The
Bachelor of Arts
Scoping
Project

Executive summary

SUMMARY REPORT 1

About the Project

The BA scoping project commenced in March 2007. Materials and resources developed as a result of the project launched on 30 July, 2008 on the DASSH website http://www.dassh.edu.au/basp

Materials Developed

The summary reports of the scoping study are particularly intended for decision makers for the Bachelor of Arts programs: those responsible for coordinating and managing Arts programs. The summary reports can be read independently or as a set of information. The set consists of:

1   The Bachelor of Arts scoping project:
    Executive summary

2   What is the Australian BA?
    Defining and describing the nature and role of the Arts in contemporary Australia

3   Mapping the terrain:
    Trends and shared features in BA programs across Australia 2001–2008

4   Who is enrolled in the Australian BA?
    Student uptake of the Australian BA 2001–2006

5   Who is delivering the Australian BA?
    Trends in staff profiles in the BA 2001–2006

6   Future studies emerging from the BA scoping project

These summary reports are supported by resources developed as part of the project. These resources are available from the DASSH website and include:

• Case studies
• Data sets
• Institutional program profiles

1.   Project Team

The project team initially operated through Flinders University. The project was directed by Professor Faith Trent, Executive Dean of the Faculty of Education, Humanities, Law and Theology and President of DASSH, and developed by principal investigator Deanne Gannaway, and research assistants, Hayley Upton and Sarah Price.

The project team was guided by a Steering Committee comprising members of DASSH and of the DASSH executive. The Steering Committee was representative of all states in Australia, the different institutional types (G08, IRUA, ATN, and NGU), single campus institutions, and those with multiple campuses. The Steering Committee members were: Professor Christy Slade (Macquarie University); Professor Kay Ferres (Griffith University); Professor David de Vaus (La Trobe University); Professor Richard Fotheringham (University of Queensland); Professor Stephen Garton (University of Sydney); Professor Andrew Wells (University of Wollongong); and Professor David Wood (Curtin University of Technology).

The Steering Committee met with the project team regularly and provided guidance and feedback throughout the life of the project.

1.1   Acknowledgements

The project team gratefully acknowledges the contribution of all of the Deans, Associate Deans, Program Coordinators of participating Arts programs, as well as the administrators, career office personnel, administrative staff and students who participated in this project. The project team would like to thank all participants for making a valuable contribution towards this project's successful conclusion and, in particular, for their time, insight and commitment in willingly completing surveys, interviews, telephone conversations, reviewing draft documents, and participating in round table meetings.

The project team would like to acknowledge the support and assistance from the following people:

- Professor Fred D'Agostino, University of Queensland, for his support and feedback across all aspects of this project
- Mia O'Brien, University of Queensland, for editorial and curriculum theory advice
- Lindy Dodd, Flinders University, for her administrative assistance throughout the project
- Members of the steering committee for hosting and chairing the round table meetings
- The personal assistants for the Steering Committee members (Ghada Daher, Carlene Kirvan, Bev Shaw, Jenny Young, Khyla Eggert, Ronda Bentley, Carol Button and Lindy Dodd) for organising the national round table meetings
- Associate Professor Janice Orrell, Dr Elizabeth McDonald, and DBI staff at ALTC for their support and guidance in the development of this project

2. Project Aims & Approach

2.1 Aims

This project focused specifically on the undergraduate award programs called Bachelor of Arts. The project aimed to:

