

Erasmus Policy Statement 2014-2020

International strategy

The University of Humanistic Studies (UvH), founded in 1989, is a renowned Dutch university inspired by Humanism. It is the mission of the UvH to contribute, through academic research and education, to a meaningful existence for every individual in a humane society. The UvH is the only university in Europe offering a degree programme in Humanistics (science of Humanism). Fully recognized as a university and funded by the government of The Netherlands, the UvH distinguishes itself from other universities by the unique multi-disciplinary courses that it offers. In spite of its relatively small size – the university comprises some 100 staff members (academic and non-academic) and 550 students – the UvH has put her mark on both the academic world and beyond. The UvH educates creative and critical academic professionals who can take an active position as a participant in social debate and act as future agents of change in a post-modern, multicultural and global society. To achieve this goal the university combines her educational programme with academic research relating to social, ethical and worldview-related issues. In this research social responsibility and individual autonomy are mutually interdependent constructs.

Until recently the UvH was a thoroughly Dutch institution, but now it is gradually changing into a more international oriented organisation that actively encourages its students and staff to go abroad and participate in international academic networks. A boost to develop an international European orientation was given by the EU Horizon 2020 programme that acknowledges a special place for the humanities and social sciences, and stimulates multidisciplinary research. Since the UvH is too small to apply for large European grants as a stand-alone university, she developed a five-year (2011-2015), three-step strategy to improve her international radiation.

The first step is to establish profitable working relations with European/international universities that share our body of thought. The UvH intends to establish long lasting academic networks and partnerships. Because of our unique object of study geography is thereby far less important than academic content. We are currently in the phase of making such agreements with European and non-European universities that have a faculty/department for humanist studies, religion studies, existential psychology, critical organisation/policy studies and/or citizenship-education. These fields are most interesting to UvH research groups, and therefore potentially the most profitable to both parties, for educational as well as research goals. Since the UvH has a small staff and aims at making international relations/mobility a long term and profitable issue, we focus at a fruitful cooperation with 5-10 (European) universities within the scope of the 2014-2020 (Erasmus) Programme.

Step 2: These relations preferably start in a bottom-up fashion by the exchange of students and staff, because it is usually very easy to make agreements on the level of the executive boards, but staff and students make these collaborations really work. Students are the front piece of the UvH; they are educated to put their mark on society. International experience, defined as the active collaboration with fellow students in an international setting and partaking in daily student's life, will make them better equipped for the kind of jobs they seek as an active participant in social debate, and as future agents of change. Student mobility (Bachelor and Master) is therefore strongly encouraged, i.e. international minors and trainee ships in internationally operating organisations, preferably universities and knowledge organisations with a public function. From 2014 a minor on Humanistics (30 ECTS) in English will be offered, to further enhance incoming student mobility.

To prepare students for their future it is important for academic staff to continuously increase their professional, social and intercultural skills as well. Therefore step 3 is initiated: Since 2011 the UvH actively facilitates international educational experience as part of a personal long-range career plan, compulsory for promotion to the function of associate/tenured professor and a component of the yearly

staff evaluation. Non-academic staff is encouraged to go abroad to deliver and take part in workshops on academic organisations as part of a track to management functions.

Although our programme is of outstanding quality (in 2012 the bachelor programme was rewarded 'top-opleiding'), we are currently not involved in (developing) joint degree programmes. From 2011-2015 the UvH international efforts primarily aim at the establishment of more significant international partnerships. Combining forces in education is one of our goals and a joint degree could be a future result, but it is not our first ambition.

International cooperation projects

For the UvH it is important to choose her international cooperation projects carefully, because once committed to a programme it should lead to a longstanding involvement (research and education) and sustainable results, even after the programme officially ends. Next to her currently successful programme on citizenship-education, the UvH seeks to co-organize new intensive programmes in three areas: interreligious dialogue, critical organisation studies and ethics of care. The goals of these intensive programmes are establishing long lasting academic networks and the development of a European body of knowledge in aforementioned areas, resulting in an internationally more attractive curriculum.

The UvH's support of the intensive programme Education for Democratic Intercultural Citizenship, which started in 2012, can be seen as a blueprint for other programmes. The university supports and facilitates all activities within this programme; yearly conferences and small workgroups to be held at the UvH and partner institutions, the forming of networks for young professionals and/or students using internet/digital support, consultation possibilities during the project, both in real life and virtually (Skype). The UvH supports the annual meetings and staff/student mobility by allowing staff adequate time to carry out project work, by financing additional recourses, by (financing) replacement for educational staff when they are abroad, and by providing (administrative and ICT) back-up by support staff and by recognising student's ECT's. Information on the programme can be found on the UvH website, and awareness of the programme results is raised in the academic community (staff and students). Results are also used to make adjustments to the UvH master curriculum.

Next to establishing academic networks, the UvH intends to create partnerships with international (public) organisations to collaborate in the field of good work, normative professionalisation, integrity and care and welfare.

Impact

This part explains the expected impact of UvH participation in the Programme on the modernisation of our institution for each of the five priorities of the Modernisation Agenda.

1. The international minor on Humanistics will uniquely contribute to the quality and relevance of higher education's content and can provide graduates of all disciplines with the type of academic knowledge and skills that Europe needs in times of (integrity) crisis. European cooperation and exchange will further improve the UvH-curriculum, making it even more attractive to an internationally divers student population. By entering into international academic collaborations students are more challenged than in a regular environment, which will improve study performance and overall output.

2. The UvH acknowledges the crucial importance of international skills and competences for future academic professionals/knowledge workers. The UvH trains her students to become academic professionals equipped to be reinstated for office. As a result she has a longstanding tradition of developing her curriculum in close alignment with the field. More intense international academic cooperation will further enhance the quality of curriculum and teaching methods. In addition new partnerships with a number of international (public) organisations will create extra possibilities for internship positions for UvH-students and will also bring the UvH important input from (international) professional fields to further enhance her curriculum.

3. Next to the already mentioned strategies to improve the quality of her educational programme by international mobility and cooperation and as a result of these combined strategies, learning mobility will help students to improve not only their professional skills, but also their social and inter-cultural skills and thus their (international) employability.

4. The UvH is allied to Humanism and the (international) Humanist movement. Due to her unique profile the UvH attracts students from all over the country and abroad. This makes the UvH more nationally than regionally oriented. UvH currently cooperates intensively with (public) organisations in the fields of education (visiting professors/guest teachers) and research (practice based studies in

organisations/PhD projects). These collaborations are supported and facilitated by the Executive Board. In the future UvH intends to develop such partnerships internationally.

5. As a small independent university it is a challenge for the UvH to acquire major grants/subsidies. Cooperation with (inter-)national academic and non-academic partners will improve the probability of participation in (for instance) Erasmus and Horizon 2020 programmes. This will enable the UvH to acquire new financial sources, to be used in the primary processes of education and research. More financial space also offers the UvH more (administrative) degrees of freedom to determine its own strategic choices.