

### **Mission**

The University of Groningen Honours College is committed to providing a challenging learning environment in which talent is recognized and fostered. As such, the Honours College contributes to society: students from across the UG are encouraged to tackle complex problems from different disciplinary perspectives.

### **Vision**

The Honours College gives exceptionally talented, motivated students the opportunity to achieve their full potential by offering them a challenging, coherent, university-wide programme in which deepening, broadening and talent development take centre stage. Talented, motivated students with a lot of potential are selected to take part in the Honours programmes. The selected students follow an additional, academically challenging curriculum (25% additional student workload) alongside their regular studies. The course units are generally taught in the evenings. To guarantee equal opportunities for all potential Honours students, no additional tuition fees are charged for the programmes.

The Honours College is built on a solid foundation. The structure chosen for the University of Groningen Honours College has proven to be effective, and the close cooperation with all the faculties and a joint commitment to achieve success are indispensable. The students really appreciate the community and are very positive about the teaching. Completing a Bachelor's Honours programme increases a student's chances of being admitted to a selective Master's programme, thereby making it excellent preparation for a career as a researcher. Lecturers also appreciate the Honours College as a testing ground for teaching innovations and for gaining experience in teaching excellent students.

The Honours College is an interdisciplinary and international community in which students deepen and broaden their knowledge and skills. Interdisciplinary skills are also of growing importance in view of the increasing complexity of scientific and societal issues in which collaboration between different disciplines is becoming more and more crucial. In addition to the development of interdisciplinary skills, talent development at the Honours College focuses on the following three questions: 'Who am I?', 'What do I want?' and 'What am I capable of?' They are designed to help prepare students to take on leading roles throughout their careers.

Teaching at the Honours College is small scale and innovative. The curriculum was specially designed for Honours students, who are given plenty of freedom to choose electives alongside compulsory course units. The Honours College is also a Learning Community within the University community, alongside the Honours students' contacts with regular student life and society.

Teaching on the Honours programmes must be provided by lecturers who can challenge excellent students. The Honours College is a testing ground for teaching innovation and offers lecturers from across the UG the opportunity to experiment with new modes of instruction and assessment. Thanks to the unique extracurricular content and the talented group of students who take part in the programmes, the Honours College is a fertile and safe educational environment in which lecturers and students work together on innovations in teaching. In recent years this has resulted in pilot projects with learning communities, active learning, project-based learning and the international classroom concept. Lecturers see the Honours College as an inspiring teaching lab for innovative education.

Positive experiences and results are shared within the lecturers' community of practice, and can be rolled out and used in regular UG degree programmes.

To ensure that the provision of such a challenging learning environment for both students and lecturers can be continued long into the future, the organization itself as well as the Honours programmes must become embedded in the UG so that it is possible to continue developing the highly acclaimed Honours education within the well-chosen frameworks. This will make it easier to develop and test new teaching innovations and apply them in regular UG degree programmes.

## **Values**

Diversity, innovative potential, inclusion and involvement are the core values that guide the behaviour and attitude of students, lecturers and employees at the Honours College.

### *Diversity*

Our Honours education is characterized by international and multidisciplinary groups of students. Together, the students and lecturers of the Honours College form an interdisciplinary and international learning community that is focused on further personal and academic development. As members of that community, students become increasingly independent and have more freedom to design their own Honours programmes.

### *Innovative potential/testing ground*

An open and investigative attitude is at the heart of our learning community, both in terms of stimulating our staff and students to share new ideas and in the content and structure of our programme. This creates the necessary space for continued development of and innovations in teaching and for finding creative ways to apply the results thereof in society. The Honours College's role as a testing ground fits in well with the non-accredited Honours programme, in which new teaching concepts can be tested and developed. Successful pilot projects and teaching concepts can then be introduced in regular degree programmes, thereby improving the quality of all education at the University of Groningen.

### *Inclusion*

Respect is a core value in the Honours community. An international and therefore intercultural community requires openness, curiosity and respect for each other. It is also important that all members of the community, regardless of their academic background, can work together well, so that different perspectives and approaches can be combined successfully to find solutions and answers. Every day, members of the community show their respect for one another by addressing fellow students and lecturers in a respectful tone, by their hospitality, by valuing each other and by daring to call each other to account if certain things can be done better.

Our second core value for inclusion is the importance we attach to the human dimension. Within the existing frameworks, we try to provide as much room as possible for tailored programmes and solutions for individual students and lecturers.

