

# **Guide to Emerging Liberal Arts and Sciences Practices in the EU**

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**Erasmus+**

This handbook is an output of the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership  
"The Best Liberal Arts and Sciences Teaching Expanded and Reinforced"  
Erasmus +KA2 (2015-1-NL01-KA203-008993)  
It is co-funded by Erasmus + programme of the European Union



## **Preface**

The primary purpose of this handbook is to provide an introduction to various aspects of the Liberal Arts and Sciences in Europe to those for whom it is yet unfamiliar. It is also meant to be an active resource to those institutions that already identify themselves with LAS education. The text is aimed at a wide audience: policy-makers, educators, decision-makers at HE institutions, teachers, administrators, students and others interested in undergraduate education in the European Higher Education Area.

The Handbook is divided into three chapters, with a brief suggested reading of important resources at the end. The first chapter discusses the various elements that characterise a Liberal Arts and Sciences programme and the values that determine specific pedagogical methods and outcomes. A second chapter examines current models of liberal arts and sciences programmes by way of four case studies, comparing and contrasting their objectives and structures. A final chapter addresses the questions associated with the appropriate measure of evaluation to ensure high standards of quality in a Liberal Arts and Sciences context.

We trust that you will find this Handbook either a useful introduction or a welcome guide to the rapidly emerging world of Liberal Arts and Sciences Education in Europe.

An augmented version of this Handbook may be found online at <http://www.ecolas.eu/eng/>. Here you will find links to additional information regarding the most important elements of our discussion.

Preparation of this Handbook was made possible by an Erasmus+ funded Strategic Partnership titled “Best Liberal Arts and Sciences Teaching Expanded and Reinforced” (BLASTER). In addition to the present work on characteristics, models and quality standards, BLASTER has also produced outcomes in the areas of teacher training-professional development and undergraduate research. For more information on BLASTER, including access to these outcomes, please consult the ECOLAS website listed above.

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# I. The Purpose and Characteristics of a Liberal Arts and Science Education

Laurent Boetsch

## Why Now?

The term “liberal arts” is certainly not new to Europe. For centuries, beginning with its origins in the Greco-Roman tradition and its evolution through the medieval period and the Renaissance, it defined higher education through its organisation around the seven liberal arts of the Trivium (grammar, logic and rhetoric, the literary arts) and the Quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy, the mathematical arts). By focusing on the cultivation of wisdom through the nourishment of the soul by engagement with and mastery of these seven liberal arts, classical scholars meant to define the distinction between “education” and “training”.<sup>i</sup> Such a distinction remains characteristic of the Liberal Arts and Sciences as we see them employed today. It is the habits of mind and modes of learning from the classical period that have lent themselves to the modern aims of LAS. The importance of critical thinking and assuming responsibility for one’s thoughts and the articulation of those thoughts, as well as the need to acquire an understanding of nature through the critical examination of all things, remain among the foundation stones of an LAS education.

The shape and ethos of liberal education remained fundamentally unchanged until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With the emergence of new university models in France and in Germany, however, attention was diverted to other aims. Napoleon’s *grandes écoles* gave primacy to the training for professions, while in Germany, the value of research within a strong disciplinary orientation in combination with Wilhelm von Humboldt’s concept of *Bildung*<sup>ii</sup> became critical functions of the university. The 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly during the post-World War II era, witnessed an important evolution in higher education owing primarily to increased access to the university, what some have termed its massification.

The Bologna Process<sup>iii</sup>, whose basic premise is to provide a framework for university reform to meet the contemporary and future needs of evolving societies within the European Union, has been instrumental as a stimulus regarding new opportunities within the higher education sphere. As the original 1998 *Sorbonne Joint Declaration on harmonization of the architecture of the European higher education system* states:

“An open area for higher learning carries a wealth of positive perspectives, of course respecting our diversities, but requires on the other hand continuous

efforts to remove barriers and to develop a framework for teaching and learning which would enhance mobility and an ever-closer cooperation.” (*Sorbonne, 1*)

Within certain areas—most notably the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and, to some extent Germany—discussion of undergraduate education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century has included reform efforts led by the proponents of the Liberal Arts and Sciences. Their objectives aim to establish a comprehensive undergraduate degree that will prepare students both for continued study and/or successful professional careers. This particular designation, Liberal Arts and Sciences, includes not just the humanities and the social sciences readily associated with “liberal arts” but the natural sciences as well. It is this range of disciplines and the attention given to the interplay among them that indicates that this is the kind of education necessary for student generations to meet the particular challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>iv</sup>

While many member states implemented the Bachelor/Master distinction, the recommendations of the Bologna Process are not prescriptive and the realisation of its objectives across the European Union has been uneven at best. Yet those objectives, refined in a series of subsequent *Declarations*, have provided a broad range of opportunities to rethink the options available to member states that seek reforms in their higher education systems. While the ministerial communiqués, the various Trend reports, the minutes of the Bologna Follow-Up groups or the various publications on education produced by the Bologna Process make scant direct reference to the Liberal Arts and Sciences, there is no doubt that the process has provided the impetus for a consideration of LAS as a viable alternative within European higher education and that several successful models have emerged.<sup>v</sup>

One of the most important features of the Bologna reform is the recommendation to divide the university degree into three separate cycles, the Bachelor, the Masters and the Ph.D. Institutions who take this division of degree cycles seriously have had to think carefully about exactly what constitutes an undergraduate (Bachelor) degree, what are its objectives, what should students be expected to learn, how might they best learn it and how might it be accurately evaluated. The emergence of interest in the Liberal Arts and Sciences derives precisely from this kind of assessment.

Additional areas within the Bologna recommendations also support the growing interest in Liberal Arts and Sciences and its aims. One is the so-called “social dimension” of the process, generally understood as providing an education that is directed toward employability in the marketplace. But this is the narrowest understanding of the objective which is outlined in the London *Communiqué* of 2007

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in much broader terms by stating that educational policy “should . . . maximize the potential of individuals in terms of their personal development and their contribution to a sustainable and democratic knowledge-based society.” This notion of one purpose of higher education to prepare its students for democratic citizenship is among the fundamental principles of a Liberal Arts and Sciences education.

One notable outcome of the Bologna Reform is the emergence of an alternative to primarily content and research education toward a more student-centred education based on closer student/faculty relationships. Education centred on the student as learner and the various modes of learning available to make it most productive are critical to the LAS ethos. As a result of the response to the Bologna recommendations by those committed to the Liberal Arts and Sciences, a first-cycle or Bachelor degree aimed toward personal development in a knowledge-based society and characterised by student-centred learning provides a different way of thinking about undergraduate education.

While Bologna provides a framework of opportunity for the Liberal Arts and Sciences, there are also cultural, economic, political and social trends that contribute to a consideration of LAS within the European context. The rapidly changing landscape of the challenges emerging for the 21<sup>st</sup> century demand that all nations examine closely the nature of the education of those whose task it will be to address and resolve those issues. Climate change, genetic engineering, the consequences of globalisation, the allocation of diminishing natural resources are all issues, among others, that share certain common characteristics and lend themselves to the ways in which those with an education in the Liberal Arts and Sciences typically address problems. So, for example, while we may be confident that these questions will ultimately be resolved, they are each long-term challenges for which much of the knowledge necessary for their resolution has yet to be produced. A student who is not inspired to a passion for lifelong learning or who does not understand how the content of her or his major specifically relates to other realms of knowledge, is not equipped to acquire or produce new knowledge in meaningful ways. That student will have little to contribute to a society that increasingly demands those attributes both in and outside the workplace. At our current pace, the information available for any one discipline is being doubled every seven years. The simple transfer of current knowledge from professor to student in the university within the framework of a narrow disciplinary organisation is wholly inadequate.

If narrow specialisation will be insufficient in and of itself to address 21<sup>st</sup> century issues, what and how should university students be learning in order to be sufficiently prepared? Proponents of LAS would answer briefly that students need to acquire the skills that will allow them to recognize which questions to ask, where to look for their answers and how to express them clearly and intelligently.<sup>vi</sup>

A brief summary of the most common characteristics of Liberal Arts and Sciences will help to demonstrate its appropriateness as an educational process that cultivates those skills and which deserves careful consideration within the overall university reform movement in Europe.

### **Creating a Framework for Liberal Arts and Sciences**

An important aspect of the Liberal Arts and Sciences is that its implementation does not correspond to a single model. It defies a rigid definition because LAS is an ongoing *process* of education and it is precisely this flexibility in its nature that sometimes provokes its critics. Liberal Arts and Sciences education is most prevalent in the United States and some of its European critics contend that that tradition is a result of specific circumstances that do not apply to other parts of the world where culture, history and tradition have shaped different but equally appropriate approaches to higher learning. Yet we do a disservice to LAS education if we try to straightjacket it into a specific non-transferable format rather than examine the variety of ways that its characteristics can be integrated into any educational setting where there is the will to do so. There is no cultural bias that excludes good teaching, rigorous research to help inform that teaching, an effort to help students realise their full intellectual and personal potential and preparation in the kinds of skills appropriate to the world in which students will live and work, all of which are essential to the LAS ethos.

While there must be a degree of flexibility in the development and evolution of an LAS programme, in order to create a proper framework, it is, nevertheless, necessary to distinguish those characteristics that ought to be present. These factors might appear in varying degrees, but there is general agreement that they provide the basic organisation of the Liberal Arts and Sciences. A recent survey of LAS colleges and programmes included in the European Consortium of Liberal Arts and Sciences (ECOLAS) reveals both common, essential characteristics as well as diverse complementary aspects of LAS education that testify both to its specific nature and its flexibility. Each of the programmes and institutions responding include statements attesting to the following:

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- a curriculum that offers a broad learning perspective, deep knowledge in one or more areas of academic interest to the student and a high level of intellectual and academic development expected in both
- proposed learning outcomes that demonstrate a commitment to highly developed cognitive skills including problem-solving, independent critical thought, the ability to work individually and collaboratively, oral and written communication skills
- knowledge across a range of disciplines
- the importance of citizenship and its responsibilities as one of the aims of an LAS education
- the cultivation of the skills, knowledge and passion for lifelong learning

### **Curricular breadth and depth**

This is the most visible characteristic of LAS and the one that sets it apart from the typical European approach to undergraduate education. Rather than having to choose a strict discipline upon entrance to the university, an LAS curriculum will allow students to explore a range of subjects, usually during the first year or, in the case of the United States, the first two years, before focusing on a particular major area of study. There are a variety of methods to providing this “breadth plus depth” approach, but the most successful are those that seek to give coherence to the breadth portion and flexibility to curricular depth. What is often termed “general education”, the breadth portion, should not be organized just to give students a sampling of different areas of knowledge but should have a specific purpose for their overall preparation. For instance, the courses may demonstrate various modes of thought or methodologies regarding the study of critical issues – how do scientists think, how do humanists approach ideas, how do quantitative resources contribute to problem solving, etc. These courses should, at the same time, introduce practice in and communication of the analytical and critical thinking skills that will be called upon for the successful completion of whichever major discipline a student may choose.

With regard to curricular depth, it is important that there be an intentional refining and application of the skills introduced in the breadth portion of the curriculum to the work required in the concentrated depth sector. Those skills are often expressed in terms of specific course learning outcomes, which are, in turn, appropriately assessed and evaluated on an individual student basis. Increasingly and appropriate to the 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges indicated above, concentrated coursework in a particular discipline is complemented by courses that students are free to choose from related disciplines

that provide additional perspective to their principal area of study. Contemporary “concentration” or “major” structures can be issue-, theme- or problem-oriented and, thus, based on more than one related field of study. This interdisciplinary approach to the major has found particular favour in a number of the new and emerging Liberal Arts and Sciences undergraduate degree programmes in the European Union.

Another important expression of the skills that are the objectives of learning in LAS is realized in the opportunity for undergraduates to pursue research in their chosen area of concentration. The teaching of research methodologies, the mentoring of students engaged in research and the assessment of student research efforts are all part of the teaching responsibilities of faculty in LAS programmes, and independent research is often the requirement of “capstone” exercises, the Bachelor Thesis or culminating projects within the major.

The overall aim of the breadth and depth nexus and the various means to its implementation is to offer a rigorous, meaningful and ultimately practical approach to undergraduate education and provide students with the knowledge and the tools for success in continued study or in the workplace.

### **Learning Environment, Learning Outcomes, Essential Skills and Lifelong Learning**

An LAS education is designed to foster certain skills to apply to disciplinary content in meaningful and practical ways. Approaches to learning within the LAS context attempt to guide students intentionally toward the essential skills that will prepare them for advanced studies, professional development and lifelong learning: critical thinking, problem solving, collaborative learning and oral and written communication.

*Critical thinking* is associated with the capacity to form abstract concepts, integrate them into specific circumstances and provide some judgment or evaluation of their effectiveness, in other words, mastering how to go from theory to practice. *Problem solving* teaches students how to collect, analyse and evaluate evidence, and then how to apply such evidence to problem resolution either within the academic setting or as part of engaged co-curricular activity. While students are responsible for their own individual academic progress, through group projects and shared research activities, *collaborative learning* cultivates the attitudes and provides the opportunity for experience in the kind of work that is generally expected in the workplace. The accurate and authentic expression of ideas through *oral and written communication* is

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a constant exercise throughout the curriculum and provides students with the practice and discipline necessary for their mastery.

The typical LAS learning environment, generally characterized as an intensive interactive environment, provides a number of avenues for students to learn and to apply these skills. Class discussions guided by the professor, projects outside the classroom, small group collaboration among students, individual and collaborative research, as well as frequent exercises in oral and written communication, are among the pedagogical practices that enable students to acquire these important skills before taking on advanced study or employment. This environment is most successful when structured on a small scale to allow frequent interaction between and among students and faculty. While small class sizes and low student/faculty ratios are ideal for creating such an environment, it is also possible to structure large classes in such a way as to implement some of these interactive aspects. For example, lecture sections can be divided into smaller groups for the purpose of discussion, writing assignments or oral presentations.

One important goal of Liberal Arts and Sciences is to provide the skills and to promote the enthusiasm in students to pursue learning beyond the classroom, what is often referred to as “lifelong learning”. Many of the pedagogical tools employed in teaching within a Liberal Arts and Sciences environment reach beyond disciplinary content to instruct students on how to learn and to keep on learning. This particular capacity, while important for the workplace where the accumulation and application of new knowledge is essential for advancement also contributes to the enhancement of the quality of life, part of the active citizenship for which the Liberal Arts and Sciences prepare students.

