

**MASTER'S PROGRAMME**  
**NORTH AMERICAN STUDIES**  
FACULTY OF ARTS  
**UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN**

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This report was finalised on 8 July 2020





# REPORT ON THE MASTER'S PROGRAMME NORTH AMERICAN STUDIES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN

This report takes the NVAO's Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands for limited programme assessments as a starting point (September 2018).

## ADMINISTRATIVE DATA REGARDING THE PROGRAMME

### Master's programme North American Studies

Name of the programme:	Noord-Amerika Studies
International name:	North American Studies
CROHO number:	60845
Level of the programme:	master's
Orientation of the programme:	academic
Number of credits:	60 EC
Specialisations or tracks:	-
Location:	Groningen
Mode of study:	full time
Language of instruction:	English
Submission deadline NVAO:	01/05/2020

The visit of the assessment panel Region Studies to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Groningen took place on 30 and 31 October and 1 November 2019.

## ADMINISTRATIVE DATA REGARDING THE INSTITUTION

Name of the institution:	University of Groningen
Status of the institution:	publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	positive

## COMPOSITION OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

The NVAO has approved the composition of the panel on 4 March 2019. The panel that assessed the master's programme North American Studies consisted of:

- Prof. dr. P. (Peter) Van Nuffelen, research professor in Cultural History of the Ancient World at Ghent University (Belgium) [chair];
- Prof. dr. D.M. (Diederik) Oostdijk, professor in English Literature at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam;
- Prof. dr. E.J.C. (Eibert) Tigchelaar, research professor in Biblical Studies at KU Leuven (Belgium);
- Dr. N.A. (Nicolet) Boekhoff - van der Voort, lecturer Islam and Arabic at the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies of the Radboud University;
- Prof. dr. G. (Gert) Buelens, professor in English and American Literature at Ghent University (Belgium);
- E.L. (Emma) Mendez Correa, bachelor's student in Greek and Latin Language and Culture at Leiden University [student member].

The panel was supported by drs. E.G.M. (Mariette) Huisjes, who acted as secretary.



## WORKING METHOD OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

The master's programme North American Studies at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Groningen was part of the cluster assessment Region Studies. Between March 2019 and November 2019 the panel assessed 38 programmes at five of universities: Radboud University, Leiden University, University of Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and the University of Groningen.

### *Panel members*

The panel consisted of the following members:

- Prof. dr. P. (Peter) Van Nuffelen, research professor Cultural History of the Ancient World at Ghent University (Belgium) [chair];
- Prof. dr. D.M. (Diederik) Oostdijk, professor in English Literature at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam;
- Prof. dr. A. (Umar) Ryad, professor in Arabic and Islamic Studies at KU Leuven (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. E.J.C. (Eibert) Tigchelaar, research professor of the research unit Biblical Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at KU Leuven (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. G. (Gunnar) De Boel, professor in (Greek) Linguistics and Modern Greek and Byzantine Literature (Department of Literary Studies) at Ghent University (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. I. (Inge) Brinkman, professor in African Studies at Ghent University (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. G. (Gert) Buelens, professor in English and American Literature at Ghent University (Belgium);
- Dr. D. (Diana Bullen) Presciutti, senior lecturer in Art History, director of Global Studies and director of the Interdisciplinary Studies Centre at the University of Essex (United Kingdom);
- R.A. (Rianne) Clerc-de Groot MA, teacher in Classics at the Cygnus Gymnasium in Amsterdam;
- Dr. D. (Dario) Fazzi, lecturer in North American Studies and International Studies at Leiden University;
- Prof. dr. A.F.R. (Ann) Heirman, professor in Chinese Language and Culture at Ghent University (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. A. (Axel) Holvoet, professor at the Institute of the Languages and Cultures of the Baltic of Vilnius University (Lithuania);
- Prof. dr. V. (Vincent) Houben, professor Geschichte und Gesellschaft Südostasiens at Humboldt Universität Berlin (Germany);
- Prof. dr. E.M.H. (Helena) Houvenaghel, professor in Spanish Language and Culture at Utrecht University;
- Prof. dr. D. (Daeyeol) Kim, professor at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INaLCO) of the Université Sorbonne Paris Cité (France);
- L. (Lotte) Metz MA, teacher in Greek and Latin at the Stedelijk Gymnasium Nijmegen;
- Prof. dr. J. (John) Nawas, professor in Arabic and Islamic Studies at KU Leuven (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. A. (Andreas) Niehaus, professor in Japanese Language and Culture at Ghent University (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. J.L.M. (Jan) Papy, professor in Latin Literature at KU Leuven (Belgium);
- Dr. N.A. (Nicolet) Boekhoff-van der Voort, teacher Islam studies and coordinator Graduate School for Humanities at Radboud University;
- C. (Charlotte) van der Voort, bachelor's student in Greek and Latin Language and Culture, and pre-master's student Dutch Language and Culture at Leiden University [student member];
- L. (Lara) van Lookeren Campagne, bachelor's student in Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Amsterdam [student member];
- G.M. (Gerieke) Prins, bachelor's student in Social and Migration History with a minor in Latin American Studies at Leiden University [student member];
- E.L. (Emma) Mendez Correa, bachelor's student in Greek and Latin Language and Culture at Leiden University [student member];
- Prof. dr. L.P. (Lars) Rensmann, professor in European Politics and Society at University of Groningen [referee International Studies at Leiden University];
- Em. prof. dr. C.H.M. (Kees) Versteegh, emeritus professor in Arabic and Islam at Radboud University [referee Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies at University of Amsterdam];

- Prof. dr. H. (Harco) Willems, professor in Egyptology at KU Leuven (Belgium) and director of the excavation in Dayr al-Barshā (Egypt) [referee Ancient Near East Studies at Leiden University];
- Prof. dr. J. (Jaap) Wisse, professor in Latin Language & Literature at Newcastle University (United Kingdom) [referee Greek, Latin and Classics at the University of Amsterdam and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam].

For each site visit, assessment panel members were selected based on their expertise, availability and independence.

The QANU project manager for the cluster assessment was dr. Els Schröder. She acted as secretary in the site visit to Radboud University and in the first site visit to Leiden University. In order to assure the consistency of assessment within the cluster, the project manager was present at the start of the site visits as well as the panel discussion leading to the preliminary findings at the other site visits and reviewed the draft reports. During her leave of absence, she was replaced by her colleagues at QANU. Dr. Irene Conradie acted as project manager in the combined site visit to the University of Amsterdam and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and in the second site visit to Leiden University. Dr. Anna Sparreboom acted as project manager in the site visit to the University of Groningen.

Several secretaries assisted in this cluster assessment: drs. Trees Graas, employee of QANU, also acted as secretary in the site visit to Radboud University; drs. Mariette Huisjes, freelance secretary for QANU, also acted as secretary in the first site visit to Leiden University and in the site visit to the University of Groningen; drs. Erik van der Spek, freelance secretary for QANU, acted as secretary in the second site visit to Leiden University; drs. Marielle Klerks, freelance secretary for QANU, acted as secretary in the combined site visit to the University of Amsterdam and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The QANU project managers and the secretaries regularly discussed the assessment process and outcomes.

