



An Investigation of the Information Landscape Surrounding Third-Level Study in Ireland

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Third level course selection is an ambiguous and complex process – why can't prospective students be met with video and interactive media rather than streams of staid descriptive text when informing themselves on their options?

Why Does This Information Matter?

Diversity, as highlighted in the European Commission's Eurydice Report of 2022, is central to the health of a third level programme.

Improving the standard of online information available to applicants could:

- Increase third level accessibility to disabled and geographically remote students
- Curb student non-retention in Ireland, helping institutions spend these lost financial and pedagogical resources elsewhere
- Help guidance counsellors draft shortlists and organise shadowing for their students

Did you know?

In Ireland, incorrect course choice is the primary driver of withdrawal in universities and institutes of technology above all other financial, family, social, and health-related motivators

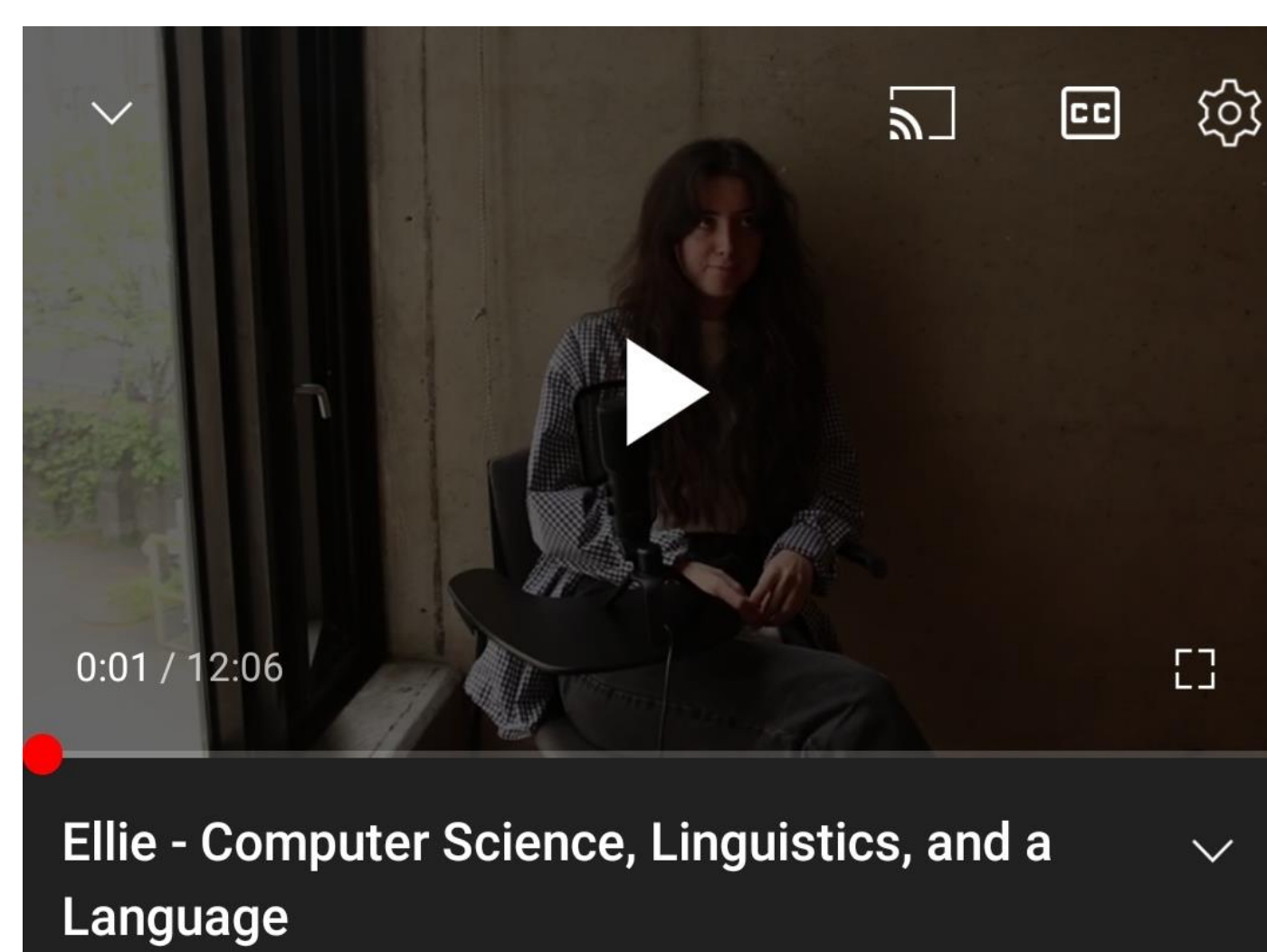
Methodology

Interdisciplinary by design, this project consisted of a literature review of papers specific to Ireland, such as internal institutional reports and nationwide surveys, as well as international economic case studies, policy documents, and discussions of aspects of marketing theory.

The project proceeded to judging existing resources against best practices synthesised from the literature, mostly through the useful abstraction of course selection as an instance of a 'consumer', subject to typical information-processing heuristics, exploring a market for a desired product or service.