### ***Engaged citizenship***

Preparation for engaged citizenship is perhaps the least well understood aspect of a Liberal Arts and Sciences education but may be the most significant in terms of its overall impact. While LAS does not overlook the importance of educating the individual, it also claims that its methods, aims and outcomes prepare students to be positive actors within a community dedicated to the cultivation and exercise of those principles that define a free, democratic society. This notion is not new to LAS, rather, it formed an essential part of its purpose from its very origins. The fields of study that defined the liberal arts in the ancient world—the *Quadrivium* and the

*Trivium*—were thought to provide the essential skills and knowledge to give individuals the capacity to assume community responsibility. The focus on intellectual development and curiosity, thinking critically and communicating effectively aimed and continues to aim at educating citizens willing to sustain the common good in a civic society. This is one of the areas where the purpose of an LAS education separates from the goal of simply training students for employment in the workplace.

While the oft-mentioned skills of critical thinking, effective communication and problem-solving should be an essential element in the learning outcomes of specific courses, in the current LAS environment much of the refining of those skills takes place outside the classroom. Participation in student organizations, study abroad, community service, internships, volunteer work, work-study programmes and related opportunities provide students with the means to contribute actively to society at large and to learn the importance of community engagement. This is what is meant when defenders of LAS speak of educating “the whole person”. Course content is just one aspect of many that make up the overall fabric of an LAS education. It is the critical blending of each of these curricular and co-curricular elements that ultimately distinguish an LAS graduate.

In sum, a basic framework for a Liberal Arts and Sciences programme will include the following:

- An institutional ethos committed to the goals and objectives of LAS
- A student-centred education within a comprehensive curriculum with a range of student choice that provides breadth distinguished by exposure to multiple disciplines and depth in a concentrated area of study.
- Learning outcomes that stress particular skills for lifelong education to include critical and analytical thinking, oral and written communication, collaborative learning and problem-solving
- Curricular and co-curricular opportunities to apply learning skills to civic and community issues to allow students to acquire a civic consciousness
- Appropriate strategies for assessment and evaluation that ensure the success of proposed learning outcomes

Yet the *framework* is not enough to ensure that students will, in fact, experience the benefits of an LAS education. In order to successfully implement its objectives and goals, the key factor in providing an education that will realize its aims is the nature and the quality of the teaching to which students are exposed.

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### **Teaching Practices at the Heart of an LAS education**

Teaching in a Liberal Arts and Sciences environment requires a strong commitment to its principles and a willingness to work towards excellence in teaching as a vital aspect of one's professional development. It must be noted, however, that an essential component of good teaching in LAS is a serious dedication to ongoing scholarly activity and research. This balance between teaching and research that can help to inform teaching is critical to ensuring the success of an LAS curriculum and it is important for an LAS institution to provide faculty the resources necessary for its ongoing development. Without faculty who demonstrate the same characteristics of curiosity, problem-solving and lifelong learning that they are charged with inspiring in their students, the framework that we have just described becomes nothing more than a sterile organizational structure.

The main teaching challenge for faculty in LAS programmes is how to create and sustain an interactive classroom environment that will engage students in such a way as to develop the cognitive skills that characterize LAS and, at the same time, guide them toward mastering course content. Preparation begins with the course syllabus which, in addition to listing assignments to be prepared for each class, should also include: learning outcomes for the course consistent with those of the overall curriculum, a description of the kinds of activities—group projects, oral presentations, out-of-class lectures or talks, etc.—for which students will be held responsible and an explanation of how student performance will be evaluated.<sup>vii</sup>

In general, the faculty member leading an LAS class will act primarily as a guide, helping students to make their own discoveries about the course material, articulate those discoveries accurately and put them forward to be tested by both faculty and their student peers. While traditional lectures can remain a part of the classroom, leading class discussion, overseeing work in small groups, effectively evaluating students on an ongoing basis and developing the kind of faculty-student relationship that inspires confidence are among the necessary skills for an LAS instructor. These are learnable skills that should be periodically revised and refined through active engagement in professional development. Teaching in an LAS environment should be a subject for discussion among faculty who share together their successes and failures in the classroom in order to consistently improve classroom performance. A recent study conducted for the American Council on Education<sup>viii</sup> focuses on instruction and student outcomes and demonstrates the importance of the quality of instruction in

helping students to attain targeted outcomes. The study lists five essential faculty practices to ensure successful student learning and can be summarized as follows:

- *Transparency*: Students must have a clear understanding of where they are going, as well as the criteria by which they will be assessed.
- *Pedagogical approaches*: Personalized instruction and active learning are among the most successful approaches for student-centred learning.
- *Assessment*: Supportive learning environments that assess learning only at the end of a course are insufficient. Students need feedback along the way as they engage in multiple opportunities to practice learning.
- *Self-regulation*: A necessary aspect of good teaching practice is to ensure that students be active learners, not just passive recipients in the learning process.
- *Alignment*: Learning environments are most successful when there is a clearly organised coherence among its various elements so that student learning does not become fragmented.

One of the ongoing difficulties for proponents of LAS has been the challenge to quantify its claims for producing positive outcomes in cognitive growth and the role that good teaching plays in that process. It is much easier to measure content knowledge through traditional testing methods than it is to assess gains in areas such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication skills or a capacity for lifelong learning. However, recent studies in the United States have produced results that appear to confirm significant cognitive growth in LAS settings during the course of the undergraduate experience based on the quality of teaching.<sup>ix</sup> Among some of the important conclusions of these studies are: 1) that clear and well-organized instruction fosters the acquisition of course knowledge but also adds to student cognitive growth and 2) “deep learning”<sup>x</sup> experiences have clear, positive impacts on growth in critical thinking skills and moral reasoning. Comparing the institutional results, it is demonstrated that while students exposed to clear and organized instruction and deep learning experiences in *any* institutional setting showed positive cognitive outcomes, “(r)elative to their peers at both research universities and regional institutions, liberal arts college students realized significant advantages on both their critical-thinking skills and their need for cognition that were attributable to exposure to higher levels of instructional clarity and organization and more frequent deep-learning experiences”<sup>xi</sup>.

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This then is the sum of our introduction: Liberal Arts and Sciences is a *viable approach* toward learning that provides students with the skills and competencies they require for advanced study, for productive professional careers and for meaningful lives, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It requires a certain framework within which to flourish but that framework is flexible and relies as much on process as on structure. Finally, it demands well-prepared, active teaching in order to realize the full measure of its objectives.

Our next two chapters will focus on current European models of LAS institutions and the ways by which this type of learning can be effectively assessed and evaluated. While the number of LAS colleges and programmes in the European Higher Education Area remain relatively few, their success is drawing attention across the continent as the European university is increasingly perceived to lack the requisite flexibility and structures to accommodate the new realities of higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Meanwhile, the active, ongoing communication among LAS programmes through organizations like the European Consortium for Liberal Arts and Sciences (ECOLAS), the University Colleges Deans Network in the Netherlands and projects like the Erasmus+ Best Liberal Arts and Science Teaching Expanded and Reinforced (BLASTER)<sup>xii</sup> are providing important platforms for the role of LAS within the current European higher education reform movement.

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<sup>i</sup> A highly accessible summary of the history of the Liberal Arts and Sciences is found in Kimball, Bruce, *The Liberal Arts Tradition: A Documentary History*, University Press of America, 2010.

<sup>ii</sup> Michael Eldridge provides a summary of *Bildung* in his brief essay, *The German Bildung Tradition* at <http://www.philosophy.uncc.edu/mleldrid/SAAP/USC/pbt1.html>.

<sup>iii</sup> Information on the Bologna Process and its evolution is found on the website, [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/bologna-process\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/bologna-process_en).

<sup>iv</sup> A variety of terms – liberal arts, liberal education, artes liberales, etc. – are used as descriptors that are sometimes employed erroneously as synonyms. A summary of the distinction among these terms is found at the website of the American Association of Colleges and Universities at [www.aacu.org](http://www.aacu.org).

<sup>v</sup> Ch.2 of this handbook will provide examples of LAS models which have emerged.

<sup>vi</sup> Recent studies indicate that the essential qualities that employers seek in making hiring decisions correspond in large part to the learning outcomes that characterize Liberal Arts and Sciences learning. A report issued by the American Association of Colleges and Universities and The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems demonstrates that “93% of employers agree that candidates’ demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major.” (*How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment*)

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<sup>vii</sup> The Erasmus+ BLASTER project also produced materials to help faculty develop the kind of learning environment that characterize LAS teaching. These materials are available at [www.ecolas.eu](http://www.ecolas.eu).

<sup>viii</sup> The study was commissioned by the American Council on Education and carried out by Dr. Natasha A. Jankowski, Director of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment. The results are available in the article *Unpacking Relationships: Instruction and Student Outcomes* and can be downloaded online at <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/Unpacking-Relationships-Instruction-and-Student-Outcomes.pdf>.

<sup>ix</sup> The most thorough of these studies to date is the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education, summarized in *Lessons from the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education*, Change, The Magazine of Higher Learning, March-April 2013.

<sup>x</sup> “Deep learning” refers to pedagogical approaches to learning that serve to cultivate the types of skills that characterize the outcomes of Liberal Arts and Sciences education. These might include the conscientious application of theory to practical problems or issues, the organization of ideas into complex relationships, projects that demand the integration of information from a variety of sources, learning that changes the way to understand an issue, etc. These kinds of experiences have been defined by Dr. Thomas Nelson Laird within three distinct categories including “Higher Order Learning”, “Integrative Learning” and “Reflective Learning”. (see Laird, *Measuring Deep Approaches to Learning Using the National Survey of Student Engagement*, online at [http://nsse.indiana.edu/pdf/conference\\_presentations/2006/air2006deeplearningfinal.pdf](http://nsse.indiana.edu/pdf/conference_presentations/2006/air2006deeplearningfinal.pdf)).

<sup>xi</sup> Blaich, Charles and Pascarella, Ernest T., “*Lessons from the Wabash Study of Liberal Arts Education*,” Change, The Magazine of Higher Learning, Marc-April, 2013, p.5.



## II. Models of LAS Programmes in the EU

Volker Balli

### Introduction

The previous chapter outlined some essential features of a Liberal Arts and Sciences education. It emphasized, though, that there is no single model by which to realize or implement these features. This chapter will deal with how an LAS education has already been institutionalized in Europe in a number of ways, depending on the respective aims but also national and institutional conditions.

The need to emphasize this plurality of models arises from the fact that for a long time the idea of a liberal arts and science education had been associated with one region of the world, namely the U.S., and with one institutional model, namely the "Liberal Arts College", that is most often private, small-scale and residential (sometimes termed '*the American College*'). However, also in the U.S., it has been emphasized over the last decades that a genuine liberal arts education can, and indeed ought to, take place in a number of settings, as forcefully advocated by the Association of American Colleges and University <http://www.aacu.org/> (cf. Chapter 3, but also 1).

In Europe, the emergence, or revival, of LAS programs over the last decades has taken a variety of forms from the very beginning. The graphics on <http://liberal-arts.eu/> forcefully illustrate this. However, most new initiatives in Europe since 1998 - with the founding of University College Utrecht as an important moment - were at public institutions, a trend that has been reinforced over the second decade of the century. A simple explanation for this is the stronger prevalence of public institutions of HE over private ones in Europe, in addition to the reform impetus of the Bologna Process, as explained in the previous chapter.

The four cases that will be presented in the following chapter and that will serve to identify three broad models for realizing an LAS education will, as a consequence, all be from public institutions. Moreover, the selection of examples seeks to reflect the variety of partners in the BLASTER Strategic Partnership. It should be emphasized, though, that it is not our aim or intention that specific institutions are replicated. Rather, their presentation serves to give expression to the variety of ways in which a commitment to a Liberal Arts education can be interpreted while also identifying a specific number of models. These models are identified not by their difference in

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stance towards the shape of the concentrations (e.g. disciplinary, multi-disciplinary, theme-based, student-designed within some constraints), or the question of core texts, or to which pedagogy each is committed. Rather, the distinguishing criterion is the institutional arrangement in and through which the program is realized, in other words: how the LAS program is embedded in and relates to the overall institutional setting of a University or College.

We will do so by dealing with four LAS institutions in Europe: the University Colleges of the Universities Maastricht and Leiden (based in The Hague) as well as the Liberal Arts Programs at the University of Warwick and at the College of Leuphana University Lüneburg. The aim is to introduce these institutions and programs and to provide insights into how challenges linked to LAS education are being addressed. These include:

- (a) striking a balance between academics and real-world challenges
- (b) fostering intensive learning under the condition of resource constraints
- (c) incorporating new forms of learning (e.g. collaborative, experienced based, student-centred)
- (d) defending LAS programs in at times sceptical environments
- (e) taking into consideration local traditions and situations

### **Model I: LAS Programmes at University Colleges**

The University Colleges at public research universities have already been dubbed the most significant contribution from the Netherlands to Higher Education in Europe in modern times. Starting with a bold, pioneering initiative in the late 1990s by Hans Adriaansens with the founding of University College Utrecht<sup>xiii xiv</sup>, there are currently nine such Colleges, with almost every research university in the Netherlands having its own College. They share information and are organized through the Deans Network: <https://www.universitycolleges.info/>

With about 5500 students enrolled in these Colleges, they already have a significant weight in terms of pure numbers. In addition, the University Colleges have an explicitly international outlook and attract a significant proportion of their student body from outside the Netherlands, and also from outside of Europe. Moreover, all of them are well connected worldwide. While it was the aim to introduce a new way of

teaching and learning, the success, as evident today, is much bigger than one had dared to hope in the early 2000s. In the following section, two such cases - University College Maastricht and Leiden University College The Hague - will be presented. The aim thereby is to highlight common features but also the space for differences within this model.

### *University College Maastricht (UCM)*

UCM is a LAS institution that aims to educate well-rounded academics whose studies show breadth and depth, and to cultivate crucial academic skills. The formula to achieve this is: curricular freedom, problem-based learning as the pedagogy, and a vibrant community.

#### *I. Founding in its context*

Founded in 2002, UCM is the second LAS institution in the Netherlands after University College Utrecht. It was established in direct response to increasingly worrisome developments in the Dutch educational system such as high drop-out rates, monodisciplinarity and weak mechanisms to guarantee a desirable degree of rigour in programmes of study (cf. reasons for setting up a programme in chapter 3). In this founding period, the aspiration was that UCM, just as University College Utrecht (UCU) had earlier done, would pave the way for a fundamental transformation of education at universities in the Netherlands. From the very beginning, UCM took inspiration from institutions in the US, such as the Sarah Lawrence College, in its emphasis on giving learners a significant amount of freedom and thus ownership over their education, in the tradition of the 'Open Curriculum' (cf. also the Studium Individuale below).<sup>xv</sup> The College, and its Liberal Arts and Science Programme, thus deliberately situated itself from the very beginning in the longer tradition of Liberal Arts Education.