#### *Preparation*

On 22 November 2018, the panel chair was briefed by the project manager on the tasks and working method of the assessment panel and more specifically his role, as well as use of the assessment framework. Prior to the site visit, the panel members received instruction by telephone and e-mail on the tasks and working method and the use of the assessment framework. A schedule for the site visit was composed. Prior to the site visit, representative partners for the various interviews were selected. See Appendix 3 for the final schedule.

Before the site visit, the programmes wrote self-evaluation reports of the programmes and sent these to the project manager. She checked these on quality and completeness, and sent them to the panel members. The panel members studied the self-evaluation reports and formulated initial questions and remarks, as well as positive aspects of the programmes.

The panel also studied a selection of theses and their assessment forms, based on a provided list of graduates between 2015-2019. A variety of topics and a diversity of examiners were included in the selection. The project manager and panel chair assured that the distribution of grades in the selection matched the distribution of grades of all available theses. Because of the large number of programmes at the site visit of the University of Groningen, the selection consisted of 15 theses per programme. This was in agreement with the additional conditions for an adjusted thesis selection (i.e. ascertainable overlap between the programmes and a shared Board of Examiners) set by the NVAO.

#### *Site visit*

The site visit to the University of Groningen took place on 30 and 31 October and 1 November 2019. At the start of each site visit, the panel discussed its initial findings on the self-evaluation reports and the theses, as well as the division of tasks during the site visit. During the site visit, the panel studied additional materials about the programmes and exams, as well as minutes of the Programme Committee and the Board of Examiners. An overview of these materials can be found in Appendix 4.



After discussions with the programme management and staff, the panel asked the programme to provide additional documentation on the feasibility of the 'study abroad' option (see Standard 2). This information was provided, and reassured the panel that adequate measures had been taken to make the situation more transparent. The panel conducted interviews with representatives of the programmes: students and staff members, the programme's management, alumni and representatives of the Board of Examiners. Members of the Programme Committee were included as part of the interviews with staff and students. It also offered students and staff members an opportunity for confidential discussion during a consultation hour. No requests for private consultation were received.

The panel used the final part of the site visit to discuss its findings in an internal meeting. Afterwards, the panel chair publicly presented the panel's preliminary findings and general observations. The visit concluded with a development dialogue, held in parallel sessions, in which the panel members and the representatives of the programme discussed various development routes for the programmes. The results of this conversation are summarised in a separate report, which will be published through the programmes' communication channels.

#### *Report*

After the site visit, the secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to the project manager for peer assessment. Subsequently, the secretary sent the report to the panel. After processing the panel members' feedback, the project manager sent the draft reports to the faculty in order to have it/these checked for factual irregularities. The project manager discussed the ensuing comments with the panel's chair and changes were implemented accordingly. The report was then finalised and sent to the Faculty of Arts and University Board.

#### *Definition of judgements standards*

In accordance with the NVAO's Assessment framework for limited programme assessments, the panel used the following definitions for the assessment of the standards:

#### **Generic quality**

The quality that, from an international perspective, may reasonably be expected from a higher education Associate Degree, Bachelor's or Master's programme.

#### **Meets the standard**

The programme meets the generic quality standard.

#### **Partially meets the standard**

The programme meets the generic quality standard to a significant extent, but improvements are required in order to fully meet the standard.

#### **Does not meet the standard**

The programme does not meet the generic quality standard.

The panel used the following definitions for the assessment of the programme as a whole:

#### **Positive**

The programme meets all the standards.

#### **Conditionally positive**

The programme meets Standard 1 and partially meets a maximum of two standards, with the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel.

#### **Negative**

In the following situations:

- The programme fails to meet one or more standards;



- The programme partially meets Standard 1;
- The programme partially meets one or two standards, without the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel;
- The programme partially meets three or more standards.



## SUMMARY JUDGEMENT

### *Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes*

The panel fully acknowledges and endorses the uniqueness, ambition, topicality, and societal relevance of the programme's profile. However, it finds the current profile too broad and advises the programme to make it more specific. Added focus will make it easier to communicate to future students what the programme is about, to differentiate it from other programmes, and to link it to certain professions. The programme can draw on an Advisory Board on Employability to provide advice to keep it aligned with the expectations of the professional field.

The panel concludes that the intended learning outcomes are of the appropriate orientation and surpass what may be required at a master's level. They are also societally relevant, given the growing importance of functioning in a globalised world and managing diversity. However, the panel agrees with the programme staff that the intended learning outcomes need to be revised. Firstly, they should be adapted to the more focussed profile it recommends. Secondly, they will become clearer if formulated on a more general level. Thirdly, their ambition should be toned down so that it becomes more clear that all students achieve the intended learning outcomes upon graduation. The panel is convinced that a sharper focus will help the programme to strengthen its connection to the labour market, to convey a clear and appealing message to prospective students, and to establish a firm basis on which to shape the curriculum.

### *Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment*

The panel finds the master's programme North American Studies well-structured and is satisfied to see that the previous panel's suggestion to abolish the subdivision of the programme into two tracks has been taken to heart. It finds the programme's content broad and ambitious, and the course materials of an excellent level. It fully agrees with the practice of letting the exact content of the seminars be determined in part by the staff's ongoing research. This is suitable for a master's programme, and gives leverage to the teaching staff's expertise. It is a great compliment that the students rate their courses very highly in evaluations: with an average mark of 4.04 on a five-point scale in 2018-2019. Around the time of the panel's visit, the thesis trajectory was restructured and is improved, in the panel's view. The new trajectory gives the students more guidance and support. In addition to the procedures already in place, the panel recommends linking up the students and thesis supervisors at an earlier stage, not after a formal thesis proposal is approved.

While the academic level of the programme is indisputably high, feasibility should be addressed more prominently. The panel is satisfied to perceive a growing awareness of this among the staff, and some actions are being taken to improve the feasibility. In addition to them, the panel recommends making a serious effort to help the students find suitable internships that are in fact worth 10 EC, instead of much longer internships, and create a culture in which the students feel facilitated and stimulated to finish their study projects within the nominal time. It seems inevitable that the students who choose to study in the US prolong their studies, accruing an additional 20 EC. In reaction to some questions about this by the panel, the programme management decided to adapt the teaching and examination regulations. It is now transparent what the consequences of the study abroad option are, and the panel is satisfied with the proposed remedy.

Students expressed the wish to see a stronger connection between the master's programme North American Studies and the labour market. The programme staff is responding to this wish with a series of measures, such as a new, practice-oriented course, possibly a new form for the academic master's thesis and closer co-operation with alumni. The panel fully supports the programme staff in these endeavours. It suggests that they may be more successful if the programme sharpens its profile, as it recommends under Standard 1.

The team of lecturers is a strong asset of the programme, well-balanced in many respects and unanimously praised by students. They say their lecturers have a broad knowledge base, are open-minded, flexible, and respectful, each with their own personal way of teaching, and create an



atmosphere of academic inspiration. The panel was appreciative of the team's enthusiasm and dedication. It finds the team is not well-balanced in academic ranking since at the time of its visit, there was only one full professor and seven assistant professors. Luckily, it was told that an associate professor will be appointed soon. This is a good first step towards a more even spread in academic positions and responsibilities.

