

Raising the dead: Reptiles recovered from the brink of disaster

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Abstract

The “Comparative Physiology and Biodiversity Project” is a series of web delivered CBL modules designed to replace wet laboratories dealing with biodiversity and anatomy of reptiles and echinoderms (sea urchins, seastars etc). The project was conceived as an alternative to traditional animal dissections and because of the advantages offered by virtual environments for comparing physiological systems. The reduction in the use of animals for dissection is important, especially with respect to sensitive native fauna experiencing a decline in local population. Also important is exposing the students to material that is difficult to source, eg. Tuatara, (an endangered but evolutionarily important NZ native species). The modules were conceptualised in 1994, funded by the Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching (CAUT) in 1995, alpha tested and evaluated in 1997. When it came time to fix content and programming errors in 1998 it was discovered that the source code for the Reptiles module, 50% of the entire project, had been lost. The School of Biological Sciences (SOBS) Teaching Development Unit (TDU), an internally funded multi media group, considered the modules of significant educational and bioethical value worthy of completion without additional funding. Pre-alpha source code was recovered and "Reptiles" was resurrected. While the project has successfully replaced significant amounts of live teaching, much work remains to bring the modules to completion. This paper discusses the history of the project and illustrates lessons learnt along the way, especially in the linkage between educators and developers.