#### *II. Aims & Purposes*

A small-scale personal community and freedom of choice are the defining characteristics of the program at UCM. These are seen as essential features in order to focus on the educational development, both intellectual and personal, of the individual student. Most importantly, the freedom of choice is realised through an Open

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Curriculum, i.e. the opportunity for students not to be bound to a pre-given curriculum, but to choose freely from a broad offering of courses and to do this in each semester, course by course. The degree is thus marked by a high degree of flexibility. The community aspect, which has been described in chapter 1 as a fruitful and inspiring learning environment, means that the College is a 'hub' in the sense that it offers day-to-day care and academic advising. To allow for such intensive interaction, the student number is deliberately kept to 200 per cohort - as is the case for most of the other University Colleges - so that personal contacts can be established and close relations can be built. At the same time, and in contrast to the policies of many other University Colleges - but in line with the commitment to a significant amount of freedom of choice - students are allowed to live outside Campus, shaping this part of their lives mostly on their own. The aspiration for "Excellence" is of less significance; being the "best" institution is not nearly as important as facilitating the self-determined intellectual development of students.

These values attract a particular kind of student, though the extent to which the programme and 'the kind of student' have influenced each other over time should not be underestimated. At first, and similar to many other Liberal Arts and Science initiatives, the College drew "pioneers" who were eager to be part of a new development in higher education. Once the College was widely known, it attracted capable students with a strong desire to excel across a wide range of subjects. And once UCM began to do well in university rankings, as it repeatedly has, the appeal extended also to students looking for prestige that was granted by a having studied at UCM. This, not uncontroversial, aspect of the "differentiation" of the landscape of undergraduate education will be discussed further below in the conclusions of this section.

What students share despite these changes is that they seek (a) to know a lot about a little, and in this way be able to show some expertise, which precisely realises the "depth" characteristics of an LAS education as outlined in chapter 1; (b) to learn a little about a lot, which is commonly understood as the general education, or, in the terms used in chapter 1, the 'breadths' part; and (c) to rigorously cultivate key academic skills, that can and will be of use in many walks of life, not the least for academic careers. This goes hand in hand with the willingness to adopt a certain ethos where the main principle is this: the college offers an education tailored to my interests and in turn I'm ready to work hard and to make the most of it.

So overall, UCM is an institution where the students match the program. The admissions process is crucial to achieving this. In a first step, student have to submit a personal statement and their school records (66%). In a second step, they are invited to an interview (33%). What they have to demonstrate throughout is that they are serious about studying and able to voice, broadly, what they are interested in. In other words, students need to demonstrate that: 1) they have ideas about what you would do with an open curriculum 2) that they are inclined towards the specific pedagogy (Problem Based Learning, as described below) 3) and that they will be a good academic citizen. This sense of direction, also at an early stage, is essential for the kind of open curriculum offered at the College.

### *III. Curriculum*

How exactly a curriculum is tailored in view of a principled commitment to LAS is, as chapter 1 showed, a decisive yet also open and therefore difficult question. It is thus not surprising that the program at UCM has evolved over the years in view of the lessons learnt during the early years, which were incorporated in the design of the program at the College. However, the main building blocks have remained the same.

The Open Curriculum allows students to choose what courses they want to take and thereby also learn the skill of making choices, rethinking them, and of making them again (the mechanics of choice). It consists of three parts. First, UCM offers a choice among three concentrations, which are to provide coherence while still allowing much more flexibility than in strictly monodisciplinary degrees: Social Sciences, Humanities and, Sciences. In addition, and reinforcing the spirit of the Open Curriculum, students can develop their own interdisciplinary concentration. About 30% of the students make use of this.

Students have to complete 16 courses (of 5 Credit Points each) from within the chosen concentration. To encourage an advancement in the learning across the degree, the courses to choose from are classified into three levels: introductory, intermediate, and advanced. Students are to take no more than four introductory, and no fewer than four advanced courses. The courses on offer are, in their substance, of a kind that could be offered in traditional departments. Interdisciplinarity, thus, is achieved rather on the level of the curriculum rather than within individual courses.

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Second, and as the first dimension in ensuring breadth, students need to attend four core courses. The objectives of these core courses are: to provide a common vocabulary, which helps create some academic community in view of otherwise diverging plans of study; a conceptual language that is of use in the respective plans of study, and; to expose students to different issues so that they are well-rounded. The mechanism to further enhance the aspect of breadth - that is general education - students need to take two courses from each of the concentrations they have not chosen.

Third, and a second dimension that ensures breadth but also familiarity with essential academic skills, students must choose between a set of skills courses and completing projects in which the practical knowledge is applied. The projects can be understood as the crowning of the curriculum, for it is an opportunity to bring together knowledge from different fields of study and make use of the acquired skills. The required individual capstone project (bachelor-thesis) is then the place where the entire learning achieved can come together.

Given the range of choices UCM offers, academic advising is crucial. Indeed, the role of the advisor is to assure the quality of the individual degree. The advising is the glue that holds the personal curriculum together. This involves meeting a faculty advisor at least twice per year during which one has to construct a narrative and justify one's choices. In addition to academic advising, the College also offers Curriculum planning exercises at the very beginning of the program, so that students are well-prepared to make informed choices. In addition, advising is a key component of creating, as outlined in chapter 1, a distinctive learning environment that is marked by close student-faculty encounters.

### *IV. Pedagogy and Teaching Philosophy*

Teaching at UCM follows an active pedagogy that strives to involve students in the learning process very directly and closely. The basic idea is to bring together motivated undergraduates from different backgrounds in classes with no more than 12 students and to encourage discussions so that they can learn from each other on the basis of what they have read. The specific approach is called PBL: Problem Based Learning. The key inspiration has been McMasters University in Canada and it stipulates that discussions evolve around problems that are being identified by the students prior to the readings. In addition to a mastery of the materials, the teaching

mode seeks to cultivate essential skills that an LAS education is committed to: self-reliance, team-work, making connections, and clear and convincing articulation.

This pedagogy, in combination with the practise of an Open Curriculum, strongly entails making informed, reasoned choices, justifying them to others and acting on this basis. These competences are foundational to modern citizenship. The cultivation of citizenship through specific courses or co-curricular activities, though, is not a priority of UCM. Local engagement is not part of the pedagogy, although local engagement is often triggered by insights students gain through the classes. What is important is thus the cultivation of a *healthy academic environment* that allows for a good balance between 'the academic' and the deliberate engagement with societal problems.

The institutional setting of UCM is crucial for this healthy academic environment and for the creation of an actual community. UCM is placed in the city of Maastricht in a former monastery, where all the teaching and much of the learning takes place. Also, the open study spaces are highly frequented. The College as a building is also the place for numerous extra-curricular initiatives, most of which are student run. In this vibrant community, learning beyond the class-room also takes place. In contrast to the majority of other University Colleges, though, UCM decided early on to be non-residential.

#### *V. Organisation*

The main challenges on the operational level at UCM is to deliver on the promise of an Open Curriculum, i.e. to organise the classes that students have chosen. Equally important is community building on the side of the students. UCM is not residential and this requires events on a continuous basis in order to bring students together. Neither the academic program nor the extra-curricular program can be provided without a staff that is committed to the values and the pedagogy of the College. This is why a hybrid staffing model was implemented very consciously: roughly one third of the teaching was to be delivered by in-house faculty, to secure a commitment to the teaching philosophy, the other two thirds is contributed by faculty from the different departments of the University of Maastricht. To ensure a long-term commitment to UCM, the College gives faculty long term career perspectives. However, up-ward mobility of faculty in the traditional research-focused tracks of academia remains a challenge, as will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

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### ***Leiden University College The Hague (LUC)***

Leiden University College The Hague was founded a decade after the first UC in the Netherlands. It could thus be informed by their experiences, and develop a distinctive profile within the landscape that had been created by University Colleges and LAS programs. The guiding purpose of LUC is to nurture an academic engagement with global challenges and hence with an international outlook. The four global challenges that are at the core of the programme have been inspired by the location in The Hague, which is generally seen as the International City of Peace and Justice. The challenges in the programme are: Peace & Justice, Diversity, Sustainability and Diversity. LUC offers a distinct mix of academic training with a preparation for citizenship of a global dimension.

#### *I. Founding in its context*

Leiden University College was founded in 2010 and since 2013 it inhabits its permanent new custom-build and distinctively modern premises in the centre of The Hague. At the same time, as part of Leiden University (established 1575), the College consciously invigorates the medieval tradition of the *Artes Liberales* – a study program for students of the university preceding a degree in Law, Medicine or Theology.

The founding was supported by the Ministry of Education with a grant for stimulating excellence in higher education and was, after several years of discussions and feasibility studies, realised in cooperation with the municipality of The Hague. Taking inspiration from LAS institutions in the Netherlands as well as the US, the program, similar to the LAS Colleges in the Netherlands, brought forth a departure from the prevailing national culture of better 'not sticking your neck out' and students being merely an unrecognised number within a mass of other students.

The ambition was to set up an interdisciplinary programme in which students from all over the world work on issues that affect the whole world. It was planned to be an honours program, to offer an education which would not be possible within a traditional monodisciplinary model of education in the Netherlands, in terms of breadth, critical skills, and also personal development.

#### *II. Aims & Purposes*

The interpretation and adaptation of the Liberal Arts tradition, as outlined in chapter 1, at LUC combines an emphasis on a rigorous academic education with a desire to cultivate a contemporary interpretation of civic responsibility and engagement. Not surprisingly the LUC motto is: ‘Building Knowledge for a Better World’. The goal is to enable students to make a true difference in the world they live in, at local, national or global levels. Or in other words: to train responsible global citizens who have the skills to turn their ideas into action.

To this end, the program aims to cultivate a range of intellectual skills which allow each student to respond creatively to a rapidly changing world. This ability involves looking at various political, social and cultural issues and problems from a new perspective and working creatively, reflectively and in cooperation with others towards solutions. The central position of engagement with global issues asks for a conscious interdisciplinary approach to learning: Students gain substantial knowledge in different fields that they can then make use of in analysing contemporary issues. At the same time, it forecloses [excludes/prevents?] a narrow specialisation on one discipline only, as is common in the recent European tradition of HE. The focus on global problems at LUC, and the commitment to interdisciplinarity that it demands, is a way to address both the LAS characteristics of breadth and of depth, as will be outlined further below.

The ambition to understand and act in the contemporary world also asks for a cultivation of central skills, a key characteristic of an LAS education: Responding to a rapidly changing world also demands critical thinking and the development of an inquisitive mind, i.e. the ability to analyse problems thoroughly, systematically, and rigorously. In turn, academic skills such as scientific reasoning, research competences, and presentation skills (e.g. reporting on findings and ideas effectively in a variety of circumstances and for various audiences) are essential, too, just as the tools for international and cross-cultural communication.

Given the goals of the program, LUC attracts a particular kind of ambitious student. They appreciate an intensive learning environment in which discussion takes a central role. LUC is aware of the challenge to maintain a diverse student body while not compromising on the students’ potential to engage in and thrive through demanding academic work. With this concern, LUC is not alone in the emerging landscape of LAS programmes.<sup>xvi</sup>

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### *III. Curriculum*

The key themes of LUC, i.e. Peace & Justice, Sustainability, Prosperity and Diversity are incorporated into the academic program at LUC. This is done in various ways. A core function, as to breadth of knowledge and skills, is realised by the first-year programme that is quite tightly structured. Here, all students have to complete core courses that fall under the title “Global Challenges”: (1) Peace & Justice, (2) Sustainability, (3) Prosperity and (4) Diversity. The intention is not only to introduce first-year college students to the various disciplines that can be used to approach global challenges and to help them understand the complexity of these issues, but also to encourage students with different interests to work together and envisage solutions, all bringing their own perspective.

Next to these four substantive core courses, students need to take the following classes: academic skills (Academic Writing, Statistics, Mathematics), History of Philosophy, and History of Science. Their place in the curriculum is to cultivate essential academic skills as well as to provide a better understanding of the nature, characteristics and limits of science.

Each student selects a major, the part of the programme where students gain depth, building directly on this engagement with the different "Global Challenges." Overall, three thematic BA-majors and three thematic BSc-majors are offered, each of them being interdisciplinary:

Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences:

- Human Diversity
- World Politics
- International Justice

Bachelor of Science in Liberal Arts & Sciences:

- Global Public Health
- Governance, Economics, and Development
- Earth, Energy, and Sustainability

A distinctive feature of the program is that majors are thematically organized. They allow students to choose the areas in which they want to gain depth, while not having to constrain oneself to one discipline only. Rather, they give the students the inter- and multidisciplinary knowledge for each specific theme. At the same time, the majors are

coherently structured and provide students a good depth of knowledge to address global challenges and connect their courses to real world problems.

To allow for actual depth, each of the six Majors consists of at least twenty substantive courses, three methodology courses from which students make their own selection, and a Capstone project (a version of B.A. dissertation, a term used in a number of University Colleges). Students are asked to declare a particular thematic Major but each Major leaves a good deal of space for students to decide what courses they wish to attend as part of it.

In addition to these six Majors, the LUC programme offers students an elective space in which they can complete a minor (Journalism, Gender Studies, Philosophy, Social and Business Entrepreneurship, Psychology), go on exchange, or take additional courses in their major. A special program for students who have an interest in fine or performing arts is offered, with the option of taking courses or even a full minor at the Royal Academy of Art or the Royal Conservatoire. To facilitate students who wish to pursue a career as a barrister or judge, LUC has an agreement with Leiden University's Law School, allowing students to pursue two degrees at the same time: a BA. degree in Liberal Arts & Sciences (with a major in International Justice) and a LL.B degree (Bachelor of Laws), both of which can be completed within four to five years.

Although the entire programme is focussed on training global citizens, the curriculum also has a specific requirement for citizenship. Students can choose from various courses to complete this requirement. They can study a foreign language, follow courses in Cities and Citizenship, take part in a course on International Development Project Management, take a field trip to Kenya and Tanzania, or take part in the Community Project. Within this service learning course, students combine classes on didactics, intercultural classrooms, and educational policy with volunteer work in two schools in The Hague. Here they give extra classes to newly arrived children or children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Finally, LUC offers a well-structured Student Support System. As at UCM, students are assigned to an Academic Advisor with whom they meet at least once per semester. In these meetings, the curricular choices of the student are discussed and pathways through the curriculum are chosen. A Study Advisor is available to advise on non-content related academic questions. To support the residential aspect of the programme, the college employs a Student Life Officer, who is also a member of academic staff, and Residential Assistants. These are senior students, one on each floor

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of the residential areas, who stimulate community activities among the group they are responsible for. Finally, for students who face personal issues, a Student Life Counsellor is available.