The teaching methods, student support, quality assurance and services all meet the standard, in the panel's view. It endorses the programme's decision to use English as the language of tuition.

The panel concludes that in general the master's programme North American Studies offers its students a stimulating and supportive environment, in accordance with the ambitious intended learning outcomes. In its view, the learning environment sufficiently enables them to achieve an academically oriented master's degree.

#### *Standard 3: Student assessment*

The panel found that the master's programme North American Studies has its assessment system under control, with varied assessment methods that fit the programme's goals, a good assessment plan and assessment matrix, well-informed students, good quality assurance, and a sufficient system of thesis assessment. It identified two points for improvement regarding the thesis assessment: adding structure to the thesis form with different categories according to which students' theses are being assessed, and making the independent assessments of the first and second examiners more explicit. This can be done by having them fill out separate assessment forms.

The panel was informed during the site visit that the new central Board of Examiners for Arts was positively received. It endorses the benefits of harmonised procedures and efficiency gains. It congratulates the members of the new Board of Examiners on the energetic way in which they have shaped its duties and the associated procedures in a short period of time. It encourages the Board of Examiners to continue along the path it has chosen and is fully confident that the quality assurance of the assessment within the master's programme North American Studies is in good hands.

All things considered, the panel judges that the master's programme North American Studies has an adequate assessment system in place that contributes significantly to the validity, reliability, and transparency of assessment.

#### *Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes*

The panel gathered from a sample of master's theses written in North American Studies that they vary in quality, as does the extent to which they correspond to the programme's ambitious intended learning outcomes. Nevertheless, it is unanimous in its conclusion that even the weaker theses are of an adequate academic level.

Although there are as yet no systematic data on alumni success in the job market, anecdotal evidence suggests that they find their way into a broad variety of jobs. The panel met with alumni during its site visit and gained the impression that they are intellectually sophisticated, flexible thinkers. It is confident that they will do well.

The panel assesses the standards from the *Assessment framework for limited programme assessments* in the following way:

*Master's programme North American Studies*

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	meets the standard
Standard 3: Student assessment	meets the standard
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	meets the standard
General conclusion	positive

The chair, prof. dr. Peter Van Nuffelen, and the secretary, drs. Mariette Huisjes, of the panel hereby declare that all panel members have studied this report and that they agree with the judgements laid down in the report. They confirm that the assessment has been conducted in accordance with the demands relating to independence.

Date: 8 July 2020



# DESCRIPTION OF THE STANDARDS FROM THE ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK FOR LIMITED FRAMEWORK ASSESSMENTS

## Context

The master's programme North American Studies is one of over 40 master's degree programmes offered by the Faculty of Arts at the University of Groningen. Since 2018, the faculty's programmes have been managed by 5 management clusters. The master's programme North American Studies is part of the Classics, History, Archaeology, Middle Eastern Studies and American Studies (CHARMA) cluster. A programme coordinator acts as a link between the lecturers and the cluster board. The master's programme in North American Studies is a small programme; it attracts an average of 10 to 14 students each year.

### **Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes**

The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.

## Findings

### *Profile*

The master's programme North American Studies is geared towards the knowledge and understanding of the society, culture, and politics of the United States and its relations to the wider hemispheric context. At the skills level, it aims to train its students in advanced writing, speaking, presentation and argumentation competences in English. Like its sister programme at the bachelor's level, the master's programme North American Studies aims to prepare its graduates so that they can synthesise a variety of academic approaches to identify and solve problems that are typical of our increasingly multicultural societies. It uses an interdisciplinary approach, with an emphasis on critical and cultural theory. Compared to the bachelor's level, the master's students acquire more in-depth knowledge, greater independence as investigators, and a more extensive level of critical reflection.

Some of the challenges the programme is currently struggling with are a relatively low student intake, an underdeveloped connection to the labour market, and slow completion rates among the students. The panel is convinced that the programme could benefit by adopting a sharper focus. It therefore recommends that the programme staff and cluster board select which themes and/or approaches are central to the programme's profile. One option is to emphasise its interdisciplinary perspective and apply this to a strategically chosen theme. As the master's programme in Middle Eastern Studies explicitly chose 'conflicts in the Middle East' as its theme, the master's programme North American Studies could choose 'politics and media in the US' or 'transformation of democratic cultures' as its theme, to name just a couple of examples. This kind of focus will make it easier to communicate to potential students (including graduates from the bachelor's programme American Studies) what the programme is about, to differentiate it from other programmes, and to link it to certain professional fields. The current enumeration of professional careers that the programme prepares for (researcher, public and corporate leadership, the media industry, policy making, business, international relations) is very broad. It is so all-encompassing, in fact, that it does not help students to get a clear sense of where they are heading on the labour market, as they stated in the student chapter of the self-evaluation report.

The panel understands that the programme seeks to broaden its scope because of the widespread 'international turn' in American Studies. But in its view, this could and should be limited by studying hemispheric or even worldwide phenomena only in so far as these developments are relevant to understanding North America. It recommends this in an effort to prevent a watering down of the programme and expertise of staff.



### *Intended learning outcomes*

The panel studied the intended learning outcomes to determine the level, orientation, and relation to the expectations of the field. It was shown an overview in which the learning outcomes are linked to the Dublin descriptors for academic master's programmes (see Appendix 1). It recognised a clear academic orientation and is convinced of the programme's societal relevance, now that the ability to function in a globalised world and manage diversity is doubtless of growing importance.

The panel admires the ambition that is inherently reflected in the intended learning outcomes of the master's programme North American Studies. It finds them to be above the academic level required for a master's programme. It agrees with the intention expressed by the programme management to further revise them. It recommends that the following points be taken into consideration. In the first place – since it recommends bringing more focus to the profile – the intended learning outcomes will have to match this revised/updated profile. Secondly, while it appreciates the clear indication of a level for the intended learning outcomes, it finds too much detail is being added to many of them. This tends to obfuscate more than it clarifies. It suggests formulating the intended learning outcomes on a more general level. For instance: 'to apply highly complex and abstract theoretical and methodological tools to new, unfamiliar contexts' could simply be replaced in its view by 'to apply theories and methods to new contexts in a suitable way'. Thirdly, the intended learning outcomes constitute a highly idealistic and ambitious set of objectives. This makes them landmarks rather than conditions that *all* students need to meet in order to graduate. For example: 'graduates have an advanced-level ability to independently and creatively use and integrate relevant theories and methodologies of the core disciplines of American Studies (including cultural studies and cultural theory, political science, media studies and film theory, history, literature and/or sociology)'. According to the panel, the intended learning outcomes would be more realistic and achievable by adding the nuance that students should study a selection of relevant perspectives and/or disciplines (for example, at least two or three) at a more advanced level.

The panel appreciates that an Advisory Board on Employability was established in an early phase (2012). The Advisory Board meets once a year to discuss the overall content of the programme's courses and their relevance for the job market. The panel believes the Advisory Board on Employability may play a crucial role in refining the profile and intended learning outcomes.

