

# Statement on the Role, Characteristics, and Cooperation of Liberal Arts and Sciences Colleges in the Netherlands

University Colleges Deans Network



Universiteit  
Leiden  
University College The Hague

Erasmus  
University  
College



university of  
 groningen

university college  
 groningen

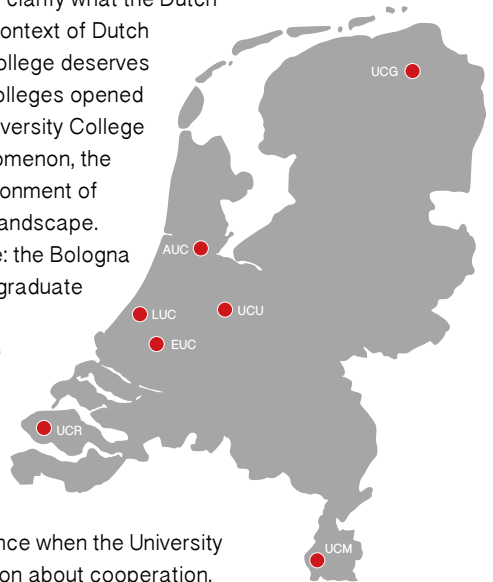
## Purpose of this statement

The purpose of this statement is to clarify the shared characteristics of the seven Dutch 'University Colleges' that are embedded in or affiliated with Dutch research universities to all interested parties. These seven University Colleges are:

- University College Utrecht (UCU) in Utrecht (Utrecht University)
- University College Maastricht (UCM) in Maastricht (Maastricht University)
- University College Roosevelt (UCR) in Middelburg (Utrecht University)
- Amsterdam University College (AUC) in Amsterdam (University of Amsterdam and VU University Amsterdam)
- Leiden University College (LUC) in The Hague (Leiden University)
- Erasmus University College (EUC) in Rotterdam (Erasmus University)
- University College Groningen (UCG) in Groningen (University of Groningen).

The meaning of the term 'University College' varies between national contexts. This in itself is an important reason to clarify what the Dutch University Colleges are. Also, within the single context of Dutch higher education, the concept of a University College deserves clarification. The first of the Dutch University Colleges opened its doors in 1998; the most recently created University College became operational in 2014. As a recent phenomenon, the University Colleges emerged in a dynamic environment of multiple developments in the higher education landscape. Some of these (inter-related) developments are: the Bologna process; emergence of multi-disciplinary undergraduate study programs; the 'honours' movement; internationalization; and increased openness to differentiation within the system with regard to selectivity and tuition fees. It is important to outline how University Colleges relate to this cluster of trends and developments.

The statement also serves as a point of reference when the University Colleges act together, as explained in the section about cooperation.



# Context

The University Colleges are international undergraduate colleges with selective admission that offer a BA / BSc program in Liberal Arts and Sciences. The Colleges strive for excellence in learning and teaching, offer small-scale and intensive education and actively promote synergy between the curriculum and extracurricular activities. The establishment of University Colleges is one of the responses of research universities to persistent issues such as a lack of differentiation, (too) early specialization, large classes, low faculty-to-student ratios, erosion of the research-teaching nexus, and a lack of incentives for teaching undergraduate students.



The educational philosophy of liberal education – that stresses intellectual growth through both broad and deep learning – is at the basis of the teaching & learning approach and curriculum of the University Colleges. But modern liberal education in the Dutch University Colleges goes beyond the traditional liberal arts approach of ‘liberating’ the individual through intellectual engagement. By combining the disciplinary depth and interdisciplinary learning with research and communication skills, students develop their creativity, entrepreneurialism, skills in working together, international and intercultural understanding abilities and societal engagement.

