

# Long-term vision

University College Student Representatives of the Netherlands



May 2017



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May 13, 2017

To whom it may concern,

The UCSRN was founded two years ago. While the focus in the first year was on creating a solid organisation foundation, this second year was marked by optimizing organisation processes and creating a vision for the coming years. Noting the input from our members during the year, we assessed the priorities for the UCSRN to be as follow:

**Internally**, the UCSRN should focus on creating the wanted platforms for discussion. While the committees focussed on organising events in the past years, the focus of the committees has shifted to be groups where best practices may be shared, student initiatives and local societies may be put into contact to create cross city initiatives and in which policy recommendations to lobby efforts may be discussed. Events are not organised top-down anymore: events should evolve bottom-up with the support of the UCSRN. An exception to this is famous UCSRN tournament.

To become an organisation with influence, the UCSRN should focus on finding **external** partners and maintaining important relationships. To provide students with better opportunities after college – whether that may be through an easier transition to master programmes or better job opportunities – the UCSRN needs to create a network of partners that support our mission. To other partners, the UCSRN is a gateway through which they can reach the community of 4.000 UCSRN students. The UCSRN should try to correct misconceptions and stigmas of UC students.

To maintain the **great quality of education** of the UC programme, the UCSRN, together with the student councils at member UCs, should aim to preserve the key elements of the UC programmes and should strive to continuously improve the quality of education. What makes the education excellent is the steep learning curve facilitated by the intensive education. Connecting classroom to community – understanding that university is not just a place to pursue academics – is key to the UC programme.

This document sets guidelines on the six major goals for the coming years. It has been avoided to decide on how these goals are reached and when they are reached. We believe the boards and students of the coming years need to have the freedom to create a clear vision on what actions they will pursue to reach these common goals.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of the Executive Board 2016 – 2017,

Joris van Schie  
*Chairperson*



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## Introduction

### The UCSRN as organisation

The statutory aims and objectives of the UCSRN are (1) to assist Students in creating an optimal academic and social environment for personal development, (2) to facilitate and coordinate activities between Students, and (3) to represent Students in the broadest sense of the word and with a view to their missions and visions. For that purpose, the UCSRN has a Social Committee and an Academic Committee that focus on point 1 and 2. The Executive Board is primarily concerned point 3 and the internal workings of the organisation.

The UCSRN was formally founded by its members in 2015. The UCSRN members are the study associations of all University Colleges. The network of the University Colleges as institutions is formed by the UC Deans Network.

### The concept of University Colleges

The term 'University College' has been used in a plethora of contexts in the Netherlands and abroad. Traditionally, a college is part of a university, is not a university on its own and provides education to its students. In the Dutch context, the term University College denotes an undergraduate university program in Liberal Arts and Sciences. Key elements of the program are small-scale and intensive education, and an active synergy between the curriculum and extracurricular activities.

### Liberal Arts and Sciences education

Clear to everyone is that Liberal Arts and Sciences education focusses on broad learning. In contrast to popular thought, Liberal Arts and Sciences students are not thinly educated: at the basis of the Liberal Arts and Sciences lies deep learning. The program is formed like a pyramid: a broad basis in your first years allows you to combine – in an interdisciplinary fashion – fields to gain a deep and thorough understanding of a few subjects in your final years. Students therefore choose one or multiple majors with which they will graduate.

### What constitutes excellent education?

University College students are not necessarily those students who excelled in high school or when they started at university. What makes the education excellent is the steep learning curve facilitated by the intensive education. Intensive means mandatory attendance, participation in class and a large amount of self-study. Realizing the full potential of students through hard work, broad interest, discipline and cooperation is what makes University Colleges excellent.

## Core values & long-term goals

### A gateway to the UC community

'What is a University College?' and 'What is Liberal Arts and Sciences?' are the two most heard questions every UC student hears when explaining their studies to their relatives. There are many questions and misconceptions regarding University Colleges and Liberal Arts and



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Sciences. Through raising awareness, conducting research and expressing opinions, the UCSRN should try to answer and correct these.

The UCSRN – as the network of all University Colleges – provides a unique student perspective on these issues: representing all University Colleges in the Netherlands, the UCSRN possesses or is easily able to collect all necessary information regarding students.

#### **A connected organisation**

Numerous topics and policy decisions made by parliament each day. More established student organisations such as the ISO and the LSVb are already recognized as a worthy speaking partner to many other organisations. The UCSRN, albeit a young organisation, should try to aim to establish a credible presence within the Dutch discussion on topics such as excellence in education, internationalization, English education and Liberal Arts & Sciences.