### **Considerations**

The panel fully acknowledges and endorses the uniqueness, ambition, topicality, and societal relevance of the programme's profile. However, it finds the current profile too broad and advises the programme to make it more specific. Added focus will make it easier to communicate to future students what the programme is about, to differentiate it from other programmes, and to link it to certain professions. The programme can draw on an Advisory Board on Employability to provide advice to keep it aligned with the expectations of the professional field.

The panel concludes that the intended learning outcomes are of the appropriate orientation and surpass what may be required at a master's level. They are also societally relevant, given the growing importance of functioning in a globalised world and managing diversity. However, the panel agrees with the programme staff that the intended learning outcomes need to be revised. Firstly, they should be adapted to the more focussed profile it recommends. Secondly, they will become clearer if formulated on a more general level. Thirdly, their ambition should be toned down so that it becomes more clear that all students achieve the intended learning outcomes upon graduation. The panel is convinced that a sharper focus will help the programme to strengthen its connection to the labour market, to convey a clear and appealing message to prospective students, and to establish a firm basis on which to shape the curriculum.

### **Conclusion**

*Master's programme North American Studies:* the panel assesses Standard 1 as 'meets the standard'.



**Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment**

The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

**Findings***Programme language and name*

The ability to communicate effectively in English is a key aspect of what the programme wants to teach its students. All of the study material is in English, and teaching in English fosters an international classroom, prepares students for an international career, and enables the programme to attract international staff. Therefore, the programme is fully English-taught. The panel endorses the clear choice for English wholeheartedly.

*Curriculum content and structure*

The curriculum is structured around four compulsory research seminars (10 EC each) and a 20 EC master's thesis. For a full overview, see Appendix 2. In the first semester, the students take three seminars. The exact subjects of the seminars may vary from year to year, depending on which staff members are involved. The seminars are intended to reflect the programme's profile and the ongoing research of staff members. They also serve certain learning outcomes, which are specified in an assessment matrix. In the academic year 2018-2019, for instance, the seminars addressed theories of democracy and the public sphere in relation to reading practices in the US ('Reading/public/protest'); the role of borders and boundaries in shaping American physical and cultural landscapes and the field of American Studies ('Borders and boundaries in American studies'); and the rhetorical nature of US culture ('A community built on words'). In the second semester, the students may take a fourth seminar. In 2018-2019, this engaged with the political, literary and cultural narration of the concept of crisis in the 21st century US ('Crises of the republic').

The students may replace the fourth seminar with a semester of studying in the US or elsewhere in the Americas, or an internship. If they choose to study abroad, they enrol in a programme at one of the partner universities of the University of Groningen. This programme must be approved by the Board of Examiners. If they choose to do an internship, an internship proposal must be approved beforehand. Students have done internships at, for instance, the National Endowment for Democracy in Washington D.C., the Dutch embassy in Washington D.C., the Dutch embassy in Ottawa and the Dutch consulate in New York.

The panel finds the master's programme to be well structured: in the first semester, all of the students share the same study material and classes, so that a shared solid foundation is laid. In the second semester, they make their own choices. The panel is satisfied to see that the previous panel's recommendation to abolish the subdivision of the programme into two tracks has been taken to heart. Offering one programme provides a good balance between a shared base of expertise on the one hand and room to follow personal interests and preferences on the other. The panel liked the fact that the lecturers meet regularly to review courses and ensure that they fit together.

The programme's content is broad and ambitious, the panel found, which fits its profile. It studied a sample of the course literature and judged that the level was excellent. It fully agrees with the practice to let the exact content of the seminars be partly determined by the staff's ongoing research. This is suitable for a master's programme, and gives leverage to the expertise of the teaching staff. It is a great compliment that the students rate their courses very highly in evaluations: with an average mark of 4.04 on a five-point scale in 2018-2019. They also told the panel that the courses are of excellent quality and truly interdisciplinary. In the self-evaluation report, they expressed a wish for more contemporary (instead of historical) discussions in the seminars. They also stated that the reading load for the seminars is so high that it leaves them little time to pursue their own research interests. According to the panel, these are some suggestions the staff may want to follow up.



### *Teaching methods*

The panel found that the students in the master's programme North American Studies have a lot of autonomy and responsibility. They combine self-study of the scholarly and critical literature with small-scale seminars. The staff hope to deepen and broaden the students' understanding of the material by some instruction and much group interaction, thus facilitating their autonomous analysis of certain issues. The students praised the in-class activities, but commented that they would like to practise some more professionally relevant skills, such as public speaking.

The panel approves of the teaching methods in the master's programme. It considers the small-scale teaching methods very suitable for the programme's aims. The bar is set high, and a lot of personal initiative and self-management are expected of the students. To a certain extent, this fits in with the programme's profile and with the master's level. Possibly, if the programme sharpens its focus and gets more closely connected to certain professions, then skills that are needed in those professions could be trained, thus responding to students' wishes.

### *Thesis trajectory*

The master's thesis in North American Studies is an extended scholarly essay of about 15,000 words, which demonstrates the student's capacity for independent research, thought, judgment and writing. Before 2019, the procedure was that the students drew up a complete thesis proposal by themselves and were assigned a supervisor on the basis of this proposal. The panel agrees with the programme staff that this was not the ideal procedure, since it left the students to struggle on their own for a longer period than necessary. This may explain the very low rate of students who complete their thesis within the nominal time. In the revised thesis procedure, which has been effective since September 2019, all lecturers discuss potential thesis topics, tentative proposals and research techniques in their seminars. Also, a thesis workshop is held at the start of the programme, at which all staff members offer to help the students with their proposal. Those students who did not follow the Groningen bachelor's programme in American Studies receive guidance in the writing requirements that are specific for this discipline. They are at present supported by the American Studies writing guide only. The panel fully endorses this new practice. It also recommends linking up students and supervisors earlier in the academic year, not after an independently drawn-up formal thesis proposal has been approved. In this way, the students can design the research proposal in consultation with their supervisor, which will probably expedite the thesis writing process.

### *Feasibility*

While the academic level of the programme is undoubtedly high, feasibility is an associated issue. This is also what the students told the panel, and it is confirmed by the completion rates: between 2015 and 2018 only 8 students out of a total enrolment of 47 finished the one-year master's programme within two years. Even though there may be mitigating circumstances – such as students pursuing two master's degrees or wishing to prolong their study for the sake of an internship or study abroad – the panel finds that feasibility should be addressed more prominently. That practically all students need longer than the nominal year to finish their studies is partly caused by the fact that the curriculum contains a 10 EC internship, the panel found, as in practice, such internships are hard to find. The students therefore often have to accept internships of much longer duration. The panel discussed this with the lecturers and got the impression that they have a growing awareness of the feasibility issues and are already contemplating several measures to increase feasibility, such as cutting up 10 EC courses into 5 EC ones. Some lecturers say that in their role as thesis supervisors, they do address the issue of delays, for instance by setting deadlines for chapters. This alone does not produce the desired result, however. The panel considers the following measures useful to increase the programme's feasibility and yearly success rate.