Through these values we try to create an environment in which different ideas, backgrounds and skills contribute to the development of talent, creativity and innovation in our learning community, in which staff members, students and lecturers listen to and are open to each other.

### *Commitment*

Our Honours College is a community in which motivated students, lecturers and staff members work, learn and discover together; together, they form the Honours community. They stimulate each other and share knowledge. Students and staff members feel jointly responsible for realizing the Honours College's objectives. They are aware of our personal (regional) social responsibility and commitment.

Thanks to the innovative and ground-breaking education, they can make a substantial contribution to the quality of society. Lecturers and staff of the Honours College create opportunities for students to deepen and broaden their knowledge and skills as well as further develop their natural talents, but the students themselves also have a role to play in the design and content of the Honours programme. The high levels of satisfaction among both lecturers and students are testament to the quality of the programme.

### **Strategic goals**

Our mission and vision result in ambitious, challenging co-curricular Honours programmes (Bachelor's and Master's levels) that can be tailored to the students' individual needs and talents. The Bachelor's Honours programme (with a student workload of 45 ECTS credit points) focuses on deepening and broadening existing skills and knowledge and developing talent; the Master's Honours programme (15 or 20 ECTS) focuses on developing leadership skills and interdisciplinary collaboration. In both Honours programmes the emphasis is on an interdisciplinary approach to scientific and social issues and talent development, while at the same time preparing the students for the job market.

Over the last few years we have seen the annual student intake grow to around 350 students in the Bachelor's programme and more than 100 in the Master's programme. A student body of this size helps maintain the close-knit community of students, lecturers and staff members and facilitates the implementation of teaching innovations in the Honours programmes. As such, the Honours College can continue to provide challenging education for students who want and can do more. By improving the sustainability of the Honours College and further expanding challenging Honours education at the University of Groningen, the talented and motivated students of the future will be able to reach their true potential.

Our strategic goals, which are set out in the following sections, focus on strengthening the College's role as a testing ground for innovations, further developing the interdisciplinary nature of the programmes and the learning community, improving the integration of the theme of 'employability', improving quality assurance systems and working towards a national quality standard for university Honours Programmes.

#### Innovation / testing ground

The Honours programmes stimulate students to think independently and critically, to use their own initiative and be creative. Thanks to the unique non-accredited character and the talented group of selected students, the Honours College offers a fertile and safe educational environment in which lecturers can experiment with teaching innovations in an interdisciplinary context. This creates a haven for inventive and innovative thinkers; we can experiment with innovations in teaching which can then be introduced in regular degree programmes.

This role as a testing ground is vital for education provided by both the Honours College and the University of Groningen as a whole. By expanding its role as a testing ground, the Honours College can continue testing and further developing the innovative teaching concepts outlined in the Strategic Plan. The Honours College's ambition is to experiment with the concepts of personalized learning and project-based learning in the Master's programme, and in the Bachelor's phase to further develop active learning based on e-learning and innovative forms of testing such as gaming. The Honours College is committed to further developing, testing and evaluating these concepts within the Honours programmes, and to then actively share the successes with the regular degree programmes offered by the faculties.

In addition to teaching innovations, we also want to improve our quality assurance system by focusing on a more research-oriented approach that is better suited to our education and the learning community.

Our Honours programmes are not simply about acquiring knowledge, but also about learning the skills and attitudes that are traditionally not easy to test. As such, we would like to carry out an academic research project to find out whether students on the Honours programme do indeed acquire and fine-tune these skills. The Honours College is also interested in finding out which modes of instruction are the most effective for teaching such skills, so research will also be conducted to determine the foundations of these skills. We will also gain experience in using non-conventional modes of assessment to assess these skills, for example, gaming. If these studies show that students successfully learn the necessary skills, these modes of instruction can then be introduced in the regular degree programmes.

Finally, the Honours College has collected a lot of data about Honours education and Honours students over the years. This data should be used for specific institutional research into Honours education and the associated innovation projects, for example, research into the selection criteria and whether the Honours College actually selects the most talented and motivated students, and research into the effectiveness of active learning concepts on study results and levels of satisfaction.

#### Interdisciplinary collaboration

The Honours College has a proven track record in stimulating and realizing multidisciplinary collaborations, which is also a huge added value for the UG. We want to build upon that solid foundation.

We want to incorporate successful expansion projects into the Bachelor's Honours programme in a way that is sustainable.

