



Long-term vision

University College Student Representatives of the Netherlands

May 20, 2017





University College Student Representatives of the Netherlands

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University College Student Representatives of the Netherlands

Foreword

Amsterdam, May 13, 2017

To whom it may concern,

The UCSRN – University College Student Representatives of the Netherlands – is the national student representation body for University College students. The UCSRN was founded two years ago and, while the focus in the first year was on creating a solid organisation foundation, this second year was marked by an optimization of 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 follows:

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: rather, events will evolve bottom-up with the support of the UCSRN. An exception to this is the famous UCSRN tournament.

To become an organisation with influence, the UCSRN should focus on connecting with 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.

A liberal education requires diversity of students to enable a truly critical discussion and frame of mind. Therefore, the UCSRN aims to promote the accessibility of education at its various colleges to students from many different backgrounds as well



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as diversity within the curriculum and student-organised projects. 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. In order to maintain this high quality of education, the UCSRN, together with the student councils at member UCs, should aim to preserve these key elements of the UC programme and should strive to continuously improve the quality of education.

This document sets guidelines on the eight major goals for the UCSRN in the coming years. Decisions on how these goals are reached and when they are reached have been intentionally avoided; we believe the boards and students of the coming years need to be free to create a clear vision on what actions they will pursue to reach these 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 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 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, with a view to their missions and visions. To achieve the first two objectives, the UCSRN appoints a Social Committee and an Academic Committee. Meanwhile, the Executive Board is primarily concerned with point 3 and the internal workings of the organisation.

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 include small-scale and intensive education and an active synergy between the curriculum and extracurricular activities.

Liberal Arts and Sciences education

It is clear that a 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





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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. In this context, an intensive education refers to 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 Sciences. Through raising awareness, conducting research and expressing opinions, the UCSRN aims to provide answers and correct these misconceptions.

The UCSRN – as the network of all University Colleges – provides a unique student perspective on these issues. By 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 worthy speaking partners to the Dutch parliament and other related organisations.



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The UCSRN, albeit a young organisation, should 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 the prototypical UC students as a jack of all trades, 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.





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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.

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, and a University College alumnus, described the UC experience 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.”

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.



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Key elements of the UC programmes are: (i) the holistic approach in admissions (wherein motivation and grades are considered to be equally important); (ii) the interdisciplinary elements of the education; (iii) the large amount of personal contact; (iv) the drive instilled in every student to continuously challenge established concepts; (v) the possibility to shape your own curriculum; (vi) looking ‘outside the classroom’; and (vii) 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: the main purpose of the committees is 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 through which they can find similar student initiatives to collaborate with. For study associations and academic councils, the committees serve as learning platforms to exchange best practices and knowledge. For external partners, the committees may be the perfect platform in which they can gather opinions of UC students. Finally, for the Executive Board, the committees are platforms through which they can gather policy input for lobbying.





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Promoting diversity and accessible education

A liberal education requires diversity of students to enable a truly critical discussion and frame of mind. This includes socio-economic, cultural, and identity diversity as well as other interpretations of diversity. Therefore, the UCSRN aims to promote the accessibility of education at its various colleges to students from many different backgrounds as well as diversity within the curriculum and student-organised projects.

A participating society

Instead of the UCSRN organising events – which has proven to be impractical due to a variety of logistical issues – the already existing events of the UCSRN should be made available to all UC students. Numerous MUN conferences, debating tournaments, large parties, and academic seminars are organised every month. Events should evolve bottom-up instead of being organised top-down.

Not to be forgotten is the annual UCSRN tournament. 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, but should consider the values and aims of this document when making their own policy.

This document contains the long-term vision of the University College Student Representatives of the Netherlands.

Register under Dutch Chamber of Commerce number 63539128.

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