- Understand the nature and role of a Bachelor of Arts degree in contemporary Australia
- Map the diverse Bachelor of Arts programs on offer in Australia between 2001 – 2008
- Identify the major strengths, difficulties, capabilities and contributions of the program
- Provide rich base-line data on the nature and models of BAs to be accessible for future curriculum planning for Arts Faculties.
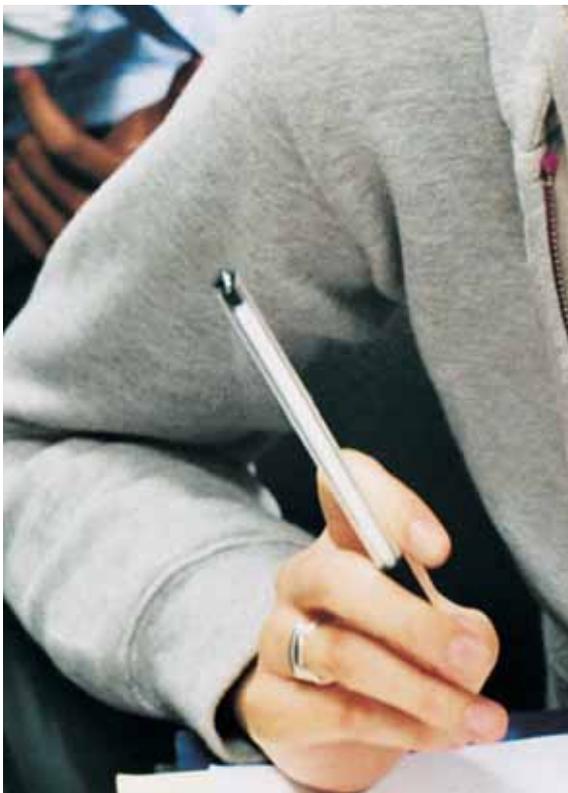
2.2 Approach

The project team adopted a historical/comparative analysis approach (Ruschemeyer & Mahoney, 2003). As much of the data was generated throughout the process of investigation, an iterative theory building process was used. (Kerssens-van Drongelen, 2001).

The project team worked with existent data relying on primary data rather than second order data.

Primary sources included the following quantitative and qualitative sources:

- DEST (now renamed DEEWR) data
- Data drawn from the Graduate Destinations Survey (GDS) and Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ)
- Course outlines, program structures and details gathered from institutional 'course finder' websites and calendars
- An online survey of those engaged in the teaching of these programs
- Semi-structured interviews conducted telephonically or 'face to face' with 67 people from a range of roles
- A pilot focus group with graduate and later year South Australian students

Secondary sources included the following:

- Existing institutional or centre reports of investigations into particular areas such as attrition or employability
- Institutional strategic plans and program review documents
- Facility or school websites, program handbooks and program flyers or publicity materials
- Literature pertaining into higher education curriculum, teaching and academic work in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and graduate employability
- Media and press releases to develop an understanding of contemporary issues.

A full report describing details of the project approach is available via the ALTC website http://www.altc.edu.au

3. Project Definitions

Defining an Arts program is problematic given the huge variation of programs within the field of Arts on offer. The Bachelor of Arts is not a universally defined program. A Bachelor of Arts in one institution might be be comparable to a program described as a Bachelor of Social Sciences in another. In some cases, the term is used by non-Arts related programs.

There is no single definitive definition of Arts degrees in the literature or current policy. In a recent review reported in "The Lettered Country", (Pascoe, McIntyre, Ainley, & Williamson, 2003) which focused on Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, the authors defined the Arts degree as *"all those bachelor programs in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, variously called a BA, BSocSci, or BA (specific field)"* (p. 7). This report drew upon DEST data using the codes associated with *"the definition of the BA is the field of study described by government statisticians as 'Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences', or, since 2001, 'Culture and Society'"* (Pascoe, McIntyre, Ainley, & Williamson, 2003, p. 10 Section 2).

However, in 2001, the coding categorisation process changed from 'field of study' code to 'field of education' code. From that point onwards, the new Society and Culture code includes Law, Economics, and Human Services programs. Data on Media and Communication programs no longer appeared within this code as these were categorised under the 'Creative Arts' coding. Many institutions include Media and Communication programs as part of their Arts offerings.

Duplication of the approach used for "The Lettered Country" was therefore not appropriate or valid for this scoping exercise.

3.1 Definition of Arts programs

For the purposes of this study, a distinction needs to be made between 'programs within the field of Arts' and a program that is specifically termed a "Bachelor of Arts". In these summary reports and in the project report, programs within the field of Arts are taken as programs that are humanities or social sciences focused and are single degree undergraduate programs, which may well include Bachelor of Arts degrees, but are not necessarily named Bachelor of Arts degrees.

A working definition for the term 'programs within the field of Arts' was adopted for this project and for all of the reports in order to make this distinction. The definition of 'programs within the field of Arts' refers to programs that adhere to the broader definition of humanities and social science programs, including those with professional, vocational, or technical curricula, and also fit within the DEST/DEEWR "Society and Culture" coding that includes:

- 0901 Political Science and Policy Studies;
- 0903 Studies in Human Society;
- elements within 0911 Justice and Law Enforcement;
- 0913 Librarianship, Information Management and Curatorial Studies;
- 0915 Language and Literature;
- 0917 Philosophy and Religious Studies;
- 0919 Economics and Econometrics and
- 0999 Other Society and Culture.
- It also includes the Creative Arts 1007 code: Communication and Media Studies.

