present workshops on these methods.

The African Centre of Excellence for Information Ethics (ACEIE), hosted in the Department of Information Science and funded by the national Department of Telecommunication and Postal Services (DTPS) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), played a pivotal role in adapting these curricula.

The ACEIE’s focal points are as follows:

- Research on information ethics-related issues
- Creating an Information Ethics curriculum to be rolled out at universities across Africa
- Presenting workshops dealing with information ethics-related issues at university and government level across South Africa and Africa

Faced with issues raised across all levels of interaction, from government officials to university lecturers, the

Centre could do research on critical questions related to information ethics and apply it in class. Similarly, the lessons learned in the classroom could be applied to the ACEIE’s interaction with government and the private sector. The results of workshop presentations and classroom lecturing activities have truly synthesised the two separate spheres.

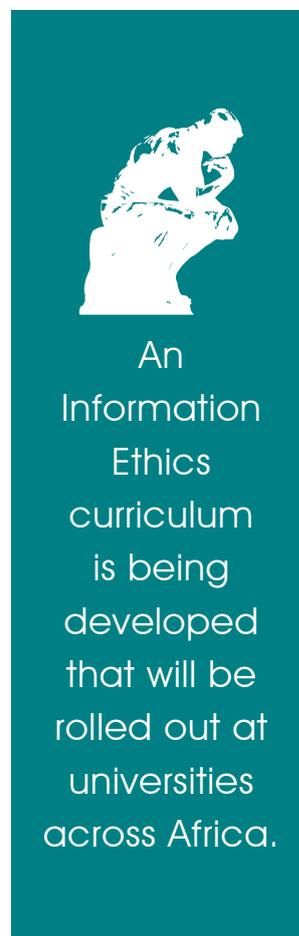
Furthermore, what initially started off as a solution to new research demands on personnel, has resulted in published articles and numerous conference and workshop presentations.

## Classroom activities

New content and research opportunities have been inspired by the modules offered by the Department of Information Science, the lecturers presenting them and interaction with government and industry.

### INL 140 – Information Science: Introduction to Information and Communication Technology

Intel and Intel Security collaborated with the Department on a concept for a volunteer project between Intel and universities in South Africa. The University of Pretoria was selected to host the pilot project. Students were instructed to create videos in which they had to address set topics, targeted at the level of their younger sisters, brothers or cousins who were still in school (between the ages of 11 and 14). Together with these videos – on whichever devices were available – the students had to develop a five-step slogan that would be striking enough to remember when confronted with a cyber-related issue. The five best videos were selected and presented during the Intel Security Cyber Safety Day on 21 October 2014. The best group received prizes from Intel, and since then, Intel has become interested in using the videos to raise awareness in other regions where they plan to roll out similar projects.





→ INL140 Cyber Safety Day on 21 October 2014. Front (from left): Andre Christian (Intel), Erin Klazar (Information Science), Videsha Proothveerajh (Country Manager: Intel), four of the INL 140 student winners, Michael Ingoldby (Intel Security) and Susanna Ackermann (Intel). Back (from left): Coetzee Bester (Director: ACEIE) and Prof Theo Bothma (Head of the Department of Information Science).

### INL 240 – Information Science: Social and ethical impact

Students of INL 240 were each required to do research on one of five set themes related to information ethics. They also had to write academic articles on these issues and present them during a student conference. The experience gained and the research conducted resulted in an article, as well as numerous conference and workshop presentations. An article on this specific experience, “Teaching Information Ethics at second-year level at the University of Pretoria: a case-study of integrating theoretical information ethics with practical application”, by Erin Hommes (Klazar) and Rachel Bothma (Fischer), was published in the *Innovation Journal*.

This year, the third Undergraduate Information Ethics Conference was held on the Hatfield Campus. It has so far produced a multitude of student articles and presentations, but its greatest contribution is that it annually gave the best group the opportunity to present at the student leg of the Annual Department of Information Studies International Conference, held at the University of Zululand.

### JCP 202 – Community-based project

The success of the INL 140 pilot project led to the realisation that the five-minute videos and awareness-raising campaigns should not be limited to university students. They could be repackaged and presented

to communities who might be experiencing similar cyber-related issues.

Since all second-year students in engineering, built environment and information technology must enrol for the Community-based Project (JCP 202) module, the coordinator, Dr Martina Jordaan, was consulted to gauge the probability of integrating aspects of the lessons learnt in INL 140 and the content developed in INL 240 in a repackaged form. This would be presented to targeted communities as part of community-based projects.

Since the initial Cyber Safety Day, Intel, the ACEIE and the Department of Information Science has renamed this cluster of projects the Digital

Wellness Project. This allowed the realignment of content and module objectives to ensure that a golden thread runs throughout these three undergraduate modules.

### The way forward

Following the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), the ACEIE and the Department of Information Science sought to address Action Line C10, contained in the WSIS+10 Action Lines, in the above modules in particular. This action line refers to the ethical dimension of the information society, and states that this society “should be subject to universally held values and promote common good, and ... prevent abusive uses of ICTs”. ➔