

Research on developing a system for offering electives within the social sciences

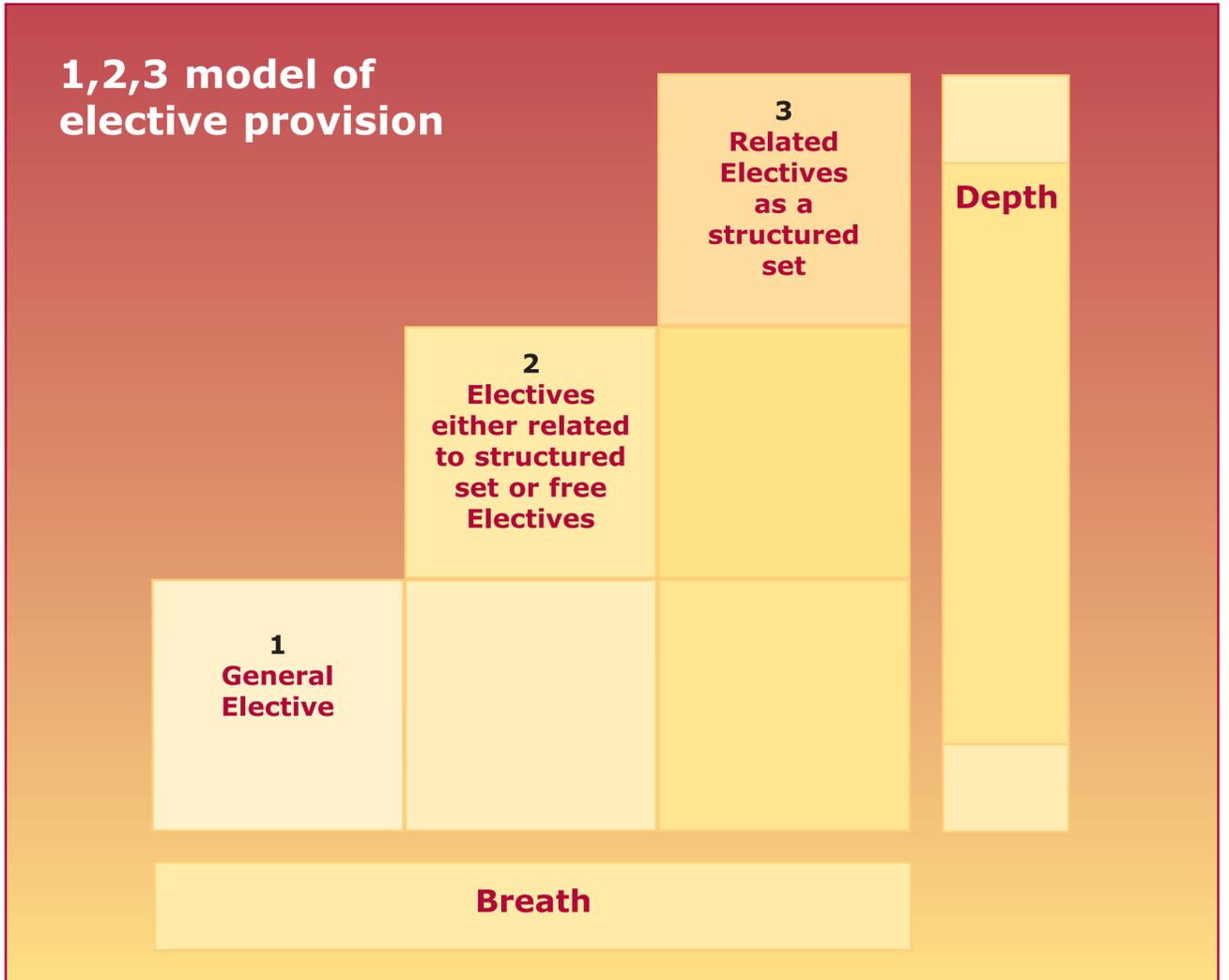
Overview

UCD has introduced a modularised system and incorporated the principle of offering electives as part of programme choice. Most of the theoretical information that informs this emanates from USA education where curricula are built on a modular and elective system. Part of this research will be to situate the elective principles in pedagogy of third level education.

Students are free to select from a wide range of elective modules from across all the colleges in the university. However information to date suggests that the flow of students is generally from the sciences into Arts and Humanities. As part of the group project we will analyse issues which may be creating barriers to selection of electives.

The main focus of my work is on exploring ways in which offering of general electives can be structured to provide the maximum return for students taking account of both breath and depth. We (Dunnion, Loughran and Purcell) are developing the notion of a 1,2,3 model of elective provision. For the purposes of my individual project I am looking at data concerning one elective module designed to engage students from across many programmes.

Along with my colleague we developed a new module SPOL 10170 Alcohol and



Drug Policy. The module draws on many aspects of alcohol and drug use in the context of policy and service provision. Building on this topical issue the module aims to heighten students' awareness of social issues and to consider their role in addressing such issues. It offers a basis for development of active citizenship in an informed way. One hundred and fifty places were offered and due to demand numbers were expanded so that a total of 159 students registered for the module.

Phase One: Provide a new elective module, Alcohol and Drug Policy. Conduct a student survey to ascertain the reasons for selecting this module and also to discover if students had an interest in pursuing further studies in a related area. The results of the survey are currently being analysed. Preliminary findings support the view that students are interested in pursuing further studies related to the Alcohol and Drug Policy module.

Phase Two: Develop structured electives which offer students a set of modules connected to this area of interest. Provision of such 'structured' electives will ideally incorporate modules from other colleges around the university. This will both provide students with a more in-depth understanding of alcohol and drug issues and will also establish interdisciplinary collaboration between a number of schools and colleges.

Breakdown of student numbers based on their major subject:

Arts	Social Science	Health Science	Agriculture	Commerce	Engineering
55	63	2	5	13	5
Science	Computer Science	Nursing	Psychology	Vet	Sports
5	2	2	4	1	2