#### **Providing opportunities after college**

University College and Liberal Arts & Sciences students are recognized worldwide as broadly educated students who can quickly grasp numerous subjects on a high level. In the Netherlands, UC students are often misunderstood. Various master programs believe that the UC programme is too broad, are unfamiliar with its contents or do not provide clarity regarding which admission requirements they have for UC students. Numerous companies, NGOs and governments are not familiar with the programme and see UC students as a jack of all traits, master of none.

#### **Master programmes**

Famous universities such as Oxford, Harvard, Princeton, Yale and Cambridge accept UC students from the Netherlands on a regular basis. The quality of the UC programme does not lie either: the programmes have been awarded the 'excellent' predicate multiple times.

The UCSRN should provide UC students better opportunities to enter masters in the Netherlands and abroad. It should try to aim to create understanding at masters programmes of what the UC programme entails, request clear admission requirements and communicate these to UC students.

The UC Deans Network – in collaboration with the UCSRN – are conducting a widespread survey amongst UC graduates. With the results of this survey, the UCSRN, in collaboration with the Academic Committee, can set up an action plan to achieve easier admissions to masters programmes around the world.

#### **Job opportunities**

When applying to any job opportunity, UC students and graduates often have difficulties explaining what their diploma entails. Although we see that UC students are recognized for their proficiency in English, their good research skills and their ability to quickly grasp complex problems, there are still employers that are unfamiliar with the UC programme. In combination with the action plan to provide better masters opportunities for UC students, the UCSRN should try to create more understanding amongst employers of the UC programme.



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### **Connecting classroom to community**

Inherent to the University College concept is the engagement with the community around yourself. UC students are much more active in student and study associations, pursue many more extracurricular activities than average students and feel an incredible sense of community with their fellow students. Sjoerd Sjoerdsma, member of Dutch Parliament, phrased it as follows:

*“That’s exactly what University Colleges should be: it’s not just a place where you pursue academics, it should be a place through which you become deeply connected with the world around you.” – Sjoerd Sjoerdsma*

The UCSRN, through its members and the formal educational programme, should aim to instil and guard this core value in all UC communities across the Netherlands, to facilitate local and cross city initiatives that aim to promote the connectivity between student and community and it should promote diversity in the UC programme and the UC communities.

### **Stimulating excellent education**

The quality of education is being threatened: there is less money available for university, classroom sizes are increased, there are less contact hours for students, facilities and study places disappear and smaller programmes are stopped. In this context, University College students are often seen as exceptional due to the small classroom sizes and the large amount of contact hours.

Key elements of the UC programmes are the holistic approach in admissions (motivation is as important as grades), the interdisciplinary elements of the education, the large amount of personal contact, the drive instilled in every student to continuously challenge established concepts, the possibility to shape your own curriculum, looking ‘outside the classroom’ and being in contact with the community around you and the interactive style of teaching.

The UCSRN, together with the student councils at every UC, should aim to preserve these key elements of the UC programmes and should strive to continuously improve the quality of education.

### **A platform for discussion**

As the uniting association for all University College students in the Netherlands, no words need to be spent on why the UCSRN is the ideal platform for discussion. In the past years, the emphasis of the committees was on organising events for students. In 2017, a change was started: committees their main purpose is now to be a platform for discussion for topics that engage with the daily topics students deal with.

To students, the committees are platforms to which they can express concerns or opinions that are relevant to more than one college. For student initiatives the committees are platforms on which they can find similar student initiatives to collaborate with. For external partners, the committees may be the perfect platform in which they can gather opinions of UC students.



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And for the Executive Board the committees are platforms from which they can gather policy input for lobbying.

### **A participating society**

Instead of the UCSRN organising events – which proves to be impractical due to the widespread locations of the board members – the already existing events of the UCSRN society should be made available to all UC students. Numerous MUN conferences, debating tournaments, large parties and academic seminars are organised every month. The UCSRN should aim to make those events available to all UC students. Events should evolve bottom-up instead of being organised top-down.

Not to be forgotten is to continue organising the UCSRN tournament every year. As it has been done in 2017, all tournament logistics should be the responsibility of the hosting UC. The hosting UC is picked at the start of the year by the UCSRN members and the UCSRN (partly) finances the event.

### **Other details**

#### **The status of the document**

This document contains the long-term vision of the UCSRN. Future policy should be made in accordance with this document. Members are not bound to this document for their internal policy, but should consider the values and aims of this document when making their own policy.