Firstly, providing more guidance in the thesis trajectory and at an earlier stage, as is already being done, is a good and necessary step, in the panel's view. Secondly, it recommends making a serious effort to help students find suitable internships that are in fact worth 10 EC. Thirdly, it warns against a culture where the norm is to take two or three years to finish the master's programme. An element of feasibility is that all students should not only be facilitated in finishing the programme as closely

as possible to the nominal time, but should be actively encouraged to do so. Although in the end the students are of course free to choose their own study pace, transgressing the normal duration should not be the norm, nor should it be encouraged by the staff. Lastly, it is the panel's conviction that an increased thematic focus can help the students to select the literature, so that the reading load can be reduced and the programme becomes more manageable.

The panel identified a separate feasibility concern regarding the study abroad option and was pleased that this could be resolved on short notice. The teaching and examination regulations ('OER') state that students who choose the 30 EC study abroad option in the second semester currently need to obtain 80 EC to finish the 60 EC programme. During the site visit, the panel questioned this arrangement. The programme management explained that attending a full semester is necessary to maintain full-time student status in the US and that the rest of the programme already consists of mandatory components (i.e. three research seminars of 10 EC each and a thesis trajectory of 20 EC). The panel asked the programme management to provide additional documentation outlining how the programme intends to remedy this feasibility problem. In a follow-up letter, the programme's chair proposed revising article 3.5 of the teaching and examination regulations. In the revised version, the students fulfil the programme requirements by acquiring a total of 10 EC in the US; the additional 20 EC accrued are 'extra' credits that will be listed in the diploma supplement. It is now made absolutely clear that these credits are optional and not required for graduating from the programme, and that they will cause a delay in graduating within one academic year. All oral and written communications about the study abroad option will also clearly state that this option will add an extra semester to the nominal duration of the programme. Provided that this solution is legally feasible, the panel endorses it. It is satisfied that the study abroad option is still on offer, while it is made transparent what it entails in terms of study duration and academic credits.

#### *Labour market orientation*

In response to student feedback that they experience little connection between the courses in the master's programme North American Studies and the labour market, the lecturers are considering a number of measures. Most prominent among them is a new course, 'Global engagement collaboratory', that is to replace one of the master's seminars. It aims at increasing contact between the students and professionals working in the intercultural domain with government institutions, media companies and NGOs. The lecturers are also considering changing the form of the academic master's thesis into an assessment mode more geared to preparing students for certain professions. A departmental alumni officer has recently been appointed, who is working on a social media platform for American Studies graduates. The students say that when asked directly, the staff is very willing to help with future employment opportunities. In addition, the Faculty of Arts organises an annual career event, with workshops, lectures, training sessions and an information market. However, the students indicated that there were few presentations by American Studies graduates. The study association organises an alumni event every year, specifically for American Studies students. The panel finds these arrangements sufficient preparation for the labour market. It supports the lecturers in their ambition to rethink the intended learning outcomes with an eye to connections to the labour market. It underscores the importance of further clarifying the intended professional field, so that students can get a clearer view of possible career choices and of professional skills valued by prospective employers.

#### *Student support and quality assurance*

In general, the panel appreciates that students are given a lot of autonomy and responsibility to arrange their own study progress, but warns the programme staff not to ask too much of them. Measures that have already been taken – such as the restructuring of the thesis trajectory – demonstrate that the staff is well aware of this risk. American Studies forms a relatively small community, and both the study advisor and the lecturers are very approachable for the students, the panel found.

Each course is digitally evaluated, and the Programme Committee (consisting of lecturers and students on a 50-50 basis) screens these course evaluations. This seems to work, since some courses



have been changed on the basis of comments by the Programme Committee, and the students told the panel they are happy with what is done with their feedback.

#### *Lecturers*

During the past couple of years, the North American Studies programme has seen turbulent times with a high staff turnover and four different programme chairs in three years. Since the arrival of the new chair in 2018, the situation seems to have stabilised. The core of the teaching staff consists of eight lecturers. Five of them hold a university teaching qualification, the remaining three are working towards one.

The panel compliments the programme on its staff, who are well-balanced in many respects: true to its spirit, it has a good variety in expertise, gender, age and cultural background. In one respect however, the panel noted an imbalance. At the time of its visit, the core staff counted only one full professor and seven assistant professors. Appointment of an associate professor – as planned at the time of its visit – would be a suitable first step towards a more gradual spread in academic positions.

The panel was impressed by the enthusiasm and fervour of the team. It is worth noting that – even though there is relatively limited staff time available per student – the students still unanimously praise their lecturers, assessing them with an average of 4.42 on a five-point scale in course evaluations. Master students in the North American Studies programme say their lecturers have a broad knowledge base, create an atmosphere of academic inspiration and are open-minded, flexible, and respectful, each with their own personal way of teaching.

#### *Programme-specific services*

American Studies in Groningen has its own study association, called E Pluribus Unum. It connects all of the students and offers them a space where they feel at home. The study association organises social events, study trips and a career day. The students call E Pluribus Unum the backbone of the programme.

#### **Considerations**

The panel finds the master's programme North American Studies well-structured and is satisfied to see that the previous panel's suggestion to abolish the subdivision of the programme into two tracks has been taken to heart. It finds the programme's content broad and ambitious, and the course materials of an excellent level. It fully agrees with the practice of letting the exact content of the seminars be determined in part by the staff's ongoing research. This is suitable for a master's programme, and gives leverage to the teaching staff's expertise. It is a great compliment that the students rate their courses very highly in evaluations: with an average mark of 4.04 on a five-point scale in 2018-2019. Around the time of the panel's visit, the thesis trajectory was restructured and is improved, in the panel's view. The new trajectory gives the students more guidance and support. In addition to the procedures already in place, the panel recommends linking up the students and thesis supervisors at an earlier stage, not after a formal thesis proposal is approved.

While the academic level of the programme is indisputably high, feasibility should be addressed more prominently. The panel is satisfied to perceive a growing awareness of this among the staff, and some actions are being taken to improve the feasibility. In addition to them, the panel recommends making a serious effort to help the students find suitable internships that are in fact worth 10 EC, instead of much longer internships, and create a culture in which the students feel facilitated and stimulated to finish their study projects within the nominal time. It seems inevitable that the students who choose to study in the US prolong their studies, accruing an additional 20 EC. In reaction to some questions about this by the panel, the programme management decided to adapt the teaching and examination regulations. It is now transparent what the consequences of the study abroad option are, and the panel is satisfied with the proposed remedy.

Students expressed the wish to see a stronger connection between the master's programme North American Studies and the labour market. The programme staff is responding to this wish with a

series of measures, such as a new, practice-oriented course, possibly a new form for the academic master's thesis and closer co-operation with alumni. The panel fully supports the programme staff in these endeavours. It suggests that they may be more successful if the programme sharpens its profile, as it recommends under Standard 1.

The team of lecturers is a strong asset of the programme, well-balanced in many respects and unanimously praised by students. They say their lecturers have a broad knowledge base, are open-minded, flexible, and respectful, each with their own personal way of teaching, and create an atmosphere of academic inspiration. The panel was appreciative of the team's enthusiasm and dedication. It finds the team is not well-balanced in academic ranking since at the time of its visit, there was only one full professor and seven assistant professors. Luckily, it was told that an associate professor will be appointed soon. This is a good first step towards a more even spread in academic positions and responsibilities.