This literature review and abstract framing of the problem was complemented with hands-on

experimentation in hosting, recording, and editing video interviews. The videos were structured around a common question set designed to promote ease of comparison across disparate disciplines.

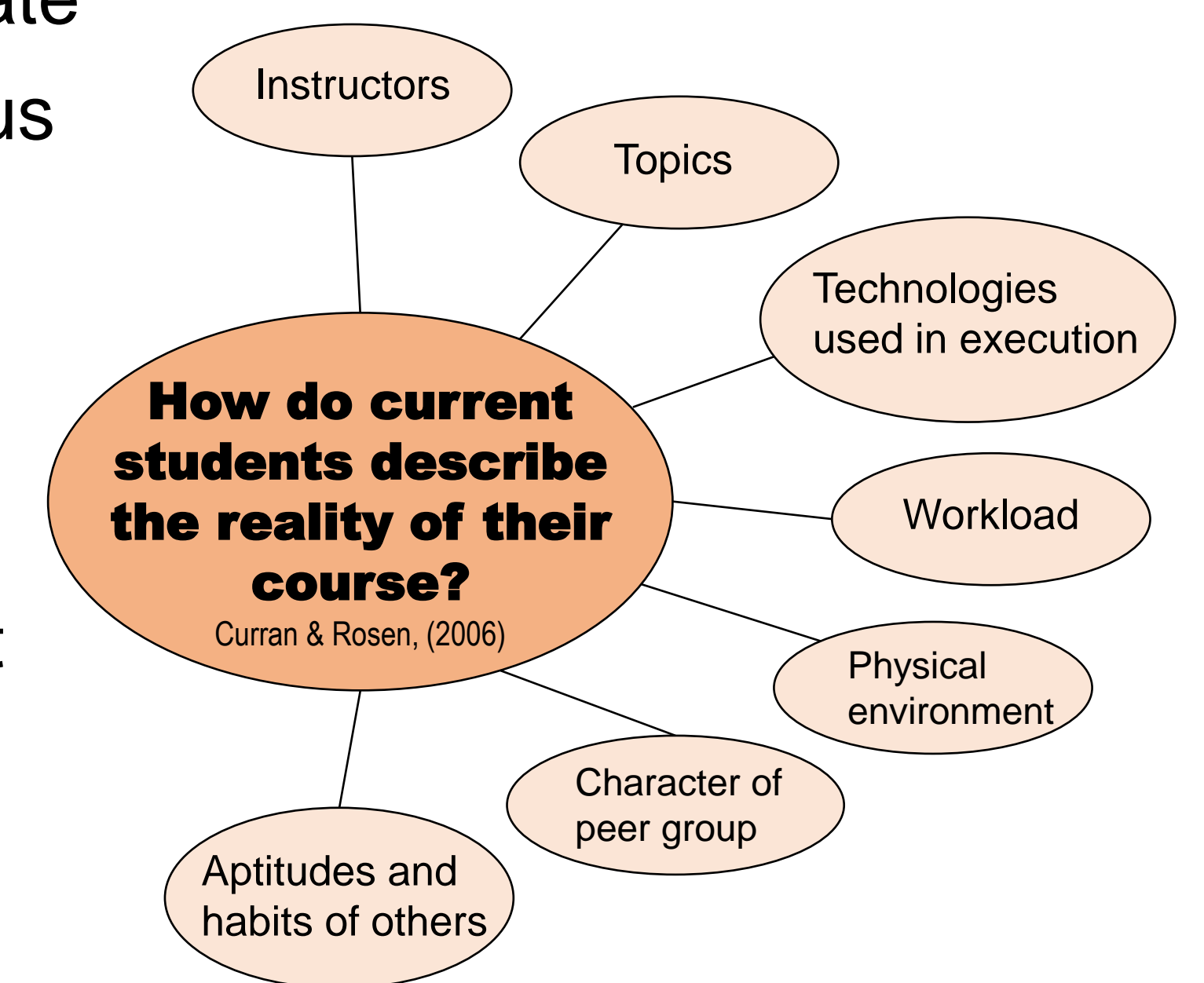


Results and Findings

Central to improving information sources is "seeking input from current students on the course description" (to directly quote an internal report from Trinity College Dublin) and in following the best practices of modern marketing and Media Richness Theory in particular.

Irish third level study information material is overly textual and lacking in the audiovisual stimuli, language variety and range of nonverbal cues associated with 'rich media', despite existing to help prospective students navigate a highly equivocal and ambiguous situation which demands it.

A message disseminated via an unattractive source or one containing information that is not stylistically appropriate, dynamically updated, nor true to reality, will dissuade students.



Computer-Mediated Solutions

Ideally, all course information would be published on a centralised content management system according to a consistent style guide, enabling simple comparison of options for the end user.

Before such a resource materialises, however, course administrators should be incentivised to augment static text information sites with video, audio, hyperlinks, and up-to-date module descriptions with sample learning content.

In any implementation, candid exchange from current students should be considered the most effective means of imparting information about third level study and decreasing the complexity of the decision-making process for the prospective student.



References:

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