### *IV. Pedagogy and Teaching Philosophy*

LUC situates itself firmly within the LAS tradition and is committed to the goal of training responsible global citizens. This gives rise to a pedagogy with multiple elements: First of all, classes are intensive and small-scale. Around 200 students are admitted each year after a strict selection process. Classes have no more than 20 students, in order to involve students, to allow new kinds of teaching and to facilitate an instructive relationship between instructors and students. It also means that students are expected to come to class prepared every time and that attendance is compulsory.

Second, instructors are encouraged to make use of student-centred didactical methods: presentations, discussions, group work, papers, assignments, moot courts, and, in particular, case studies are used frequently to create a learning environment in which students can excel. As a consequence, students assume an active role in teaching, they seize the responsibility for their own learning. In addition to that, discussions need to get started, which at times can be difficult to achieve if there happen to be more introvert students in the class. The instructor uses various methods to involve all students.

Third, the College follows a broad approach as to pedagogy, so teachers can ultimately choose what formats they make use of, including flipped classroom, small online-courses, but also theatre. This depends on the learning goals of the course and how these can be best achieved.

Fourth, students undertake fieldtrips to, for example, the International Criminal Court, Houses of Parliament, Ministries or non-governmental organisations in the city as well as completing internships at these institutions, and they participate in moot courts or other simulations. There are also several professionals who are appointed to teach the students, this includes former high-ranking diplomats, a former war correspondent, a former prosecutor at one of the tribunals, and even former ministers. Guest lectures by professionals happen frequently, both in courses as well as outside the curriculum. The integration of real life experience with academic training is and one of the basic elements of the educational philosophy.

Finally, students can undertake undergraduate research either in research clinics in which the students work with a member of academic staff on their research or in their capstone thesis. Thereby, they can deepen the research-skills which are a key part of academic training and which are increasingly demanded by employers.

The pedagogy, in line with what has been outlined in chapter 1 as a LAS learning environment, does reach beyond the classroom in the form of co-curricular dimensions. Similar to UCM, LUC encourages and promotes, the idea that all students should be active in student-run initiatives. These can relate both to the community at LUC itself or concern the outside world. It is there that the students sharpen their leadership, teamwork and intercultural skills.

Another central dimension of this implicit learning is that LUC is a residential college. For the first two years, students live on Campus, which for LUC means in the specifically built premises in central The Hague where the formal aspects of learning and teaching also take place. The choice for a residential program has been a very conscious one: living together with peers from all over the world should create an additional environment in which learning can take place. This can take the form of discussions continued from class, activities that are organised, but also the daily interaction with other cultures, like cooking and eating together.

### *V. Organisation*

Certain conditions need to be in place in order to offer an honours program that is rigorous and demanding. The most important one is the adequate distribution of tasks and responsibilities. At LUC, the Board of the College has three members: the Dean, the Educational Director and the Operational Manager. Teaching is shared between the 35 (32fte) LUC academic staff (mostly Assistant Professors) who teach 50% of the courses and academic staff from the various institutes at Leiden University who take care of the remaining 50%. In this way, the LAS pedagogy is well grounded in the organisation while the program can also draw on specific expertise from the University. The Support Staff adds up to 10 fte and includes admissions and exchange officers. LUC is part of the Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs in The Hague, one of the seven faculties in Leiden University.

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### **Model II: Specific LAS Programmes within the research university**

All University Colleges in the Netherlands, as well as the one at the University of Freiburg in Germany, offer distinctive LAS programmes. The institutional home of the programmes, the respective University College, is so closely intertwined with the programme that, especially in the eyes of many applicants, the University College and the LAS Programme can hardly be separated. In the second model of how to implement LAS this relation between programme and institutional home is different. While still often hosted by a specific existing department (often in the realm of the humanities or social sciences), or, in some cases, a new department or institute founded for the purpose, they are still different from UCs in two important respects: first, these programmes are portrayed and perceived as one programme among many that the university offers. Second, in many of the programmes students, figuratively and literally, do not stay in their home department, but take courses that are on offer from the entire university.

Programmes of this kind have been appearing in significant number since 2012 at British universities. Some of the programmes, similar to the programmes in the Netherlands, deliberately try to combine the (Liberal) Arts and Sciences, e.g. those at University College London and take the bridging of the 'two cultures' as a defining feature of their programmes. Others are more strongly anchored in the humanities, broadly understood, such as the programmes at King's College London. In the following, we will illustrate this overall model with the case of the Liberal Arts programme at the University of Warwick, as it takes as its defining features a specific pedagogy and the skills that this approach cultivates.

### ***Liberal Arts at the University of Warwick***

#### *I. Founding in its context*

The University of Warwick was founded in the mid-1960s. Being a university with a reformist agenda from the very beginning it advocated a decidedly modern outlook on HE. Its re-affirmed strategic vision sets out to provide new approaches to delivering excellent teaching and learning opportunities. In this spirit, Warwick has been experimenting with innovative interdisciplinary teaching and learning since the early 2000s, e.g. by the establishment of the Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning and the founding of the Warwick International Higher Education Academy. The establishment of the Liberal Arts Programme is a continuation of this. In 2014

Warwick identified a potential opportunity to establish itself as an important contributor in the emerging field of LAS programmes. The features of this contribution were a conscious response to contemporary concerns in line with the commitment to citizenship education and a challenge to American pedagogical hegemony in this area, demonstrating that this approach to education does not have one homeland only.

The founding Academic Director advocated a non-directive problem-based approach to enable students to follow their interests within a clear skills-development framework. Given a rapidly changing UK policy landscape in higher education with a greater focus on student choice (Browne Report, 2010), Warwick felt that a student-led and problem-focused liberal education programme might benefit future graduates. Market research indicated that there was a substantial demand amongst prospective students and graduate employers for the skills and experiences developed in liberal education programmes.

However, and in line with experiences of other LAS initiatives at an incipient stage, perception issues around the name 'liberal arts' existed: students reported confusion about its meaning and concern about potential perception by employers. In response, Warwick decided, being confident of the assets of this tradition as outlined in chapter 1, that it would retain the traditional title of 'liberal arts' and, at the same time, encourage prospective applicants to critically examine the parameters of liberal education programmes when considering their options. It was envisaged that this approach would result in the recruitment of a small, dedicated applicant pool that had chosen a liberal education programme as a consequence of in-depth research about the composition and benefits of such a programme. Liberal Arts at Warwick welcomed its first cohort of thirty-three students in October 2016.

## *II. Aims & Purposes*

Liberal Arts at Warwick is defined by its problem-based pedagogic methodology (more on which further below). This method functions not only in the classroom level but also at the curricular level: The programme uses problem-focused, interconnected case studies to develop methodological and critical thinking skills. This principle underpins the central structuring of student pathways and the core modules. In the classroom, it uses PBL-inspired workshop sessions to deliver skills and content training.

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Students are required to plan their degree focus strategically to address a particular problem or thematic area. This can adhere to a traditional discipline (History, Economics, etc.), or it can follow a Specialist Interest which draws on expertise from across the University to address complex problems: Food Security, Global Sustainable Development, Social Justice, etc.

In addition to their curricular choices, students are encouraged to bring their individual skills and interests to their core methodological training modules. Individual students are taught to determine critically how their skills and experiences enable them to approach new areas of knowledge or practice, and to identify how to acquire new skills or experience. Learning is active and reflective, with clear links to critical and professional skills development.

This pedagogic method is focused on the individual student and her or his critical personal development, interpreting and realising the LAS tenet of personal growth in a contemporary way. But it also requires that students become practiced at working collaboratively to acquire access to expertise or skills they do not possess. This necessitates a small and tight-knit community of learners and tutors who are able to become familiar with the strengths and interests of individuals in the cohort. These cohorts do not exceed forty students and share core modules, communal study, meeting space and department-specific administrative support, thus taking the LAS characteristic of creating an inspiring learning environment seriously.

The Liberal Arts programme at Warwick is designed to connect critical thinking skills with critically-cultivated research and professional practices. The goal is to help students develop a range of academic and professional skills, and to build their confidence in deploying those skills when entering new professional or intellectual areas - in other words, to build the foundations for life-long learning.

As the programme is designed to require a high degree of independent inquiry from students, the admissions process tries to identify highly committed and engaged students: Each applicant is required to submit an additional personal statement that addresses specific aspects of the Warwick programme; this, combined with high entry requirements, results in a competitive applicant pool.

### *III. Curriculum*

The curricular structure designed for the programme is meant to achieve this integration. A crucial role, as mentioned above, is given to the special approach of

Problem Based Learning. It requires students to conduct individual research and work collaboratively in small groups to address a ‘messy’ problem; that is, a problem with no clear single solution. As a result, students learn to develop research questions, acquire expertise, and collaborate with colleagues. While other liberal education programmes have employed Problem-Based Learning in the classroom, the courses offered by Liberal Arts at Warwick use the ‘messy problem’ concept to structure the entirety of a student’s degree.

While these may fall within traditional subjects, students are encouraged to think in a transdisciplinary fashion. In 2017/18 Warwick’s most popular pathway was ‘Social Justice’, with five of thirty total students adopting this pathway with a variety of modules from Liberal Arts, Global Sustainable Development, Politics and International Studies, Modern Languages and Cultures, and others. These pathways build on Liberal Arts core modules and feature increasing proportions of student-selected modules from across the department and wider University. Students at Warwick are therefore able to map their transdisciplinary PBL-based classroom sessions onto the wider arc of their undergraduate education, and can structure their degrees with a clear strategic organizing principle.

The curriculum provides a tapering scaffold for helping students from all educational backgrounds to develop and apply critical thinking and research skills; over time, students gradually shift from transdisciplinary method and theory modules to content-rich modules tailored to their individual interests. At key points, students are offered opportunities to complement their formal classroom experiences with professional skills development through Certificate Programmes. These short courses provide students with opportunities to take up work placements and develop professional skills that mesh with their academic work.

In the first year, seventy-five percent of students' time is spent in four core modules: Art and Revolution; Science, Society, and the Media; Qualitative Research Methods; and Quantitative Research Methods.

The first two provide problem-oriented training to enable students to practice assembling and investigating case studies; the second two provide students with intensive research method training. In both streams, students take active roles in generating and addressing a wide range of problems.

The remaining twenty-five percent of a student's time is spent in individually-chosen modules from across the University, which are used to explore potential areas for

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specialisation and to provide a content base for subsequent study. Students can also take the *Certificate in Digital Literacy*, which enables them to think critically about how to integrate digital tools into their studies.

In Year Two, in line with the depth characteristic, students declare either a Disciplinary Interest or a Specialist Interest pathway. In addition to two year-long core modules (*Sustainability* and *Consumption*), students assemble a collection of subject or problem-focused modules to enable them to acquire in-depth content knowledge and methodological training.

Also in Year Two, students can elect to take two certificates: *Professional Communication* (with work placement) and *Coaching Practice* (delivered with colleagues from Warwick Business School). Students learn to develop leadership skills, analyse and manage workplace structures, and gain professional experience. Each student is expected to demonstrate an ability to communicate their research to a broad audience by participating in a public event or by organising an outreach event and to reflect on its impact on wider society.

Students are encouraged to take an optional year abroad, and Liberal Arts at Warwick have built a number of partnerships with institutions with sympathetic approaches to the Liberal Arts. In their final year, students spend the majority of their time exploring modules relevant to their problem-oriented pathway. They are required to pursue a year-long dissertation project, designed to act as a culmination of their study experiences. This project is jointly supervised by Liberal Arts faculty and subject experts. By the time students graduate, they have achieved a minimum of 180 credit points in pathway-specific modules, with the remaining 180 occupied by core modules. They will have conducted independent and small-group research projects for three years, developed a range of transferrable skills, and practiced moving into new professional, cultural, and intellectual environments.

### *IV. Pedagogy and Teaching Philosophy*

The programme, as already outlined, is based around Problem-Based Learning at both the curricular and classroom level. While individual members of the teaching faculty are encouraged to differentiate their teaching methods, common approaches connect all Liberal Arts modules. Teaching sessions are largely structured around non-directive activities, in which students work to link prior knowledge with assigned and suggested

readings to explore a specific question or concept. Sessions are generally planned as one or two-hour workshops of up to fifteen students seated boardroom-style.

Teaching sessions typically break down into three sections: concepts are introduced; students engage in smaller group activities to engage with concepts; students present or discuss findings and reflect on the process. Students typically are either required to discuss how particular activities, concepts, or skills relate to the academic or professional worlds, or they are provided with signposting. The same is done to help students develop personal connections between external material and material discussed in the module. Reflective activities seek to provide students with an initial opportunity to make connections between specific elements of a given section, the wider aims of a module, and their more general development.

These reflective sections are vital for students who increasingly spend time in external departments that employ a range of pedagogic methods. One of the key skills students cultivate in their first year is to identify and structure new inquiries using peer expertise, enabling the students to act as leaders and facilitators in diverse professional and intellectual environments. Students spend a substantial amount of their degree programme learning to adapt and use a variety of critical methodologies that enable creative responses to a range of problems and make use of broad expertise.

### *V. Organisation*

Liberal Arts at Warwick is a small and tight-knit community of faculty and students that can draw on the resources of one of the top research universities in the world. Liberal Arts at Warwick provides students with the communal feel of a small residential college and the resources of a global university. The community is developed through out-of-classroom activities, ranging from film screenings to research discussion groups, and students are strongly encouraged to think of their time out of the classroom as essential space to practice, read, think, and discuss.

## **Models of LAS Programmes in the EU**

### **Model III: Encompassing institutions**

In the previous two broad models, an LAS programme is usually just one programme among many others within a larger University. In the United States, as mentioned earlier, it has been and is quite common that an entire HE institution is the place of an LAS education - the aforementioned 'Liberal Arts College'; or that the entire undergraduate education at a University is taken place within the 'College' of that University.

While much less frequent, also in Europe entire institutions have been set up with a commitment to an LAS education. By far most of them have been small, independent, private institutions, such as American Universities (many of which are in East and East-Central Europe and founded after 1989, or in major European cities), part of US based Universities (such Bard College Berlin), or with a very distinctive commitment, such as Benedictus College in London.