The project therefore excludes programs like Bachelor of Arts (Psychology), the Bachelor of Creative Arts, Performance Arts (including Music), and accredited programs such as the Bachelor of Police Studies and the Bachelor of Social Work.

3.2 Definition of Bachelor of Arts programs

As a subset of the more broader "Arts" definition those programs specifically called "Bachelor of Arts" were identified as programs that follow the above criteria and, in addition, adhere to a "liberal Arts notion" i.e. a tertiary curriculum that:

- is humanities or social sciences focused;
- are single degree undergraduate programs;
- is not accredited or dependent on a professional body for benchmarking;
- allows some level of flexibility in terms of choice for students; and
- aims to impart a general knowledge and developing intellectual capabilities

4. Project Deliverables

A crucial outcome of this project is the collection and presentation of centrally located accessible data that can be used across the sector for benchmarking, and as a resource for future curriculum development. This can be used by institutions for quality assurance processes such as preparing for AUQA audits and institutional curriculum reviews. These deliverables take the form of a database of program profiles, case studies, data sets and highlight or summary reports. All are available via the DASSH website http://www.dassh.edu.au/basp

4.1 Summary reports

The summary reports of the scoping study are particularly intended for decision makers for the Bachelor of Arts programs: those responsible for coordinating and managing Arts programs. The summary reports can be read independently or as a set of information. The set consists of:

1   The Bachelor of Arts scoping project: Executive summary

2   What is the Australian BA? Defining and describing the nature and role of the Arts in contemporary Australia

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6   Future studies emerging from the BA scoping project

The summary reports provide an introduction to the specific issue and articulate the key findings pertaining to that theme. Each summary report provides links to the data sources for further investigation. The report format emerged in response to requests from participants of round table meetings who indicated a strong preference for information sheets that provided bites of information, with salient points highlighted, and block text on fact and figures. Hard copies of the summary reports have been provided to Executive Deans and are available as PDF documents on the DASSH website.

These summary reports are supported by resources developed as part of the project. These resources are available from the DASSH website http://www.dassh.edu.au/basp

4.2 Case studies

Case studies describe experiences and current practices that address common issues raised during the round table sessions. These experiences, practices and issues emerged during the interviews and round tables discussions conducted during the data gathering phase of the project. Case studies are available as MS Word documents on the DASSH website and include:

*   Retention and recruitment strategies
*   Advanced studies
*   Administration
*   Work integrated learning
*   Links to community
*   Teaching quality
*   Different approaches to positioning and marketing BA degrees
*   Effective use of technology
*   Trans cultural curriculum
*   Effective attention to globalization
*   Curricula structures
*   Graduate attributes
*   Employability

4.3 Data sets

The datasets draw together the raw data collected during this project. They are designed to enable DASSH members to interrogate the data in response to their own needs. They are offered in an excel spreadsheet format as both raw data and as pivot tables. They too are available via the DASSH website and offer current information related to:

*   Bachelor of Arts arranged by institution
*   Graduate attributes used in programs within the field of Arts
*   Work Integrated Learning in programs within the field of Arts

- Student Exchange in Arts programs
- Disciplines taught as part of the Bachelor of Arts as sequences of study, including core courses within programs
- Bachelor of Arts Student demographics 2001–2006
- Graduate destinations of Arts students 2001–2006
- Arts Graduate satisfaction with course 2001–2006
- AUQA reports pertaining to Arts degrees
- Projects dealing with Bachelor of Arts

4.4   Institutional Program Profiles

The Institutional Program Profiles focus specifically on the Bachelor of Arts award. The profiles are itemised program details collated in a uniform framework to facilitate a comparison of programs across a standard instrument. They are designed to provide a baseline overview of Bachelor of Arts award programs currently available across the Australian Higher Education Sector in 2008 and to enable benchmarking.

The first part of each profile describes the details of the award Bachelor of Arts as offered by each institution in 2008. This description is of the Bachelor of Arts award only, and does not include tagged or named programs such as Bachelor of Arts (International Studies), double degrees or honours. The second part of the profile describes the Bachelor of Arts award in contrast to other Arts awards offered by each institution fitting the definition described earlier in this report.