The teaching methods, student support, quality assurance and services all meet the standard, in the panel's view. It endorses the programme's decision to use English as the language of tuition.

The panel concludes that in general the master's programme North American Studies offers its students a stimulating and supportive environment, in accordance with the ambitious intended learning outcomes. In its view, the learning environment sufficiently enables them to achieve an academically oriented master's degree.

## **Conclusion**

*Master's programme North American Studies: the panel assesses Standard 2 as 'meets the standard'.*

### **Standard 3: Student assessment**

The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.

## **Findings**

### *Assessment policy*

The master's programme North American Studies has an assessment plan that provides a detailed survey of the various modes and moments of assessment and their relative weight. An assessment matrix links the courses directly to the intended learning outcomes. Assessment takes a variety of forms across the different seminars, from research essays to in-class group discussions, presentations and class participations. The primary method of assessment for the courses is the argumentative essay. The students perceive this as a good way to demonstrate their critical thinking skills, academic writing, and research. Given that the acquisition of advanced-level English language skills is an important learning outcome of the programme, in-class participation is part of the assessment for many course modules, and the writing of research essays is important throughout the entire programme. All students receive individualised feedback, either in written form or orally, to facilitate their active learning process.

All course syllabi contain details about the modes of assessment, the criteria, the relative weight of the various components of the grade, and the date of the exam and the re-sit, or deadlines for written assignments. Students told the panel they are well-informed, and they stated that the assessment methods are effective and form a good fit for the programme's structure.

Internships are assessed on specific criteria outlined in the master's internship guidelines. Prior to embarking on an internship, the students define the specific and generic learning outcomes they are aiming at, together with their academic and workplace internship supervisors. At the end of their internship, they write a final report in which they describe their actual work experience. The report is assessed by their academic supervisor, in consultation with the workplace supervisor.



The Programme Committee checks whether the course modules contain a balanced mix of different modes of assessment, whether the grading percentages seem fair, and whether the course assessment matches the assessment in previous and subsequent courses. Grading guidelines clearly specify the criteria used to mark assignments such as presentations, essays or exams. These guarantee consistent and transparent assessment throughout the course units, in the panel's view. There is an active quality-control protocol in place to ensure the fairness and accountability of grading practices (double-grading, spot-checks, exam and essay script swaps). All examiners must ensure that a report is available after a course has been completed, which includes the course syllabus, the assignments plus instructions, the assessment criteria as well as an evaluation form, filled in by the examiner and a colleague who acts as the peer reviewer. On the basis of this report, the Board of Examiners regularly conducts a review in order to safeguard the quality of assessment *ex post*.

The panel found that the master's programme North American Studies has an adequate assessment system and a carefully designed assessment plan and assessment matrix. It particularly appreciates the appropriate and varied assessment modes, clear grading guidelines and excellent quality control.

#### *Thesis assessment*

On the recommendation of the previous assessment panel, all theses are assessed independently by two examiners. They agree on the final grade, and both substantiate their opinion in general comments on the thesis assessment forms.

The panel studied a sample of the master's theses and their assessment forms. In general terms, it agreed with the examiners. Although it found the examiners' comments mostly insightful and convincing, the panel questions the unspecified 'Comments' section on the thesis assessment form. It believes a more structured set-up would benefit assessors and students alike. The lack of sub-criteria on the thesis assessment form does not encourage assessors to assess all criteria or to do so equally. The panel therefore advises the programme to add different categories to its thesis assessment form. Particularly with negative feedback, the supervisor and second reader should make sure that the comments are detailed enough to help the student in his or her development. The panel is satisfied to see that the previous panel's advice was taken to heart, so that there are now two examiners for each thesis. However, the independent assessment by both examiners should be made more explicit, in its view. As it is, both examiners offer their comments on one form, and in some cases the second examiner simply professes to agree with the first. In these cases it is not evident that an independent assessment by the second examiner has taken place, and if so what his or her individual comments were. The panel therefore recommends that both examiners use separate forms first, then discuss their findings and grading, and finally fill out a third, collective form. In this way, it becomes more transparent what each examiner's view on the thesis was. If their grading differs by more than one point, a third examiner should be called in. Finally, the panel suggests sending all assessment forms automatically to the students, to guarantee that they can take advantage of the feedback given.

#### *Board of Examiners*

The assurance of assessment quality within the master's programme North American Studies rests with the Board of Examiners. Until January 1, 2019, this was the Board of Examiners History, Media Studies and Greek and Latin Language and Culture. From that date, this group continued as an expertise team within a new central Arts Board of Examiners. The chairs of the constituent expertise teams sit on this new board, along with a professional assessment expert. The Board evaluates the assessment of individual courses and the theses on a random basis, trying to give as many courses as possible an evaluation once every three years. It has drawn up a protocol for these evaluations: ensuring that the assessment proceeds in accordance with its own rules and guidelines, that the learning objectives stated in the assessment plan are assessed for each course, and that the assessment is valid, reliable and transparent. The evaluations by the Board of Examiners take place on the basis of the assessment portfolios supplied by the course co-ordinators and lecturers. These contain course syllabi, papers/exams and assessment forms, possible resits, answer models and



result lists with partial and final grades. In addition to evaluating the assessment quality, the Board of Examiners also has an advisory function with regard to regulations, assessment forms, etc.

The panel was informed during the site visit that the recent transition to one central board of examiners has been received very positively all around. An important advantage is that procedures throughout the entire Faculty of Arts have become standardised; also, one central board of examiners can work more efficiently than several decentralised ones. Expertise teams are available within the Board of Examiners for programme-specific matters. The panel endorses the benefits of the new central Board of Examiners and compliments its members on the energetic way in which they have expeditiously put the new working method on track. They did this, for example, by facilitating the assurance process, and drawing up rules and guidelines and an evaluation protocol. Providing a single 'counter' for the faculty where everyone can go with questions or complaints about assessment is another goal. The panel encourages the Board of Examiners to keep up the good work and is confident that the assessment quality of the master's programme North American Studies can be safely entrusted to it for the future.

### **Considerations**

The panel found that the master's programme North American Studies has its assessment system under control, with varied assessment methods that fit the programme's goals, a good assessment plan and assessment matrix, well-informed students, good quality assurance, and a sufficient system of thesis assessment. It identified two points for improvement regarding the thesis assessment: adding structure to the thesis form with different categories according to which students' theses are being assessed, and making the independent assessments of the first and second examiners more explicit. This can be done by having them fill out separate assessment forms.

The panel was informed during the site visit that the new central Board of Examiners for Arts was positively received. It endorses the benefits of harmonised procedures and efficiency gains. It congratulates the members of the new Board of Examiners on the energetic way in which they have shaped its duties and the associated procedures in a short period of time. It encourages the Board of Examiners to continue along the path it has chosen and is fully confident that the quality assurance of the assessment within the master's programme North American Studies is in good hands.

All things considered, the panel judges that the master's programme North American Studies has an adequate assessment system in place that contributes significantly to the validity, reliability, and transparency of assessment.