Attempts to bring an LAS education into an entire public university, in distinction to realising it in the distinct space of a University College or a specific programme, have been rare to date. Reasons for this might be: the often-affirmed intrinsic difficulty to reform universities (arguably about the most reform-resistant institutions); the lack of a perception that education, in particular undergraduate education, needs to be reformed; and, surely, also the simple lack of awareness of the tradition and current practices of LAS education as sources for reform, it being perceived, if at all, as a tradition that has its place and rationale on a different continent.

One of the rare attempts to reform the entire undergraduate education at a mid-sized public university will be outlined in the following discussion. It is thus clearly, also in view of important independent/ private initiatives, such as Bard College Berlin or Franklin Academy Switzerland, one model, though one that might be more ambitious and more difficult to realise than the two models outlined above.

#### ***The College at Leuphana University Lüneburg***

The ambition and rationale of Leuphana College is to install the main characteristics of an LAS education, as they are outlined in chapter 1, into all parts of undergraduate learning at an existing public university. Leuphana College is thus committed to combine both broad and in-depth academic work, the cultivation of key skills that are of use for a variety of workplaces in the early 21st century, and the preparation of responsible, reflective engagement as a European citizen. It thereby aims to be a model

university as to how the Bologna reform (as discussed in chapter 1) can be creatively used.<sup>xvii</sup>

### *I. Founding in its context*

Leuphana Universität Lüneburg, a mid-sized public university in Northern Germany (with about 5500 undergraduate students), is the first public higher education institution in Germany that, since 2007, has been implementing a Liberal Arts inspired education. The window of opportunity for this major reform was opened up by the merger of two previously separate institutions of HE and the need for re-organisation and re-orientation that this merger entailed. A focus on exemplary teaching and learning as well as an engagement with societal issues seemed a promising path to create an attractive and distinctive profile. LAS is a very appropriate overall frame in which this reform was to be realised.<sup>xviii</sup>

The endeavour of offering all undergraduate education under the umbrella of Leuphana College and to do this in a LAS frame meant both a continuity and a break with the German tradition. On the one hand, the College incorporates some of the key elements of the German academic tradition, such as academic rigor, a certain degree of freedom and autonomy granted to the student and a close link between research and teaching. On the other hand, the Bologna reform was taken much more seriously at Leuphana than at other German universities, and personal growth was set as the key purpose of the course of study instead of the narrower goal of conveying discipline-oriented expertise.

A key notion that helps to illuminate the contrast is the (Weberian) term of "Fachlichkeit" (best translated as expertise/ being competent). In the traditional understanding, "Fachlichkeit" was identified with the mastery of one narrow field of study - be it with the aim of an academic disciplinarian, or as a professional. The "Neue Fachlichkeit" in the spirit of LAS, in contrast, entails the mastery of a breadth of skills, *including* the one to gain deep knowledge in on area, to make responsible choices and to work independently as well as with others, that are of use and relevance for many walks of life and professions.

### *II. Aims & Purposes*

The overall rationale at Leuphana College is to integrate a preparation for the workplace with personal development as well as civic responsibility. These different purposes of higher education are thereby not, as is often done, pitted against one

## Models of LAS Programmes in the EU

another, but creatively and consciously combined. To this end, the Leuphana Bachelor offers a broad education through the Leuphana Semester and 'complementary studies', and in-depth knowledge provided by the choice of a Major and a Minor. This commitment to an LAS philosophy is expressed in three distinct goals:

First, to nurture the personal growth of each student by offering a personal education. The time at university is not taken to be simply one of training for a pre-given future profession by showing mastery, as the very end, of a certain, pre-described body of knowledge; instead it is an opportunity to find out who one is and wants to be, to identify and develop one's strengths (and also an awareness of weakness), to be clearer about one's interests and, possibly, passions. At Leuphana College, a central way students are enabled to develop their personality is to allow them to have significant choice over the curriculum and by orienting the curriculum towards the students' personal questions and perspectives. This goal of self-development and, in fact, self-transformation<sup>xix</sup>, entails the widely sought capacity and inclination for life-long learning. While these goals are often, under the concept of *Humboldtian Bildung*, taken to be a key feature of German universities, it is much rarer that they are actually implemented and taken seriously. Leuphana College does attempt to do so.

Second, in line with the purpose of preparing present and future citizens, Leuphana aims to foster civic engagement, i.e. to activate students to assume responsibility and to develop solutions to real world challenges. Leuphana College thus aspires to enable students to address the question of the common good and societal challenges in the 21st century. Similar to the aim of personal development, also this purpose is not taken for granted in the context of Higher Education in Germany, where high school (Gymnasium) is assumed to be the place for civic education and there is an understanding of universities as remote, detached and a-political places, only committed to the disengaged pursuit of knowledge.

The commitment to engaged citizenship and, in turn, the creative dealing with contemporary problems also asks for an international dimension to education: many, if not most of today's pressing problems have dimensions beyond the nation-state and will only be addressed in co-operation. Particular efforts have been made in recent years, therefore, to create such an internationalised learning community.

The third goal is a contemporary, smart approach to professional preparation. This involves, first of all, a broad set of skills, such as convincing communication, clear reasoning, nuanced judgement, but also the practical ability to go beyond the ivory tower, to look for solutions beyond the strict boundaries of academic discourse. And at

the same time, such a contemporary way of professional preparation asks the student to get familiar with a number of fields of knowledge, and, crucially, to be able to make connections between them (the interdisciplinary approach). Last, it also involves exposing students to different types of life experiences which is important in forging a professional career.

Leuphana College attracts students who identify with these multiple purposes and who are not satisfied with a very narrow, mono-disciplinary degree. In turn, as a Liberal Arts and Science education differs significantly in many regards from established ways of studying in Germany, a certain willingness and preparedness to engage in this different way of studying is asked for by the students. Moreover, to thrive within this Liberal Arts and Science setting, students need to be curious, and not just about one thing; they need to be able to care, not only for their own work and development, but their fellow students and common problems.

The specific selection process for Leuphana College, which is an uncommon feature at German universities, tries to ensure that students will enter who will thrive in this environment. While the final school examination grade still plays a significant role, evidence of engagement of many kinds, is also taken into account. In a second step, applicants sit a test and take part in an interview. At interview, students are asked to elaborate on their motivation for their envisaged studies, and to demonstrate a conscious decision to opt for a Liberal Education, instead of seeking a traditional 'Fachlichkeit', or even simply a degree. More crucially, the dispositions of intellectual curiosity, care and commitment are looked for. The selection process itself, through personal interviews undertaken with time and care, is to be an expression and first step of a student-centred education.

### *III. Curriculum*

The principles of the liberal arts and science philosophy are realized through a distinctive structure ensuring both breadth and depth and various ways in which broad, general skills are cultivated.

The breadth is provided through two parts of the curriculum: First, and literally at the beginning of each students' course of study, there is the 'Leuphana Semester'. It, in addition to one module that is an introduction to ones' major, consists of three additional study modules: An introduction to the humanities (*"Wissenschaft will Verstehen"*), a project-based module around sustainability and responsibility

## Models of LAS Programmes in the EU

("Wissenschaft trägt Verantwortung"), one that introduces students to questions of epistemology and methods. All of these are distinctively interdisciplinary and in all of them skills are cultivated that are of relevance to the students beyond their chosen field of specialisation (the Major). Last, all students have to attend the Leuphana Semester that is concluded by a one-week conference.

The second dimension - the breadth component - carries throughout the whole course of study. In their 'complementary studies', which takes many important insights from the 'Open Curriculum' tradition within Liberal Arts, students expand their intellectual horizons, participate in practical projects and learn additional languages, accounting for 1/6th of the Leuphana Bachelor. The 'complementary studies' thus introduce an element of choice to all students and it also involves a 'practice-oriented' stream, in which students are prepared for internships, are enabled to connect practical experiences with their studies and thus to address real-world challenges.

In turn, the depth is provided through a Major and a Minor where all Majors and Minors place an emphasis, again, on choice and real-world issues. About half of the Majors at Leuphana College, similar to those at Leiden University College The Hague, are interdisciplinary:

- Digital Media Studies (B.A.)
- International Business Administration & Entrepreneurship (B.Sc.)
- Cultural Studies (Kulturwissenschaften) (B.A.)
- Environmental Studies (B.Sc.)
- Business Administration (B.Sc.)
- Industrial Engineering (B.Eng.)
- Teaching and Learning (B.A.)
- Political Science (B.A.)
- Law (Corporate and Business Law) (LL.B.)
- Economics (B.Sc.)
- Studium Individuale (B.A.)

The Major "Studium Individuale" takes on a distinctive role within Leuphana College as a place of a Liberal Arts and Science education. Entirely taught in English, and thus consciously international, so as to invite international students, it takes the individualized learning experience one step further, by combining an academic core committed to real world learning and generic skills, with an extensive elective part, in which students can choose freely from the entire range of courses offered at Leuphana College. It thereby shows some similarity to the programme at University College

Maastricht, or to Colleges in the US as Sarah Lawrence or Pitzer, the Gallatin School at NYU or Wesleyan University.

In practice, this commitment to a personal, engaging and challenging education means that students with the Major Studium Individuale design their own curriculum around personally and socially relevant questions, interests and strengths. They do this, however, not in solitude, but in close coordination with faculty in the framework of an intensive advising program. Advising in the Studium Individuale includes both faculty and peers, and is supported by tools for self-directed student development and study planning. This dimension of informed choice leading to a personalised, though coherent, depth is complemented by six compulsory core modules, which are the intellectual backbone of the programme.

The Studium Individuale thus crystallises four core features of a liberal arts and science education: a careful balance between breadth and depth; the explicit cultivation of general skills that transcend narrow disciplinary confines; the development of the whole person by granting a significant amount of freedom and responsibility to each student; the cultivation of citizenship by close and critical engagement with key problems as well as the ability to develop an informed stance towards them. Its subtitle, in turn, is: a contemporary liberal education.

#### *IV. Pedagogy and Teaching Philosophy*

Leuphana College is committed to a student-centred and active pedagogy, in line with the LAS philosophy, and in contrast to an understanding of universities as producing certain *kinds of people* narrowly prepared for a certain profession (the so-called *Fachmensch* or expert). This liberal arts and science pedagogy entails moving away from the idea of "liberty and solitude" (*Einsamkeit und Freiheit*) to one of "liberty, community and responsibility." However, due to the vast number of people being involved in the different parts of teaching at Leuphana College, there is no fixed pedagogical model. Nevertheless, teaching is oriented towards the following principles:

- Active participation of all students in the learning activities, that entails an intensity of all learning activities
- High impact practices (cf. chapter 3 for further discussion), such as student projects both within and outside the university

## Models of LAS Programmes in the EU

- Undergraduate research that prepares students for graduate research, but also teaches them a key element for many jobs: this is not only expected for the Bachelor thesis, but already in different parts of the course of study
- Interdisciplinarity: both on the curricular and on the course level (encouraging co-teaching)
- Experiential learning understood as "learning through reflection on doing", for example through internships, or project-based learning in different societal spheres
- Intensive ties between students and teaching staff based on trust, achieved through small-classroom settings and a dialogical teaching approach
- Focusing on student-engagement (also through facilitating a broad range of student activities and initiatives), which is in turn essential to facilitate an overall academic learning community

These various aspects of the pedagogy aim to contribute to an overall ethos and culture of learning that is similar to the one of US American Liberal Arts College or the University Colleges in the Netherlands, despite the bigger scale of Leuphana College. This ethos and culture is deliberately supported by Leuphana, again in contrast to many, especially the older, more traditional, European University, having a well-demarcated Campus on the edge of town, which invites, through various features (a gym, sun-deck chairs, various open learning spaces) students to spend time there. The new 'main building' (Zentralgebäude), designed by Daniel Libeskind, is an additional way to promote a lively, creative and close-knit College community.

### *V. Organisation*

In contrast to the Universities of Maastricht and Leiden, where the University Colleges form only a small part of the undergraduate education, Leuphana College houses the whole of undergraduate education at the Leuphana Universität Lüneburg. How the learning is organised for all Bachelor students, in turn, results from this logic:

Teaching for the modules of the different Majors and Minors is provided by the departments of which there are four: the department of Education, the department of Cultural Studies, the department of Sustainability and the department of Economics. The teaching is accompanied by continuous improvement approach to quality assurance, for example through the "Project Quality Audit": a system of quality assessment where different universities audit each other. Realising that the quality of

the teaching and learning, essential to this approach, depends on the quality of the teaching staff, Leuphana puts particular emphasis on including this dimension into the hiring process. Incoming staff are made aware of the specific teaching ethos, different from those at many other public universities, and of the commitment and engagement that this entails (cf. chapter three on the demands on teachers in a Liberal Arts and Science setting).

The teaching for the breadth part, the course of the Leuphana Semester and the Complementary Studies are centrally organised and administered. Here, a significant proportion of the teaching is done by faculty from the different departments, while others are external staff, bringing in a broad range of expertise. As they have been exposed to an even greater variety of pedagogical approaches than the 'in-house' faculty at Leuphana, the clear communication when recruiting the teaching staff of the specific LAS framework at Leuphana and the heightened demand of commitment and engagement in teaching is taken very seriously. This is, then, continued, by offering specific training.

### **Some conclusions from the cases and models**

As has been said in the introduction of this chapter, the outline of three models, though the discussion of four cases, were meant to indicate the varieties of ways in which an LAS approach to undergraduate education has been, and is, successfully realised. As will be discussed in Ch. 3 individual (national or university-wide) contexts and aspirations play a key role, for the specific model, the shape of the programme, or even of an entire College.

The realisation of an LAS education in Europe can thus be understood in terms of the remarkable convergence in some of the characteristic dimensions. Noteworthy convergence in a vast number of programmes (be it hosted in Colleges or not) is, first, the existence of a set of compulsory core courses which provide for the breadth, or general education part. Often, these courses are understood as the *signature* of the respective programmes. Second, the depth part allows for more choice than in many monodisciplinary degrees especially those designed in Continental Europe in the wake of the Bologna process. Either with choice within a well-structured major as at LUC or Warwick, or deliberately standing in the sub-tradition of the 'Open Curriculum', allowing students to tailor their own concentrations, such as at UCM or in the Studium Individuale at Leuphana. Third, there is remarkable convergence in the pedagogy that the programmes are committed to: all embrace and practice active, student-centred learning.