Program details include:

- Duration
- Current Program structure (2008)
- Major changes in structure
- Entry score 2001–2008
- Articulation into Bachelor of Arts Program
- Host Faculty
- Campus
- Modes of Delivery
- Coordination/Management
- Specific Requirements/Limitations
- Work Integrated Learning within the Bachelor of Arts
- Industry
- Community
- Links to External Organisations
- Graduate Attributes Shaping the Bachelor of Arts
- Fields of Study available to the Bachelor of Arts
- Student Numbers enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts
- Review
- Contextual Comment
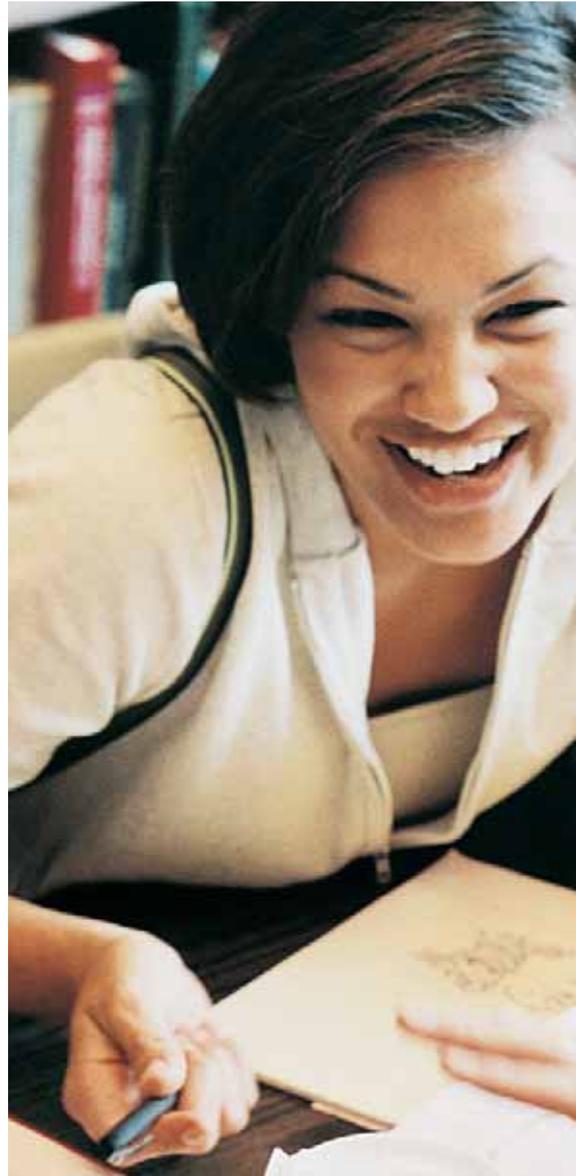
5.   Key Project Findings

The following are some of the key findings that emerged as a result of the project. They are loosely described in this executive summary and are accompanied by supporting data and discussion in the accompanying summary reports.

>   The Bachelor of Arts is highly complex

There is little in the way of common understanding in terms of shared definitions, scope and pedagogy across the various Arts degrees across the sector. Once a working definition of programs within the field of Arts had been established, only 35 of 390 programs explored fell within this project definition of 'Bachelor of Arts'. This suggests that the Arts are serving a range of functions, yet are commonly referred to as a single entity.

>   Decline in numbers of full-time staff, increasing casualisation and implications for renewal

Despite the steady increase in student numbers across all of the programs defined in this project as Arts programs, there has been a steady decline in the numbers of full time staff teaching into the programs within the field of Arts over the last 6 years. Project informants report concerns about the increase of casualisation of the workforce and the potential effects on learning and teaching in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. This is concern seems well-founded given recent DEST/DEEWR data. A combined picture indicates that there are looming issues related to how Arts degrees will be staffed in the future and how the trend towards casualisation will be curbed at a time when Arts is serving a range of functions in the community.

>   Increase in student numbers

Although there has been a steady increase in the number of students across the broader programs within the field of Arts as defined above, there has been a steady decline in the number of students engaged in those programs that are named as "Bachelor of Arts". The percentage of students who have been engaged in undergraduate programs within the field of Arts has dropped from 8% of the total student enrolment in 2001 to 5.8% in 2006. This is despite the fact that the actual enrolment in the broader Society and Culture definition has been increasing steadily over the last few years – largely in the areas of Psychology and Law.