In the Master's Honours programme we want to take interdisciplinary collaboration to the next level. As far as teaching is concerned, we want to reinforce experiments with project-based learning through interdisciplinary collaboration whereby students work on assignments from the professional field, and introduce this concept to all disciplines. This not only increases interdisciplinary cooperation but also improves students' employability. We also want to start developing the concept of personalized education throughout the whole programme. In order to further strengthen the community spirit, increase the effectiveness of the proposed teaching concepts and design workable education programmes, the number of start dates for the Master's Honours programme will be reduced from two to one (Sept/Oct). Marketing efforts will need to focus on increasing awareness of interdisciplinary cooperation, employability and personalized learning.

#### Learning community

Our Honours education combines interdisciplinary and international cooperation. All students are influenced by their own culture and discipline when they start the Honours programme. All of them have at least one thing in common: they are talented, motivated students. Despite their differences, they feel involved with and committed to the Honours College and each other. This means, for example, that both international and Dutch students have the opportunity to actively participate in the Honours community. We nurture, facilitate and stimulate this learning community both as an organization in general and more specifically in terms of the teaching and content of the broadening course units. We also encourage the students to contribute to the development of this community by giving them the opportunity to name their own cohort (since 2014, the cohorts have been named Marie Curie, Spinoza, Einstein and Rosalind Franklin respectively).

We also want to further develop vertical communities, student networks with members from successive years, whereby Honours alumni take on a more active role, for example by setting up an alumni network. In addition, in the coming years we will have to devote more attention to the cultivation of a Master's student community in light of the short duration of the Master's Honours programmes. We want to achieve this by, among other things, reducing the number of start dates.

Over the coming period we are also committed to further developing and expanding the community of lecturers, the foundations for which were laid during the 2014/15 academic year. The idea is to create a network in which lecturers can share ideas and experiences and experiment with innovations in teaching. Every year, around 30 Fellowships for Innovation of Teaching are awarded. Fellows then belong to an interdisciplinary community for which networking meetings are organized. The Fellowships and programme of related activities will continue until at least 2019, by which time it is expected that the community will have grown to include more than 100 lecturers.

### Employability

The Honours College wants to strengthen and increase the visibility of the relationship with and connection to the professional field and help students prepare to take on leading roles in society. The Bachelor's Honours programme already puts a lot of emphasis on this, for example in the Pick Your Own Talent programme, for which various events are organized that focus on the themes of careers in Academia or Entrepreneurship. In the Master's Honours programme we want to put a greater focus on 'employability' by developing a programme based on personalized learning and project-based learning. The Honours College also wants to increase the number and scope of public-private projects such as the HTSM programme, which was developed in collaboration with FSE/ZIAM and Philips Drachten. During this one-and-a-half year programme (20 ECTS), students are given the opportunity to learn about the latest scientific insights and skills required in the field of High Tech Systems and Materials and how to apply that knowledge and those skills in product development processes.

This has proven to be an inspiring approach which deserves to be continued. Some of the Sirius Plus funding was used to finance research into whether similar projects could also be introduced at the following four faculties:

- FSE, concentrating on the development of the High Tech Systems and Materials course unit and increasing the number of industrial partners, thereby increasing the number of students
- FEB, developing Business Challenges for UG Honours Master's students
- Faculty of Arts, developing a Career Lab as part of the Faculty's Career Minor
- Faculty of Law, developing a course unit in which students work together on a multidisciplinary request for advice from a client in the public sector

The Honours College provided initial funding for these projects in 2015, but would also like to see these activities continued as part of the UG's strategic policy. The Honours College would also like to remain involved in the development of Faculty projects. These developments are expected to trigger an increase in students enrolling on the Master's Honours programmes at the Faculties involved, and also have an impact on the regular degree programmes.

### Quality assurance and a national quality standard for university Honours Programmes

University Honours Programmes are non-accredited programmes, which, given the nature of these programmes, is actually desirable. Accreditation would curtail experimentation with innovations in teaching and could hinder the development of an innovative and flexible educational organization. However, this does not mean that the universities are less committed to ensuring the quality of Honours programmes and justifying them to the outside world. As already mentioned, the Honours College is committed to adjusting the existing quality assurance system so that it is more closely aligned to the requirements of the Honours programmes. To achieve this, policy and operations will need to be adjusted or developed from scratch. The Dean of the Honours College is closely involved with and has taken on a leading role in the development of a national quality standard for Honours programmes. We are committed to continuing these efforts and are confident that a national quality standard for university Honours Programmes will be introduced in the near future. Part of quality assurance also involves university-level research into intake and drop-out rates among Honours students to find out why students decide to stop following the Honours programme.