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A characteristic in which there is apparently more room for interpretation is the education for citizenship: Citizenship surely means to be able to understand the important problems of one's time and, in some way, act on them in a responsible way. A significant number of LAS programmes in Europe consciously posit the ability to deal with such 'problems' as one of the key learning outcomes, as could be seen above at the programme at LUC, but also at Warwick and at Leuphana College. The ability to engage with and even address these problems and challenges often requires further components of the programme: interdisciplinarity, in order to understand a problem from 'multiple perspectives' (and courses that are designed with this very purpose in mind); key skills, among them to communicate convincingly and to work in teams and; an international outlook, because, as is true today, these problems do not recognise (national) borders. This understanding of Liberal Arts as cultivating "global problem solvers" has become remarkably strong, especially in the eyes of many interested students.<sup>xx</sup>

In other European LAS programs, the discourse about (global) 'problems and challenges' is much less pronounced. Here, the aim of educating citizens is attempted in ways that are more implicit: the learning, both within and outside the classroom, is to foster the ability to critically discern information, to analyse these carefully and to make, on this basis, informed, nuanced, but clear judgements. In some programmes, such as at UCM, these skills are even foremost those of citizens of the academy. This aim to cultivate critical, responsible minds in the class, is often complimented by forms of community and service learning, at times 'for credit', at times a co-curricular activity.

A second dimension in which there is significant variance - and thus the need, when founding a programme, to take a deliberate choice - is the actual institutionalisation of the learning environment. Here, as the choice of the designation of the first two models is shows, there a spectrum of rather separate environments with a strong degree of coherence (the University Colleges) and the programmes that are more directly part of the overall university.

The University Colleges have, in part, been created with the very intention to create distinct spaces in which a close community of learners, with similar dispositions, can develop, especially if they are residential. These spaces can, as is evident in many of the UCs, give rise to a high work-ethos, to a plethora of initiatives and co-curricular activities, and a strong identification of the students (and the faculty!) with 'their' College. In turn, the interaction of students with the overall university, especially if the

College is in a different location, can be less intense and more ambiguous. Last, the Colleges have to engage with the criticism of being privileged places for selected students only (though, as has been mentioned, some programs were designed very consciously as Honours Colleges).

The LAS programs that are, for lack of a better expression, more directly integrated into the overall university and on the same level as other 'subjects' or 'disciplines' one can study at the university enable students to draw on a very wide range of courses and allow the students to feel part of a larger community, which some seem to privilege over a close knit one. However, for the courses, often the 'core courses' that are not offered by the program itself, but by another department, it is much more difficult to ensure that the teachers are also committed to an LAS pedagogy. In addition, the creation of a thriving community of the LAS students tends to be more difficult, though specific common spaces and close contact to the core faculty and common co-curricular activities (as at Warwick) can facilitate this.

Last, all cases above give evidence that appropriative leadership, faculty and staff is crucial for success of any LAS initiative. LAS teachers need to dedicate a very significant amount of their time and energy on good, intensive teaching. Their realisation of the work for the benefit of the overall program (and the learning of the students) thus depends on the recruitment of faculty willing to choose exactly this work as a teacher-scholar. This significantly differs from the normal pathways of the research-centred academic career as has been developed over the last three to four decades, in Europe and elsewhere. The further expansion of LAS programs in the European landscape of HE might have to go in hand with a reconsideration what it means to be a good university teacher.

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xiii Tak, H. & Oomen, B. eds., 2012. *De disciplines voorbij. De colleges van Hans Adriaansens*, Middelburg: De Drukkery.

xiv Peter Weingart and Britta Padberg *University Experiments in: Interdisciplinarity - Obstacles and Opportunities*, Transcript-Verlag.

xv For the value of an Open Curriculum, see the Study by a working group sponsored by the Teagle Foundation: <http://www.teaglefoundation.org/Library-Resources/Fresh-Thinking/The-Values-of-the-Open-Curriculum-An-Alternative>

xvi Cf, for instance, the double commitment to 'Excellence and Diversity' of Amsterdam University College: <http://www.auc.nl/>

See also: van der Wende, M.C., 2013. *An Excellence Initiative in Liberal Arts and Science Education: The Case of Amsterdam University College*. In Q. Wang, Y. Cheng, & N. C. Liu, eds. *Building World-Class Universities. Different Approaches to a Common Goal*. Shanghai: Sense Publishers, pp. 89–102.

xvii <http://www.leuphana.de/en/college.html>

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xviii Three commitments are central for Leuphana as a whole. First, it is a humanistic university in the sense that it promotes both personal and academic development while placing the process of acquiring knowledge into a concrete context. Second, it is a sustainable university; through its education and research, Leuphana contributes to the sustainable development of society. Third, it is a proactive university in that the development of responsible individuals is being fostered, of individuals who demonstrate the creativity and thoughtfulness as well as the willingness to creatively shape society.

xix Cf. Michael Roth: *Beyond the University*. Yale. 2013.

xx <https://2ndlesc.wordpress.com/>



## **Setting Up a Liberal Arts Program**

### **III. Setting up a Liberal Arts and Sciences Program**

Lieke Schreel

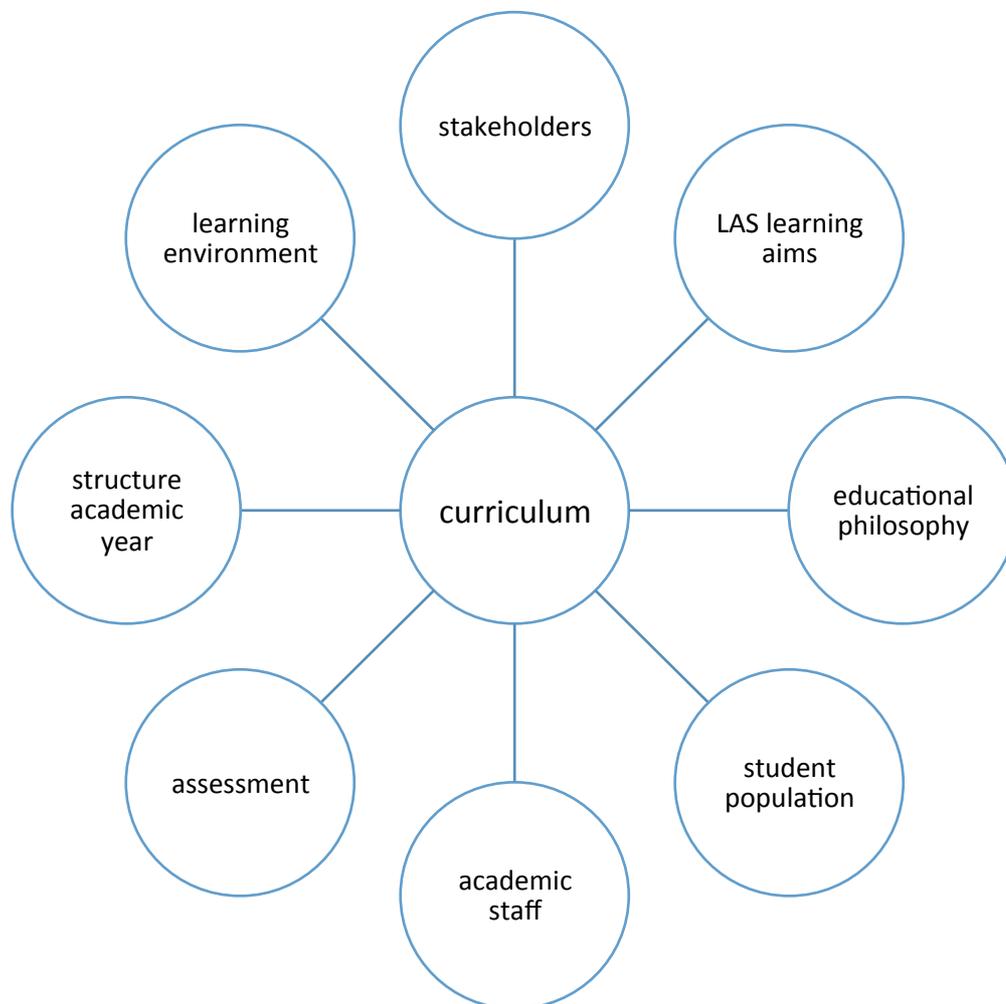
#### **Introduction**

As emphasised in chapter 1 LAS is a concept or philosophy of learning rather than a system or theory of knowledge. This means that the variety in LAS programmes is great, especially in Europe where LAS is frequently used as an innovative approach to undergraduate education. As shown in chapter 2, LAS lends itself to a broad variety of programs, or models. Nevertheless, they share common characteristics that make sure it is indeed LAS that is at the core of the programme. In order to ensure that each programme continues to conform to accepted standards, it is important to review on a regular basis those aspects of your programme that characterize it as a liberal arts and sciences programme. This chapter serves therefore two purposes: it gives a practical guide for those who are planning or are in the process to set up a new LAS program in Europe. But it can also serve as a checklist for programs already in operation that want to see where they stand in the European LAS landscape.

This chapter is practical and will take you through several steps of the curriculum design process: going from the reasons for setting up your program, to learning aims, and educational philosophy. Practical matters like the type of students you hope to attract, the learning environment you have or want to offer, and how the rules and structures in your university may influence the content of your curriculum will also be addressed. Finally, some suggestions regarding assessment tools particular to the aims of LAS will be discussed. It may be that this is still very new too you; but it may also be that there are already have many of these ideas in place, that you are busy shaping them. In that case, please use this chapter as a checklist to make sure all aspects have been included. This chapter will be accompanied by an online source to help you in this process.

When designing a new programme and implementing it, many different factors need to be taken into account as they all have their own influence on the curriculum. In Figure 1 these factors are schematically displayed and then discussed in the text below. While setting up a new programme, each factor will require attention at various stages in the design process. As the factors influence each other, it is important to regularly check if changes in one factor will affect others or the curriculum design as a whole as you go along. Below the factors are explained in a logical sequence, but in practice many of the ideas for these factors may already be in place, or, as they are implemented they

may change in interaction with each other. That is not problematic, as long as you make sure to continuously align the ideas you have for each step in the process.



*Figure 1: schematic overview of curriculum design factors.*

### **Stakeholders: Why this program**

We assume that you have started reading this book because you are interested in setting up an LAS program, are in the process of doing so or have recently done so. The previous chapters have given you a background to the development of LAS programs across Europe as well as some examples on how universities have designed an LAS programme to fit their own institutional goals and profile. For example, as discussed in the previous chapter, in the Netherlands most LAS programmes are set in an international and residential environment as selective honours programmes. They meet several aims of their universities at the same time: teaching innovation,

## Setting Up a Liberal Arts Program

stimulation of talent, internationalization. It is important that the aims of your university or other stakeholders are and remain very clear while doing so, as setting up your own programme will require significant investments in time and resources.

The reasons in the past two decades to start a LAS program in Europe have been described in chapter 1 and exemplified in chapter 2. To summarize briefly:

- A reaction to the strong monodisciplinary orientation of degree programmes that characterises most universities in Europe combined with a desire to innovate Higher Education from within the Universities.
- The desire of students to follow a broad program that trains them in academic skills and provides them with a solid basis for both a career and postgraduate study.
- The need for differentiation to counteract the massification of Higher Education.
- The increasing demand by the labour market for employees who are able to apply problem solving skills, who can master new knowledge quickly and who can communicate in a variety of settings including a culturally diverse environment.

Now that more and more LAS programmes have been established, it is important to decide what the aims of the university are with this programme. The institutional gain for your university should be clearly defined. Does it want to fill a specific niche? Does it want to experiment with new didactical approaches? Does it want to attract more students and, if so, is there a specific group they want to target? Is it hoping that these students will continue with a Master's degree at your university after they graduate? Are there departments that are expected to take part in the programme? Or is there a combination of aims that need to be taken into account?

Before you go into the design of the program, ensure that you know what the expectations of the University are, to what extent that limits the freedom you have in designing the program and if it is actually possible to combine all of these expectations. Conversely, make sure that the stakeholders know what they can realistically expect from a LAS program.

## LAS learning aims

As described in chapter 1 and 2, LAS is not a corpus of knowledge, it is an approach to learning and can be used in a variety of ways. The criticism that is often heard within European Universities which have a monodisciplinary tradition is that LAS lacks rigour, depth and coherence, that in LAS ‘anything goes’. When hearing about a broad bachelor program, concerns are expressed that students will not gain enough depth, that there is not enough coherence in the programme. To the unfamiliar an LAS program in which students compose their own curriculum can be seen as a grab-bag out of which students pick and mix the courses they find interesting without making sure they develop (research) skills or work towards deeper knowledge in one or more disciplines.

Those who work in LAS programs know that this is not the case; our programs are thought out very carefully. Most LAS programmes give the students the freedom and responsibility to create their own path, as this allows students to follow personal interests and to learn to take decisions: in some programmes, as at UCM or in the Studium Individuale at Leuphana, this is more pronounced than in other. But almost all programmes have requirements in place to make sure that students graduate with a meaningful set of courses that prepares them for further study or the workplace. The integrity and coherence of the programme and the vision that underpins it, is essential and this should include a strong commitment to liberal education.

With the increasing popularity of LAS programs in Europe, there is another tendency to call all broad bachelor programs LAS. For those who do not fully understand the principles of the LAS programmes, this is an understandable misinterpretation, although some aspects between a LAS programme and a broad bachelor in for example Social Sciences may be similar. A broad bachelor programme which combines various disciplines within the social sciences but does not include sciences or humanities is very interesting and worthwhile, but it is not LAS.

Although different discussions, they both focus on the structure and aims of the LAS programme. It is therefore important to benchmark your program against general learning outcomes for LAS programs. There are various sources you can use for this. Drawing on the American experience, a good starting point is the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU). AACU is not an accreditation organization but ‘the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education’<sup>xxi</sup>. It represents hundreds of institutions within the United States as well as a good number of international partners.

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With their members AACU has developed a set of Essential Learning Outcomes which can be found on their website (see further reading at the end of this chapter).

There is also the American Academy for Liberal Education (AALE) which is an accreditation organization. Their AALE Program Standards include standards on Learning Objectives and Assessment, and Curriculum, which can be useful as benchmarks when designing your own. These standards can be found on their website (see further reading).

Within Europe, as part of the Bologna process, the EU has introduced the Dublin Descriptors which are part of *the Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*. The first cycle of Higher Education is the Bachelor's degree and the Dublin Descriptors, introduced in 2004, describe the very general qualifications for that level. If you are in the European Union you must make sure that your program meets these qualifications.