> ## Programs within the field of Arts are in a state of renewal and review

Most of the Bachelor of Arts programs examined in this program were either under review or emerging from a review. It could be argued that programs within the field of Arts are in a state of flux. Most of the programs investigated reported that they were currently under review or offering a new iteration as a result of institutional restructuring. The BA programs reviewed in this study appear to be constantly adapting and adjusting the aim or focus and emphasis in curricula and market niche. Of the 37 programs subjected to close examination during the project, six were undergoing a standard cycle of review; eight were undergoing a major faculty or institutional restructuring exercise and fifteen were either implementing an entirely new program in 2008/2009 or developing a program for implementation in 2010.

> ## Reduction of the number of programs on offer in 2008

Of the 390 programs within the field of Arts that were initially explored, there were 214 on offer in 2008, and an additional 10 new programs made available. This means that there is a reduction of 176 programs across the country. At the same time institutions that had initially closed Bachelor of Arts programs with the aim to develop 'niche degrees' are now reinstating Bachelor of Arts programs and teaching out niche degrees.

> ## Problems with the DEST/DEEWR data

Our experience of analysing the DEST/DEEWR collections and the GCA collections shows that interrogating the data for comparison and benchmarking purposes at the program level is particularly challenging.

Data is collected in divergent methods, frequently unique to individual institutions. Each institution records program names in unique and idiosyncratic ways in accord with relevant institutional policies. This means that program names are an unreliable mechanism for examining comparable awards across the sector. The project team found that the only reliable mechanism for distinguishing programs was the use of the Society and Culture code. However, this process is prone to inaccuracies.

In addition, there are inconsistencies between the student numbers and sessional teachers data collected and distributed by DEST/DEEWR and that are maintained by institutions.

> ## Work integrated learning

The project team identified the different types of work integrated learning that comprise sections of the Arts programs. Data gathered from the interviews and analyses of programs suggest that there are increasing opportunities for work integrated learning within Arts programs. However, there are discrepancies in the actual equivalent full time student load identified as participating in courses that are recognized by DEST as work integrated learning opportunities. This may in part be caused by the shifting use of extent definitions by DEST/DEEWR, making comparisons difficult.

> ## Curriculum leadership

The project team found that the management of BA-type programs can be a highly complex activity. The data in this project indicated that this process requires negotiation and management across a range of disciplinary pedagogies and organisational structures such as schools and Faculties. Many of the project participants who had responsibility for these activities expressed a concern about their capacity and their knowledge of curriculum.

> ## Curriculum

A firm finding from this project is that within the BA context, the notion of curriculum is ill-defined and potentially misunderstood. The project team coined the term "lego" degree to reflect the fact that while there is some coherence evident within discipline areas of Arts degrees, the overarching curriculum is rarely referred to or described in 'whole-of-program' terms, except in professional BAs. While the flexibility of the degree is widely viewed to be a virtue, this potential may be overshadowed by issues of availability, timetabling and student external pressures.

> ## Inclusion of the student voice

The project found that the student voice has been largely absent from studies of Arts programs. Future research into the programs within the field of Arts will benefit from greater input from students, and particularly from data about students' motivation for enrolment, expectations for career progression and experiences of engaging with the program.

6. Project Outcomes

> Creation of a common language

An outcome of this BA scoping project is a clearer definition for Arts programs. This definition has been proposed, and used throughout the project data analysis processes, to guide and ensure consistency. As the project progressed, it became apparent that there is a lack of a common, shared understanding of what is meant by the term "Arts". The reference to "Arts" is frequently ill-defined and often limited to the DEST/DEEWR definition of Society and Culture. This reliance is problematic as the DEST/DEEWR Society and Culture definition encompasses programs that include Law, Social Work and Police Studies. There is also confusion between liberal Arts and creative or visual Arts.

> Identification of key features of the programs within the field of Arts

This project identifies and maps the features that make the Bachelor of Arts distinct from other programs within the broader Arts definition. A clearer understanding of these features and their characteristics within each variation of programs within the field of Arts provides a potential step towards clearer articulation of the value of the Bachelor of Arts award programs.

