

Development Dialogue Liberal Arts and Sciences

Date: 7 November 2018

Present: Visitation panel, Prof. dr. Mathieu Segers (Dean University College Maastricht), Prof. dr. Thomas Cleij (Dean Maastricht Science Programme), Prof. dr. Aalt Bast (Dean University College Venlo), Daisy Blaauw (secretary).

Development Dialogue - introduction

The Development Dialogue is part of the Dutch accreditation procedure. The content discussed during the Development Dialogue is not part of the official assessment of the programme, but rather provides an opportunity for the programme to discuss future-oriented questions and (policy) proposals with a panel of peers. The Liberal Arts and Sciences programme submitted two topics to be discussed during the Development Dialogue.

Liberal Arts and Sciences at Maastricht University: deepening unity while cultivating diversity

The Liberal Arts and Sciences programme is comprised of University College Maastricht (UCM), Maastricht Science Programme (MSP) and University College Venlo (UCV). They share an overarching unity and educational philosophy and benefit from their combined strength. They also each have a somewhat different focus and distinct student population. The panel appreciated the educational philosophy of the programme and small-scale college structure that UCM, MSP and UCV offer, which result in low dropout rates and high success rates. The panel commented on the Liberal Arts and Sciences philosophy in relation to the specific focus of MSP and UCV as both offer only a limited selection of courses in the humanities. According to the panel, a Liberal Arts and Sciences programme should offer the full spectrum of social sciences, humanities and sciences. In this context, it was noted that humanities courses are offered within the Liberal Arts and Sciences programme, as MSP and UCV students have ample opportunity to take these courses at UCM. However, the panel indicated that the MSP curriculum could still be further strengthened by offering more courses that pay attention to the role of ethics in science and the ways in which the social sciences, humanities and (life) sciences mutually relate. The panel also suggested including humanities courses in the curriculum of UCV to enrich the curriculum contents. MSP made a clear choice to focus on the natural sciences and UCV offers courses in the social sciences and (life) sciences, tailored to their specific focus and regional embedding. Notwithstanding the focus of both MSP and UCV, they both appreciate the input of the panel in relation to the Liberal Arts and Sciences philosophy.

In conclusion, the panel appreciated the educational philosophy and combined strength of UCM, MSP and UCV. The panel also emphasized their desire for sufficient broadness in each of the individual curricula, while maintaining the three distinct profiles.

The recommender system

The Liberal Arts and Sciences programme is currently in the process of designing a 'recommender system'. Over the past years, a considerable amount of data has been gathered on curriculum choices and curriculum design of individual students. The system in development allows for both analysis and prediction of these data, using data mining, to enhance internal and external consistency of individualized curricula. Internal consistency refers to how the profiles function in curricula, which elements are (potentially) missing, and how the intended learning outcomes of the programme are covered in the specific courses of an individual curriculum. External consistency refers to the connection of individual curricula to master's programme requirements and societal/industry demands. Based on the first observations, the recommender system will allow for quality control and proactive and informed decision making by all stakeholders (students, academic advisors and management) involved. The panel looked at this initiative with interest, as it allows students to present a tangible overview of their knowledge, insights and skills and allows management to adjust the curriculum where necessary to strive for an even better alignment between individual curricula and the overall intended learning outcomes. The panel was concerned that the system would conflict with the open curriculum and academic freedom of students, by categorizing students into a specific field or specialization and steering their course selection. The Liberal Arts and Sciences programme clearly stated that this is not the intention, nor the expected outcome, of the recommender system. Rather, it is introduced as a service to students and data bank for management, providing enriched information, offering suggestions, and informing students about their academic choices in a broader societal context. UCM, MSP and UCV will continue developing the system and expect its implementation in the next academic year.