Finally, your own national quality standards may require you to meet specific qualifications. In the Netherlands, this is done through a Domain Specific Framework of Reference (DSFR), which is determined and used by all equivalent programs. The Deans of the, by now, twelve programmes have together published the characteristics of LAS programmes. In the United Kingdom degree programmes have to comply with the Benchmarks of the Quality Assurance Agency and other countries have their own frameworks. Please check your own national requirements as this can greatly differ across Europe.

The generic learning outcomes from the various sources create a framework against which you determine and benchmark your own programme-specific learning outcomes. There is a huge range of handbooks and guidelines available on how to write learning outcomes and it is not the aim of this book to train you in this respect. However, it is highly recommended that with your learning outcomes you clearly, in active verbs, describe what the students should learn in your program, rather than what you want to teach them. When a student graduates, she should be able to demonstrate that the learning outcomes have been achieved. Therefore, learning outcomes should be written in such a way that they can actually be assessed. This also helps when having to explain what LAS is to those for whom LAS is still a new concept. Finally, the learning outcomes will guide the design of your programme, so ensure that the LAS specific aims and goals are included.

## **Educational Philosophy**

In the learning outcomes you will have established what you want your students to learn. The next step is determining how you are going to create conditions in which they can achieve these learning outcomes. You will probably already have ideas of how you want to teach, in addition to what you want to teach. These ideas will have to come together. A good starting point to address and assess all these practical issues is writing an educational philosophy for your program.

Educational philosophies explain how a teacher sees education, how they consider their own role in the teaching process, how they actually teach (see for example Chism, 1997). An educational philosophy for a program describes what learning and teaching are considered to be and how the programme plans to implement this. This statement can serve as a tool during the design process of the curriculum but also to organise those aspects that facilitate the learning process. Typical LAS skills and attitudes, for example citizenship or research skills, should obviously be included. Having a clear educational philosophy can also be helpful when talking to those in the university who are responsible for those practical aspects as it helps to explain what the foundation of your programme is.

## ***Learning***

Before describing how you want to teach your programme, spend some time on defining how you, as designers of the program think that students learn. The recent European LAS programs have been designed with a wealth of theory available on this topic. When researching the current programmes you will find that many are directly or indirectly founded in the theory of Social Constructivism. This theory of knowledge maintains that human development is socially situated and that knowledge is constructed through interaction with others. In short: students learn from interaction with their teacher and peers.

The foundations for this theory were laid by Lev Vygotsky, a 19<sup>th</sup> century development psychologist who posed the theory that learning continues to build on previous learning and when instruction is available. The context for learning has to be relevant and multiple modes of learning are offered. Students take responsibility for their own learning and actively construct their own knowledge. In the cases described in chapter 2 you will see that all programmes have determined their own mode of teaching and their own context to encourage learning in students and include

## **Setting Up a Liberal Arts Program**

characteristics of this theory. The student is central to the learning process, for example in Problem Based Learning, small classes, close staff-student interaction, case studies or a combination.

### ***Teaching***

Once you have determined how you conceptualize learning the next step is to describe how you want to facilitate this in teaching. Assuming you want to use the student-centred learning which works particularly well in a LAS programme, and claimed by all cases outlined in chapter 2, you now have to decide how you will implement this. The student and her or his learning are at the centre of the program and all decisions you take now are related to this aim.

There are various didactical approaches that you can use to achieve this aim. You will find that most European LAS programs do not use frontal lecturing for large groups of students. Rather they opt for smaller classrooms, between 12-25 students, in which interaction between teacher or instructor and students, and students among themselves is optimal. In small classes students have to be involved in their own learning, there is no hiding behind others as one can in a large group or even in an auditorium. In some cases, large-group lectures are complemented by small-group discussion which can also be an effective approach. Problem-based learning, as used by UCM and at Warwick, is one didactical approach that can be used effectively to give students responsibility for their own learning. Through the seven-step procedure<sup>xxii</sup> students analyse a case and while doing so, master the knowledge and skills set in the aims of the course. This way they learn in context and the supporters of this approach believe that it increases the learning gain.

Another approach is project based learning where students work during the course students on a specific project: for example a business plan, a solar powered instrument or an annotated literature list. While working towards that end goal, the students have to find and understand specific knowledge in order to reach the goal: how to write a budget, how solar energy cells work or which schools of literary theory exist. Again, it is learning in context, but with a strong motivational goal attached.

It is not necessary to use a strict prescription of one didactical approach for your entire program. Often a variety of approaches suit best the aim of a specific course. There are numerous other ways in which students can be involved, motivated and responsible: class discussions in which students lead the discussions, reflections on reading

materials, simulations, moot courts, lab sessions, smaller projects, presentations, even theatre productions in content classes can work. Depending on your learning outcomes and the learning outcomes of the courses in your program, you decide on the way you want to shape your teaching.

In order to safeguard coherence in the program the teaching conceptualization should be written down, shared and discussed regularly, making sure all teaching staff understand and support it. The Teaching and Learning kit developed as part of the BLASTER project will help teachers develop their teaching. When planning your new programme, it is recommended to plan ample time for this and for training teaching staff if necessary.

### **Student population**

Many of the LAS programmes in Europe are specifically targeting an international population with the aim of increasing intercultural awareness, communication skills and citizenship skills. These programmes are usually taught in English and they turn out to be attractive especially to students who are considering an international career. There are also programmes that focus mainly on the home population, teaching in the national language. These will have less focus on global citizenship, and more on national or local citizenship like many of the LAS programmes in the USA traditionally do. Whether you will have a national or international population will affect how you structure the citizenship components that are essential to all LAS programmes, a question that was already raised towards the end of chapter 2.

The student population you have in mind will also have an influence on the content of the programme. If you are aiming for international students, the language of instruction will most likely be English and the focus of the curriculum will probably be international or global as well.

The level of the students will be an important factor: aiming for the top students will result in higher expectations from your students than when you aim more broadly. This will in turn translate into different types of courses, course materials and assessments. The focus of your programme may also require specific prerequisites from the applicants. Frequently secondary school systems require students to choose a specific direction: oriented more towards humanities and art, social sciences, natural or life sciences. Determine which profiles or school subjects are required to be successful in your programme, also for the most common international secondary school degrees for

## **Setting Up a Liberal Arts Program**

the admission of international students. Those designing the courses will need this information to create an optimal fit for their courses.

Perhaps you also want to include a student profile in addition to academic requirements. Are there specific characteristics you are aiming for? Often the LAS programmes are looking for students with a strong social commitment. If this is your aim, the programme should be designed in such a way that it will offer opportunities for students to further develop this aspect.

Finally you will have to determine the size of your total population. Most programmes in Europe are small to medium sized. LA at Warwick University, as described above, had an intake of 32 students for their programme; in contrast most of the Dutch programmes admit around 200 students per year.. It is also possible that you would like to create a LAS component that all students in the university have to take, for example the compulsory Leuphana Semester at Leuphana University. Leuphana admits about 1500 students to their College each year, more than most Liberal Arts Colleges in the US do. These decisions can be influenced by pedagogical considerations about community building, but also the availability of teaching and support staff, facilities, and budgetary constraints.

### ***Admissions***

Once you have established the student profile, you have to define your recruitment strategies: where will you find the students you would like in your programme? This will require special consideration if your LAS programme is aimed students who are currently not coming to your university. Be prepared to invest in both online presences and marketing in person, which will require travelling if you are aiming for an international population. You may also want to join international recruitment groups like the Council of International Schools.

Admission can be selective in two ways: it may be that you have abundant places available and admission is only subject to meeting the minimum requirements for admission to the university, for example a secondary school diploma. The other is to have selective admissions for a limited number of places. Additional considerations and questions you need to address need to include the following:

- Should your students have specific knowledge before starting your programme? Do they need to achieve a certain grade, a combination of grades, a score of

points? If you are targeting international audiences, have the international office of your university help you determine the minimum entrance requirements.

- Will there be an entrance exam? If so, is this nationally or centrally arranged or do you have to organise this yourself?
- Is there a national application system that you have to use, like UCAS in the UK or Studielink in the Netherlands? How will that influence your admissions procedure?
- If your LAS programme will be international, how will you assess the level of English? There are several widely used tests: Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Cambridge English Language Testing, are among the most widely accepted. Other languages also have their own standardized tests. Decide which scores you require for each test. If your classes will be highly interactive and students will have to read and write a lot, you will have to set higher expectations. Comparing to other programmes may be a source of inspiration.

If admissions is going to be selective, design your admissions procedure.

- How will you determine which students meet your requirements?
- Decide which elements the application process requires and what the minimum requirements are.
- Will an interview or admissions day, where all applicants are assessed at the same time in a variety of ways, be part of the procedure or is a paper application sufficient?
- Do you want to consider online admissions activities like an online module that needs to be completed?

Socio-economic diversity is an important issue in admissions. An international programme will appeal to students from many different countries where the cost of living might be lower than in your own. These might be students that fit your programme really well and also whom you really need to increase the diversity in your population. Find out which sources for scholarships and financial support are available, either within your university, nationally or even internationally. Using networks to find corporate sponsors is also a way to create more opportunities for students who will need support to study at your programme. Draw up clear criteria for awarding financial support.

## Setting Up a Liberal Arts Program

### Academic staff

As stated at the end of chapter two, the main success factor of your programme will be the academic staff. Without academics who are specialists in the required fields, who fully subscribe to your educational philosophy and who are intrinsically motivated to teach and work with students, your programme will not succeed. Above under *Educational Philosophy* you will have decided how you want to teach this programme; small scale, lectures, online, a specific didactical approach, a combination of these or something completely different. Together with the targeted student population, it is now possible to determine how many academic staff you will need to teach the programme. Depending on the aspirations of the university and the budget available, you will have to use academics already employed in the university or you can hire your own staff, or a combination of these two, as UCM and LUC do.

The disciplinary focus of your staff and their own research will have an influence on the content of the programme, especially in a programme that is flexible and seems to be able to accommodate a wide range of courses. You probably want to use the strengths and enthusiasm of your academics but at the same time you cannot make the programme too dependent on individual preferences as this makes your programme potentially vulnerable. Finding a balance will be a continuous process, during the start-up phase, but also afterwards.

The models described in chapter 2 give examples of various ways of staffing the programme. All three models have their own core staff for the courses that are central to the programme. For the more specialized courses in the majors, either staff from other schools, institutes or departments is seconded to teach in the LAS programme, or students attend courses in other parts of the university with students of these programmes. Both, as described in chapter 2, will work but will have a different effect on your own programme. In any case all instructors of LAS students should understand the aims and objectives of the LAS programme and adjust their teaching accordingly. When designing your programme, you will have to keep this in mind: can the university give you the specialized teaching you need? How can you use the strengths of your university in your own curriculum while still meeting the LAS concept? If you are developing an international programme, it will be logical to have staff with international experience and who speak the language of instruction well. Do you need to provide training in this respect and how can you facilitate this?

The work done in the Teaching and Learning group as well as the Undergraduate Research group in the BLASTER project will be helpful in training instructors for

teaching in your new programme. You can find the handbooks on the ECOLAS website: [www.ecolas.eu](http://www.ecolas.eu).

One of the strengths of the successful LAS programmes in Europe is the close relationship between staff and students. The close and easy access to professors and direct interaction in the classroom all contribute to the community in your programme. It is also important to build this community among your academic staff. They may have come from all over the world or from various departments in the university; in both cases they will have their own experiences and ideas on how a programme is run. Some may take for granted that there will be teaching assistants or that exams are organized centrally while others are used to acting independently without strict regulations. This can create confusion and irritation. Include these kinds of expectations explicitly in the training of the staff.

### **Assessment**

In the past decades, a shift in universities has been noticeable. The focus is moving to what students should learn (see also learning aims) rather than what professors can teach. This student-centred focus fits well with the successful LAS programmes in Europe, in which students learn in interaction with each other and the professor.

Assessment plays an important role in this type of learning process. Used well, it can stimulate learning. Educational scientists distinguish between formative assessment and summative assessment: the former aims at making assessment part of the learning process through timely and useful feedback, the latter assesses if the student has mastered the expected learning outcomes. Considering the student-centred focus of most LAS programmes in Europe, it is hardly surprising that formative assessment is used frequently.

In practice, this means that students have multiple assessment moments during their courses and receive prompt feedback on their work. The assignments are aligned with the learning outcomes and are designed in such a way that students learn from their course work and know if they are heading in the right direction. Working with their peers on their assignments can also lead to an increase in learning as they have to work together to deliver the end product, which could be a presentation, a paper, or another project. While working together, it is expected that they will stimulate learning in each other.

## **Setting Up a Liberal Arts Program**

Using various assessments throughout the course also allows the teacher to assess various skills, rather than only exam writing or essay writing. This also fits the LAS-philosophy as outlined in chapter 1.

This assessment regime is intensive and may be unfamiliar to your university. Often the big, summative, exam or paper at the end of a course is still considered the best way to assess if students have met the learning outcomes. This is frequently the method that has been used in the past decades and most academics who work in academia now will have experienced this and are familiar with it.

You may have to convince colleagues and administrators that continuous and formative assessment will lead to a more intensive and varied learning experience in students. If your university has an assessment regime in which the traditional exam at the end of the year is the standard, you will have to find ways to circumvent this. When implementing continuous assessment it is important not to simply list a series of assignments, presentations or quizzes, but to clearly think through each assignment, determining what kind of learning it is meant to achieve in students, to make sure it is relevant and will help students master the materials, and to plan feedback.

Continuous assessment is intensive for the instructors as well: they will have to provide feedback quickly, and adapt their teaching when needed. There are many ways to make giving feedback more manageable, also using technology. This can range from recording oral feedback, highlighting text in various colours, using feedback rubrics, using peer feedback and many other options. It goes beyond the scope of this book to give the practical guidelines here, but there are suggested resources at the end of this chapter to inspire you.

Whichever assessment regime you decide on, make sure to make it specific for your academic staff for example by writing an assessment framework.

## **Structure Academic Year**

As you are working on a new programme, you may find that you want to structure your programme in a different way than your university offers. Often universities use semesters or trimesters and all programmes operate in the same rhythm of teaching and examining. If you want to include for example project weeks, short intensive courses that last only a couple of weeks, or different assessment schemes, you will have to take the regulations of your university into account. Find support for your

innovative plans and try to find the freedom to try something new. If this is not possible, you will have to find a creative way to adjust your plans.