### **Conclusion**

*Master's programme North American Studies: the panel assesses Standard 3 as 'meets the standard'.*

#### **Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes**

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

### **Findings**

#### *Theses*

The panel is impressed by the wide variety of thesis topics chosen, often quite original ones. For instance, recent thesis topics have included discussions of the modern cinematic zombie, the evolution of the Black Panther Party's framing, David Foster Wallace, as well as analyses of Trump's use of executive orders. In the sample studied by the panel, there was one thesis not related to the Americas at all. That connection should be an anchor point, in its view, so that theses reflect the programme's profile, staff expertise and course content.

In the sample studied by the panel, there was a broad range in the quality of theses: from fairly weak to excellent. One thesis it considered a bare pass: it was written so essay-like that it



significantly differed from the usual form of an MA thesis, yet it displayed sufficient knowledge and skills in the field of American studies. Some theses were truly impressive, with a good mix of personal observations and theoretical substantiation. The degree to which the theses corresponded to the ambitious intended learning outcomes – such as ‘applying highly complex and abstract theoretical and methodological tools to new, unfamiliar contexts, and [...] develop possible solutions [...] for specific cultural and socio-political problems’ – varied, in the panel’s view. But the panel unanimously agreed that even the weaker theses met the requirements for an academic master’s level. It appreciates that all theses are written in good English. In a few cases, it was struck by what is perceived as a possible ideological bias which got in the way of an objective academic analysis. When dealing with politicised topics – as the master’s programme North American Studies often does – such a *parti pris* is always on the lurk. The panel recommends that the programme staff remain vigilant against such bias as they guide their students in the supervision process.

Finally, the panel applauds the staff’s intention to experiment with different kinds of final projects other than the academic essay.

#### *Alumni success*

Based on informal contacts with alumni and feedback given during and after internships, the programme staff concluded that its students are being effectively prepared for career trajectories. The staff is proud that several alumni were accepted for competitive PhD programmes in the US and in the Netherlands. Other positions of recent alumni are in the fields of media and journalism (NOS; SBS; BNR Washington, D.C.; Washington, correspondent for Elsevier), film production (Global Nomad Media, New York), government and diplomacy (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dutch Embassy in London, U.S. Embassy in The Hague), business management and administration (Philips; Universal Pictures; Penda Photo Tours, Cape Town), as well as the educational sector (HR, marketing).

From the self-evaluation report, the sample of theses and its meeting with the students and alumni, the panel gained the impression that graduates of the master’s programme North American Studies have a broad intellectual scope and are flexible, critical thinkers with a global perspective. The fact that some successfully embark on academic careers is also an indication of the high academic level the programme manages to maintain. The panel is convinced that alumni of the master’s programme North American Studies are sufficiently equipped to find their way in society, as the variety of their professions indicates. If the programme were to adopt a sharper focus, as suggested under standard 1, this could, in its view, help the graduates profile themselves more sharply in the job market.

The programme plans to monitor the success of its graduates in a more structural and systematic way; to this end, an alumni officer has been appointed. The panel fully endorses these plans.

#### **Considerations**

The panel gathered from a sample of master’s theses written in North American Studies that they vary in quality, as does the extent to which they correspond to the programme’s ambitious intended learning outcomes. Nevertheless, it is unanimous in its conclusion that even the weaker theses are of an adequate academic level.

Although there are as yet no systematic data on alumni success in the job market, anecdotal evidence suggests that they find their way into a broad variety of jobs. The panel met with alumni during its site visit and gained the impression that they are intellectually sophisticated, flexible thinkers. It is confident that they will do well.

#### **Conclusion**

*Master’s programme North American Studies:* the panel assesses standard 4 as ‘meets the standard’.



## GENERAL CONCLUSION

The panel assessed standards 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the master's programme North American Studies as 'meets the standard'. Based on the NVAO decision rules regarding limited programme assessments, the panel therefore assesses the programme as 'positive'.

### **Conclusion**

The panel assesses the *master's programme North American Studies* as 'positive'.



## APPENDICES



## APPENDIX 1: INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

<i>Dublin Descriptors for MA Level</i>	<i>Learning Outcomes for the MA Degree Programme in North American Studies articulated in Key Competences</i>
<p><b>Acquiring Knowledge and Understanding</b></p> <p>1. Students have demonstrable knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study.</p>	<p>A Master's Degree Programme in North American Studies is awarded to students who:</p> <p>1 a. have demonstrated in-depth interdisciplinary knowledge and understanding of specific cultural, social, historical and political developments on the American continent, notably at the interstice between culture, politics and ethics.</p> <p>1 b. have demonstrated in-depth knowledge and understanding of the U.S.'s hemispheric and international relations, with particular emphasis on the role of the media in the production of cultural memories, historical truths, beliefs, and ideologies as well as national and individual identities; cultural and political identity formations of ethnic minorities in the Americas; formative dynamics of print culture and digital media in the formation of American history, culture and national identity; the impact of individual U.S. regions on the formation of national identities</p> <p>1 c. have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the socio-political dimensions of American society, in terms of how it makes fundamental choices about its future in the face of a unique and overwhelming diversity of attitudes, behaviors and perspectives</p>
<p><b>Applying Knowledge and Understanding</b></p> <p>2. Students can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study.</p>	<p>2 a. have the ability to formulate and refine a significant research problem, as well as to gather, select, and critically evaluate all relevant information from a wide variety of print, archival, and electronic resources, whilst demonstrating high standards of textual analysis and conceptual thought</p> <p>2 b. have an advanced-level ability to independently and creatively use and integrate relevant theories and methodologies of the core disciplines of American Studies (including cultural studies and cultural theory, political science, media studies and film theory, history, literature, and/or sociology)</p> <p>2 c. are able to apply highly complex and abstract theoretical and methodological tools to new, unfamiliar contexts, and in particular to develop possible solutions – on the basis of theoretical, ethical, and practical reasoning – for specific cultural and socio-political problems in past and/or contemporary multicultural societies, notably those in the United States and the Americas</p> <p>2 d. have the ability to formulate logical, critical, conceptually and theoretically sophisticated and original argumentative essays of different length and complexity, whilst demonstrating a significant degree of creativity and flexibility in adopting multiple perspectives and in approaching problems with the theoretical and methodological tools offered by several different disciplines</p> <p>2 e. can make constructive contributions to group projects, deal with criticism, respect divergent opinions, give constructive feedback, assume responsibility for certain tasks, and (in higher-level courses) assume a leadership</p>