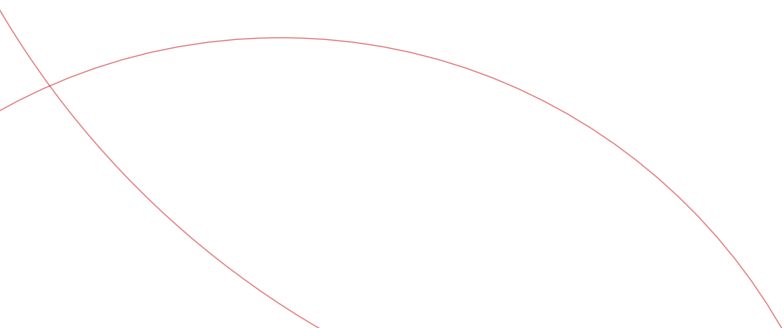
Over the last sixteen years, the Dutch University Colleges have developed a very strong track record with high student retention, positive student satisfaction and excellence in teaching. University College alumni have elevated success rates of being accepted into very competitive graduate programs worldwide. It is a shared ambition of the University Colleges to maintain their high standards of performance. To that end, the University Colleges share, exchange and discuss their ideas and best practices.





# Characteristics

The following principles underlie University Colleges in the Netherlands that offer an undergraduate program in Liberal Arts and Sciences:

1. University Colleges have intended learning outcomes that include: (a) multidisciplinary breadth of academic knowledge combined with depth of knowledge in a chosen concentration area; (b) ability to approach questions or issues in an interdisciplinary way; (c) excellent academic skills including communication skills, critical thinking skills, research skills and learning skills; (d) attitudes and skills for active participation as citizens in society, including international and intercultural understanding, social skills and a will to contribute to solving societal issues; (e) intellectual curiosity, reflexivity, and an open mind. These categories of intended outcomes are reflected in the domain specific framework of reference for Liberal Arts and Sciences.
  2. University Colleges have a radically open curriculum that allows students to explore a diversity of academic fields across the humanities, social sciences, natural and life sciences and that enables them to attain depth in a disciplinary or interdisciplinary concentration area of their own choosing. Each student at a University College meets regularly with their academic advisor, who also supports the student in the construction of a personal curriculum that fits the ambition and interest of the student.
  3. Teaching at University Colleges is research-based. Students have ample opportunity to participate in undergraduate research.
  4. University Colleges are distinct learning communities *and* social communities. They actively promote strong links between the formal program and extracurricular activities. Students, faculty and staff participate actively in the governance of the program and the community.
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5. University Colleges offer teaching and learning experiences characterized by small scale, high intensity and a high level of interaction between students and teachers and among students. University Colleges have therefore acquired the distinctive feature “small-scale and intensive education” as formulated in Dutch higher education regulations (NVAO).
6. University Colleges strive for diversity in their student population in terms of nationality, ethnicity, gender and cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. They select students on the basis of their motivation and ability to succeed in the program. English is the language used inside and outside the classroom.
7. University Colleges are dynamic environments that continuously offer space for curricular experimentation and educational innovation and attract academics dedicated to excellence in teaching.

## Cooperation

The Dutch University Colleges work together in many ways.

- The Deans of the Dutch University Colleges together form the University Colleges Deans Network (UCDN) that meets on a regular basis for discussing points of joint interest;
- Similar networking of (sections of) the staff, faculty and students of the University Colleges is actively supported by the Deans, for exchange of practices and experiences, or for joint projects; a UC students network is already in place (UCSRN);
- The UCDN initiates and supports joint branding of the Dutch University Colleges, both nationally and internationally, including cooperation in marketing and recruitment;
- The University Colleges are committed to an open exchange of data on admission, student, faculty and alumni performance among them;
- The University Colleges work together in providing professional development for UC faculty and staff members;
- The University Colleges cooperate in gaining political support for Liberal Arts and Sciences undergraduate programs, and for further strengthening the position of LAS students in master programs and on the labour market;
- The University Colleges jointly promote the educational values that underpin the University College programs within Dutch higher education at large;
- The University Colleges collaborate in a joint project that will allow students to gain a teacher qualification for secondary schools.



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