## **Learning Environment**

The learning environment will be an essential factor in the success of your programme, as all cases in chapter 2 gave evidence of. Depending on the choices made on educational philosophy, a physical space will have to be found. A programme that plans to use frequent group work or self-study or labs, will have different spatial requirements than a programme depending on large lectures. The cases described in chapter 2 are quite different, but they all have their own dedicated space, ranging from reserved classrooms and a common room, to fully dedicated college buildings or campuses in which only students from the programme study and work on assignments. To build a learning community having a dedicated space where students and staff can meet is essential.

Most of the Dutch LAS colleges are residential, sometimes only for the first year students, for others it is for the full three years. These are all international LAS colleges which have the aim to build a community in which learning continues beyond the classroom. Living together in dorms with students from all over the world, encountering variety in daily living habits can give students a very strong learning experience. Most of the students will live without their parents or other adults for the first time in their lives and they have to work out how to look after themselves, be considerate of the others' needs, sharing facilities, having to keep kitchens, living rooms or bathrooms clean. This is challenging in itself, but can be made more complex by living together with peers from other backgrounds. By cooking and eating together a different level of community is established and students will forge friendships that will last them a lifetime and, just as importantly, contribute to the development of positive citizenship, a goal of all LAS programmes.

Such residential systems are not cheap and require additional attention from the institution to make it work well. As explained in chapter 2, LUC uses a system of residential assistants and a Student Life Officer to encourage community building. A system like this works, but your university has to be prepared to invest in this.

Student support is another aspect of the learning environment. LAS programmes offer students a lot of choice and students have to forge their own pathway through the curriculum determining their major specialization, minor, study abroad or not,

## **Setting Up a Liberal Arts Program**

internship or career choices, all in combination with the restrictions and aims of the programme. This room for flexibility and own interests is what often makes the LAS programmes attractive to students, especially when these programmes are offered in a country where mono-disciplinary programmes are the norm. But it can also be slightly overwhelming as they have to weigh the various options and decisions. Most of the LAS programmes in Europe have a system in which students are assigned to academic staff who act as their advisor for these questions. There are various formats, as described in chapter 2 and whichever system suits the needs of your programme best, the student support should be systematic and integrated in the programme.

You will also need to think about libraries, online sources, and other resources: which libraries are available to your staff and students? Do they stock to books needed for the programme? How can you make sure the required titles and subscriptions are available and can be updated? You will have to make sure that students can buy books, perhaps through a student-discount scheme, a campus bookstore, online or otherwise.

Finally, you will have to consider which additional services the students will need or can already access in the rest of the university: career services are highly important particularly for LAS programmes in countries where the concept is not known. ‘What can I (or my child or the student) do with a LAS degree?’ will be the single most asked question by colleagues, parents and prospective students alike. Having career services which are well aware of the strengths of the students will not only help your students find a suitable career, but will also lessen these concerns. The same applies for internship coordination.

### **The curriculum**

All the factors described above have an influence on the design of your curriculum; they mutually influence each other and you will have to go back and forth between what you have planned and what is actually available. All factors contribute to a learning experience that will be as strong as possible, create an environment in which you can offer a LAS curriculum.

You will find LAS a very flexible programme in which you can accommodate a wonderful variety of disciplines and courses. The challenge will be to have a focus in your programme, to make choices on what to offer and what not to offer.

In sum, current LAS programmes aim to combine the essential elements described above in chapter 1:

- Academic skills that are core to the LAS educational philosophy
- Breadth in the programme so students become acquainted with Humanities, Natural Sciences and Social Sciences
- Research skills to prepare students for the depth portion of the major and minor
- Citizenship courses, modules, projects or elements throughout the programme
- Specialisation in majors, concentrations, interests, or themes

Each of the programmes described in chapter 2 made their own choices in shaping these elements, giving more or less weight to each. What they all share, as emphasised at the end of chapter 2, is a set of core courses that all students have to complete and that require the student to study the various disciplines in courses that have a more or less strong interdisciplinary focus. These core courses are either taught in the first year to serve as a basis for further study, or students take one of these increasingly challenging courses in each year of study.

For the core courses you should plan in advance what type of academic you would like to teach these courses. Especially interdisciplinary courses require motivated, open minded academics who are really interested in teaching innovation. It is highly frustrating if an element of your programme design cannot be implemented because you cannot find the staff to teach it. If all your teaching staff is seconded from the university, then you will have to search very carefully for the academics to teach these courses. Especially when designing innovative and interdisciplinary courses, keep asking yourself who can teach this course and where will you find them. Once you have your staff, involve them in the course design, give them proper training as to what is expected of them and offer regular and intensive supervision.

Research skills are introduced and refined throughout the programmes often starting in the first year with compulsory courses, followed by more training within the specialisations, with formative assessment to support the students' development. Throughout the programme students write shorter and longer essays regularly. Nearly all programmes end with an individual research project. From the beginning plan the research training from more general skills to specialisation specific courses, preparing students for their individual project, but obviously also for master programmes or job market. The online *Companion to Undergraduate Research in the Liberal Arts and Sciences* that was created as part of the BLASTER project will help you in deciding how can implement this in your own LAS programme.

## Setting Up a Liberal Arts Program

Finally, citizenship skills are included in a sometimes more other times less explicit ways: included in core courses, as skills trainings in languages or in action learning programmes.

The specialisation areas of all programmes discussed in this book contain series of more disciplinary oriented courses. A distinction can be made between the programmes that offer all courses in their own programme and those which offer a core set of courses in the programme while students select the rest of their courses from other programmes in the university. Within those two categories programmes make their own choices. LUC and UCM offer all their courses themselves, within their own programme but these courses are organised in different ways: at Leiden University College The Hague courses from various disciplines are scheduled in thematic majors, University College Maastricht works with concentrations that are more disciplinary organised but within which the students can also study a thematic set of courses. In these programmes students have quite a lot of choice. Provide them with a clear framework of which requirements their choices will have to meet for graduation.

At Warwick University students can pick part of their courses from courses the university has on offer in addition to the core modules that are designed and taught by the programme itself. Here, specific sets of courses within other degree programmes have been preselected, usually with some space for own choices.

Whichever choice you make, it is important to have clear guidelines for the content of your programme. As your programme develops, new insights will arise, ideas will be proposed, new staff will bring enthusiasm for additional courses. It will most likely not be possible to incorporate them all and you should be able to make decisions based on the aims and vision of your programme.

The availability of instructors will obviously also determine the direction the programme will take, so as already stressed above, your staffing policy is key to your success.

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<sup>xxi</sup> Mission statement AACU, <http://aacu.org/about/mission>, retrieved 29<sup>th</sup> September 2016.

<sup>xxii</sup> For more information on Problem Based Learning see for example the guide provided by Maastricht University [https://fasos.esc.maastrichtuniversity.nl/fasos\\_docs/PBL\\_Study\\_skills\\_versie\\_2003-2010.pdf](https://fasos.esc.maastrichtuniversity.nl/fasos_docs/PBL_Study_skills_versie_2003-2010.pdf)

## Checklist

The following checklist is designed as a quick reference guide of the core elements to consider for either beginning or continuing to develop an LAS programme. For more information on each element, please see above.

- Stakeholders
  - Map the stakeholders and their expectations of the programme
  - Inform stakeholders of what can realistically be expected
  
- Learning aims
  - Benchmark your learning aims against the various frameworks (AACU, AALE, Dublin Descriptors, UC Deans Network)
  - Learning aims are written in ‘active’ verbs describing behaviour that shows the student has met the learning aim.
  
- Educational Philosophy
  - Develop and discuss an educational philosophy, including the vision on how students learn and what this means for teaching.
  - Determine how you will teach (Class size, language, didactical approaches)
  - Design training in Educational Philosophy for staff
  
- Student population
  - National or international students
  - Which diplomas are accepted
  - Do you required specific orientations or courses
  - Are there specific requirements for language fluency
  - What is the profile of the ideal student for your programme
  - Translate requirements and profile into an admissions assessment procedure if applicable
  - Develop and implement recruitment plan
  - Create financial aid opportunities
  
- Academic staff
  - Will you have internal or external staff or a combination
  - Will you staff the entire programme yourself or will students take courses with other institutes or departments
  - Calculate how many staff you will need
  - Develop ideal staff profile
  - Set up a recruitment strategy for staff

## Setting Up a Liberal Arts Program

- Set up training for staff (educational philosophy, didactical principles, assessment, feedback, ...)
- 
- Assessment
  - Will you use formative assessment, summative assessment or both
  - Align assessment with learning aims
  - Write up assessment policies in framework
  - Assist staff in setting up assessments
  - Provide training when needed
- Fit programme in existing structures within university
- Learning environment
  - Locate and design physical space for programme
  - Create meeting spaces for staff and students to support community building
  - Develop and implement student support system, bot academic and social if needed
  - Make sure access to libraries and resources is organised
  - Create access to career services and/or internship coordination
- Curriculum
  - Have academic skills been placed at strategic points throughout the curriculum
  - Are the Humanities, Social Sciences and Life or Natural Sciences included in the programme, i.e. is there a breadth requirement?
  - Are core courses contributing to general development of students?
  - Does the programme have a clear structure that enables students to achieve their best and offers them opportunities to make their own choices?
  - Are the specialisations designed within a coherent structure?
  - Are research skills trained, developed and evaluated at all levels?
  - Does the programme contain elements of citizenship education?
  - Is the programme not too strongly depended on one or two individual instructors?
  - Do you have a plan for evaluation, development and changes in the programme

## Further Sources and Readings

### On LAS education

The American Association of Colleges and Universities	<a href="http://www.aacu.org">www.aacu.org</a>
The American Academy of Liberal Education	<a href="http://www.aale.org">www.aale.org</a> .
ECOLAS	<a href="http://www.ecolas.eu">www.ecolas.eu</a>
University College Deans of the Netherlands	<a href="http://www.universitycolleges.info/">www.universitycolleges.info/</a>

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<http://testa.ac.uk/index.php>

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Laurent Boetsch is an Executive Director of the European Consortium of Liberal Arts and Sciences (ECOLAS) and Professor Emeritus of Romance Languages at Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Va. (USA). In addition to his faculty service at Washington and Lee he served in various positions in the senior administration including Dean and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Provost and Acting President. From 2003-2008 he helped to establish the European College of Liberal Arts, Berlin (now Bard College, Berlin) where he served as President.

Laurent did his M.A, and Doctor of Modern Languages at the Spanish School of Middlebury College in Vermont and in Madrid. Before entering his administrative career, Laurent's area of research and publication was in the area of early 20th century Spanish literature and culture with an emphasis on the social novel. He has published numerous articles in both Spain and the United States and his book, José Díaz Fernández y la otra generación del 27, was an important contribution to the restoration of an entire generation of writers whose voices had been silenced by the former Spanish dictatorship.

### **Dr. Volker Balli, Leuphana Universität Lüneburg**

Volker Balli (Ph.D.) is the Academic Director of the Studium Individuale at Leuphana University of Lüneburg. He is in charge of the conceptual development and implementation of this programme of study that offers contemporary liberal education. Previously, he has been a part of the founding team of the Liberal Arts and Science Programme at University College Freiburg, developing the social science Major 'Governance'. In these functions, he has gained extensive expertise in: programme and course design and implementation; advising; internationalisation of programmes of study.

Volker's particular interest lies in the nexus between changes in HE and broader societal developments, specifically in the European context. He has been a student of European Studies (B.A.) at King's College in London, LSE and Sciences Po, and European Politics at the College of Europe in Bruges (M.A.). He received his Ph.D. in Social and Political Sciences from the European University Institute in Florence (2009) and has been a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Trento.

### **Drs. L.A.J.M. Schreel, Leiden University College The Hague**

Lieke Schreel is Educational Director of Leiden University College The Hague (LUC). She has nearly two decades of experience working in Liberal Arts and Sciences colleges in the Netherlands, working at University College Utrecht as teacher and administrator from 2000-2009, after which she moved to Leiden University to develop and design the concept and curriculum for LUC in The Hague, which started in 2010 and of which she was the founding Educational Director. Between 2012-2015 she

worked with the Board of the newly founded Faculty Campus The Hague (Leiden University) to build up the Faculty, before returning to LUC.

Lieke has a degree in Medieval Studies from Utrecht University. Following a five-year position as Dutch Lector at Trinity College Dublin, she returned to the Netherlands and while working at UCU she deepened her knowledge of Educational Science and took part in the prestigious Educational Leadership Programme offered by the Center of Excellence in University Teaching, both at Utrecht University. Lieke has a keen interest in quality management in Higher Education, teacher professionalisation and educational innovation. She regularly advises other programmes and serves on quality management panels.

## About BLASTER

Strengthening the relevance and the quality of higher education is a key objective in the European Union's educational policies. Current higher education lacks the emphasis on creativity and innovation needed to prepare students for the 21st century. In addition, as a result of a lopsided emphasis on research, there are concerns about the quality of university teaching. This applies particularly to undergraduate programs, even if these constitute the bulk of higher education.

Liberal Arts and Sciences Programs, as they slowly emerge all over Europe, hold true potential to meet these needs. They offer interdisciplinary undergraduate education, stimulating fundamental academic skills and students' ability to think analytically, critically, and creatively. They also emphasize teaching excellence, and bridge the divide between teaching and research in undergraduate research.

This Erasmus+ funded Strategic Partnership brought together six of the forerunners in Liberal Arts and Science Education in Europe: University College Roosevelt, Leiden University College The Hague, Vytautas Magnus University, Leuphana University Lüneburg, Warwick University and the European Consortium for Liberal Arts and Sciences (ECOLAS). Together, these partners sought to expand and reinforce the best of Liberal Arts and Science Teaching in order to strengthen the relevance and the quality of undergraduate education at HE institutions throughout Europe.

These general objectives were met within the Strategic Partnership via three activities:

- The development of a Guide to the Emerging LAS Practices in the EU
- The development of a Teaching Training Kit
- The development of undergraduate research guidelines, showcasing best practices

Each of the strategic partners has a unique expertise in one or more of these fields – quality assurance, teaching excellence and undergraduate research – which made cooperation particularly fruitful and strengthened the combined impact. This impact is enhanced by all output being disseminated widely: digitally (video's, podcasts), in writing and physically (in various multiplier events).

Put together, the project activities not only strengthen the quality and relevance of the education in the participating institutions, and existing and aspiring LAS colleges, but also of higher education in Europe as a whole. The Dutch experience with University

Colleges demonstrates the spill-over effect of broad bachelor programmes and an emphasis on teaching excellence and undergraduate research to higher education as a whole. Building on this existent evidence of the relevance and power of an LAS education, BLASTER will ultimately benefit young Europeans via offering them an education that opens their hearts and their minds, and expands their horizon beyond compare.