	<p>role in coordinating and integrating contributions by various group members</p> <p>2 f. have the ability to plan and complete appropriate coursework, and organize and carry out a substantial research project within an established time frame</p> <p>2 g. have shown an advanced awareness of and commitment to scholarly standards in terms of accuracy, ethical behavior, and the breadth of the sources used and cited in assignments and in the final dissertation</p>
<p><b>Making Informed Judgments and Choices</b></p> <p>3. Students have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues.</p>	<p>3 a. ability to conduct a medium-length research project, develop a significant and at least partly original research problem, integrate complex theories and methodologies of relevant core disciplines of American Studies (including cultural studies and cultural theory, political science, media studies and film theory, history, literature, and/or sociology, as appropriate), formulate responsible and ethical judgments, and present the results in the form of an MA thesis (including critical apparatus) of about 15,000 words that fully conforms to academic standards</p> <p>3 b. have displayed originality and independent thought in formulating and refining a significant research problem and in providing abstract, theoretically-founded critical analyses of complex social, cultural, historical, ethical and political issues related to the chosen research topic(s)</p> <p>3 c. are able to select and integrate relevant theories and insights offered by a range of disciplinary domains to critically examine cultural and socio-political challenges stemming from different forms of injustice and inequality in contemporary multidisciplinary societies (particularly in the United States and the Americas), and to articulate possible solutions on the basis of theoretical, ethical, and practical reasoning</p> <p>3 d. have the ability to form well-grounded opinions about complex social, political, and economical issues in contemporary U.S. society, as well as the role that ideology and media play in those issues, and are able to engage with others in informed debate over those opinions</p> <p>3 e. are able to continuously re-examine their views of the United States and contrasting cultures (notably in the Americas) in the light of their own lives and employment experiences</p>
<p><b>Communicating Knowledge and Understanding</b></p> <p>4. Students can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences.</p>	<p>4 a. ability to communicate effectively and convincingly the results of one's research and to present complex and highly abstract information to both academic and non-specialist audiences in English by making effective use of appropriate communication registers</p> <p>4 b. have the ability to work and communicate effectively in an international and intercultural context.</p> <p>4 c. have the ability to communicate effectively and to present complex scholarly information at an advanced level of English language competence to both academic and non-academic audiences by making informed use of digital technologies, including online learning environments, digital databases and communication systems</p> <p>4 d. have demonstrated proficiency in the target language of English at C2 level (near native) in the areas of listening and reading, in written and spoken production (based on the CEFR)</p>

<p><b>Capacities to Continue Learning:</b></p> <p>5. Students have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.</p>	<p>5 a. have the requisite domain-specific and general knowledge, understanding and skills to study autonomously and to formulate and refine an original research problem</p> <p>5 b. possess the appropriate learning skills and strategies to independently identify and fill specific knowledge gaps and stay up-to-date at an advanced level with current developments in the domain of American Studies and related fields</p> <p>5 c. have acquired the requisite intercultural awareness and respect to successfully undertake advanced academic course work and experiential learning at a partner institution in the United States, as well as in future international employment contexts</p> <p>5 d. have the ability to successfully undertake specialized third cycle degree programmes requiring MA-level domain-specific knowledge and understanding as well as independent research skills, in particular in American Studies and related fields, as well as Research Master programmes, both in Europe and North America</p>
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## APPENDIX 2: OVERVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM

<b>Semester 1</b>	<b>Semester 2</b>
<p>Seminar 1: Reading / Public / Protest (10 EC)</p> <p>Seminar 2: Borders and Boundaries in American Studies (10 EC)</p> <p>Seminar 3: Rhetoric and Identity in America (10 EC)</p>	<p><b><u>Either:</u></b> Seminar 4: Politics and Culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century U.S. (10 EC)</p> <p><b><u>Or:</u></b> Study Abroad programme (30 EC)</p> <p><b><u>Or:</u></b> Internship (10 EC)</p> <p>Dissertation (20 EC)</p>



## APPENDIX 3: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

<b>Day 1 (Wednesday 30 October)</b>	
09.00 - 09.15	Arrival of the panel / Welcome from the Vice-Dean
09.15 - 12.30	Preparation, private panel meeting and documentation review
12.30 - 13.00	Lunch break
13.00 - 13.45	Meeting with faculty senior management
13.45 - 14.15	Private panel meeting
14.15 - 15.00	Meeting with programme management - BA en MA (North) American Studies
15.00 - 15.45	Meeting with students - BA en MA (North) American Studies
15.45 - 16.30	Meeting with staff - BA en MA (North) American Studies
16.30 - 17.30	Private panel meeting and documentation review
17.30 - 18.00	Open consultation hour

<b>Day 2 (Thursday 31 October)</b>	
09.00 - 10.00	Private panel meeting
10.00 - 10.45	Meeting with programme management - B Griekse en Latijnse Taal en Cultuur and M Classics
10.45 - 11.30	Meeting with students - B Griekse en Latijnse Taal en Cultuur en M Classics
11.30 - 12.15	Meeting with staff - B Griekse en Latijnse Taal en Cultuur en M Classics
12.15 - 12.45	Lunch break
12.45 - 13.15	Private panel meeting
13.15 - 14.00	Meeting with programme management - B Midden-Oosten Studies en M Middle Eastern Studies
14.00 - 14.45	Meeting with students - B Midden-Oosten Studies en M Middle Eastern Studies
14.45 - 15.30	Meeting with staff - B Midden-Oosten Studies en M Middle Eastern Studies
15.30 - 16.30	Private panel meeting
16.30 - 17.15	Meeting with Examination Board
17.15 - 17.45	Private panel meeting

<b>Day 3 (Friday 1 November)</b>	
09.00 - 10.00	Private panel meeting and documentation review
10.00 - 11.00	Final interview with management
11.00 - 11.30	Break
11.30 - 12.30	Private panel meeting to formulate conclusions of the visit
12.30 - 13.00	Lunch break
13.00 - 15.30	Private panel meeting to formulate conclusions of the visit
15.30 - 16.30	Development dialogue(s) in three parallel sessions: Middle Eastern; (North) American Studies; Classics
16.30 - 17.00	Informal feedback on the panel's findings and recommendations
17.00 - 18.00	End of the site visit / Drinks



## APPENDIX 4: THESES AND DOCUMENTS STUDIED BY THE PANEL

### *Thesis selection*

The panel studied 15 theses of the master's programme North American Studies; 12 prior to the site visit and 3 afterwards. This was done to complete the panel's picture of the achieved learning outcomes. The selection was based on a provided list of 34 graduates between mid-2015 and mid-2019. There are no specialisations to take into account. A variety of topics and a diversity of examiners were included in the selection. The project manager and panel chair assured that the distribution of grades in the selection matched the distribution of grades of all available theses. Further information on the selected theses is available from QANU upon request.

### *Documents studied*

During the site visit, the panel studied, among other things, the following documents (partly as hard copies, partly via the institute's electronic learning environment):

#### Faculty-wide documents:

- Arts Board of Examiners annual report 2017-2018;
- Arts Board of Examiners minutes 2018-2019;
- BoE Expert team History, Media Studies and Greek and Latin Language and Culture annual report 2017-2018;
- BoE Expert team History, Media Studies and Greek and Latin Language and Culture minutes 2018-2019;
- Big7 Arts Board of Examiners.

#### Specific reading material master's programme North American Studies:

- Self-evaluation report including appendices;
- Programme Committee American Studies annual report 2017-2018;
- Programme Committee American Studies minutes 2018-2019.

Of the following courses, the panel studied complete portfolios (course guide and literature, relevant course documents, assignments, tests and answer keys, a selection of assessed student work and, if available, course evaluations):

- Reading/Public/Protest (LAX043M10);
- Politics and Culture in the 21st Century United States (LAX041M10).