> Development of models to describe curricula currently in use

This project has developed a series of models to describe the various curriculum structures and educational philosophies that are evident within programs within the field of Arts on offer at the time of this study. These models offer an overview of the 'curriculum landscape' that comprises Arts programs.

> Bachelor of Arts programs collection

A crucial outcome of this project is a collection of centrally located accessible data that can be used across the sector for benchmarking and as a resource for future development. The collection can be used by institutions for quality assurance processes such as preparing for AUQA audits and institutional curriculum reviews. They take the form of a database of program profiles, case studies, data sets and highlight or summary reports. These resources are available via the DASSH website http://www.dassh.edu.au/basp

> Testing of a national communication strategy across programs within the field of Arts

Throughout this project a series of round table meetings were held as part of the engagement strategy. These meetings offered an opportunity for people engaged in the coordination of BA programs to meet with each other. Meetings held in regional areas offered the opportunity for participants to address the kinds of issues that were of particularly relevance to their institutions. The engagement strategy implemented within this project enabled the dissemination of findings across the sector, and tested a possible model for a national communication strategy across Arts programs.

> Methodology for further studies

The project team recommends that a series of further investigative projects are undertaken. In this regard, the project team recommends that institutions work collaboratively to identify and research areas of significance sector-wide, facilitated through DASSH.

In particular, the project team recommends that a series of further investigative projects are conducted in order to:

1   *Examine areas identified through this project as requiring further investigation*
    The areas identified by the sector for further examination were established through the BA scoping project's steering committee and through the round table meetings held in each state.

2   *Examine the long term impact of the BA*

7. Glossary and References

7.1 Glossary

Articulation: The movement between areas of study, Academic Organization Units or institutions by a student.

Capstone: In-depth exploration of an area of the curriculum. Usually occurs in the final term of study and builds on previous learning.

Community work integrated learning: Placements formally arranged for students to engage within community organizations and volunteer groups.

Credit points: Number of points assigned to each unit of study that acts as an indicator of the amount of work required in that unit. Collective of credit points indicates successful completion of a program.

DASSH: Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities. DASSH represents the deans of Faculties of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities in universities and higher education institutions across Australia and New Zealand. http://www.dassh.edu.au

DEST: Department of Education, Science and Training. Since the change in government in 2008, this federal government department is now known as DEEWR. Data sets informing this project were delivered under the DEST name, hence the use of this name as a cited source.

Field of study: A subject or discipline area; a branch of knowledge or learning. Majors have been collated to match to a field of study to provide a sense of a subject area in which a major is offered.

Elective: A unit counting towards the total credit points required toward a program but is not a specific program requirement.

Entry score: Required scores to gain entry to be able to participate in a program of study. Often set as a tertiary entrance score developed as a result from standardized exams at the end of secondary schooling.

Exchange program: An opportunity for domestic student to continue a portion of studies at a university other than the home institution. May include an exchange of a domestic student with an overseas student.

ICT: Information and Communication Technologies.

Industry work integrated learning: Placements formally arranged for students to engage within industry.

Level: Used in this profile to describe what has traditionally been conceived of as year of study. Findings from this project suggest that students do not necessarily complete a program within traditional 3 year blocks. Levels have been used instead of years to indicate a staged progression through a program.

Major: A group of units, typically in one or more related fields of study which are a specialisation within a program. A major denotes a concentration of a number of credit points in a specific subject. It does not necessarily imply an increasing level of complexity.

Minor: A secondary field of academic concentration or specialization with fewer credit points than a major. Sometimes called a sub-major. It does not necessarily imply an increasing level of complexity.

Program: Program is used in these documents to denote an integrated course of academic studies. It could include award programs, or programs of study that allow students to qualify to access postgraduate studies.

Restricted field of study: A field of study is restricted to certain students (e.g. some Dance majors require auditions; some majors require the student to be enrolled in a double program).

Unit: In keeping with the DEST definition, the term "unit" has been used to describe a subdivision of a course, subject, or program of study or training. Different institutions may refer to a unit as a course, subject, topic or module.

Upper Level: Academic concentration in a particular subject requiring some grounding or basic understanding. A primary field of study. Implies an increasing level of complexity through study.

7.2 References

Kerssens-van Drongelen, I. (2001). The iterative theory-building process: rationale, principles and evaluation. *Management Decision, 39*(7), 503-512.

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