

MASTER'S PROGRAMME
NORTH AMERICAN STUDIES
FACULTY OF ARTS
RADBOUD UNIVERSITY

QANU
Catharijnesingel 56
PO Box 8035
3503 RA Utrecht
The Netherlands

Phone: +31 (0) 30 230 3100
E-mail: support@qanu.nl
Internet: www.qanu.nl

Project number: Q0725
© 2019 QANU

Text and numerical material from this publication may be reproduced in print, by photocopying or by any other means with the permission of QANU if the source is mentioned.



CONTENTS

REPORT ON THE MASTER’S PROGRAMME NORTH AMERICAN STUDIES OF RADBOUD UNIVERSITY	5
ADMINISTRATIVE DATA REGARDING THE PROGRAMME.....	5
ADMINISTRATIVE DATA REGARDING THE INSTITUTION.....	5
COMPOSITION OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL	5
WORKING METHOD OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL	6
SUMMARY JUDGEMENT.....	9
DESCRIPTION OF THE STANDARDS FROM THE ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK FOR LIMITED FRAMEWORK ASSESSMENTS.....	13
APPENDICES	25
APPENDIX 1: INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES	27
APPENDIX 2: OVERVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM	29
APPENDIX 3: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT	31
APPENDIX 4: THESES AND DOCUMENTS STUDIED BY THE PANEL	33

This report was finalised on 12 September 2019



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

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:	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:	- Literatures and Cultures of North America in International Perspective - Transnational America: Politics, Culture and Society
Location(s):	Nijmegen
Mode(s) 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 Radboud University took place on 18 and 19 March 2019.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA REGARDING THE INSTITUTION

Name of the institution:	Radboud University
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;
- Dr. D. (Dario) Fazzi, lecturer in North American Studies and International Studies at Leiden University and researcher for the Roosevelt Institute for American Studies;
- Prof. dr. J.L.M. (Jan) Papy, professor in Latin Literature at KU Leuven (Belgium);
- L. (Lotte) Metz MA, teacher of Greek and Latin at Stedelijk Gymnasium Nijmegen;
- C. (Charlotte) van der Voort, bachelor's student in Greek and Latin Language and Culture, and pre-master student Dutch Language and Culture, at Leiden University [student member].

The panel was supported by Dr. E. (Els) Schröder, who acted as secretary.



WORKING METHOD OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

The master's programme North American Studies at the Faculty of Arts of Radboud University 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.

Leiden University has 19 programmes in the cluster Region Studies. To ensure that the workload for panel members was evenly distributed and all programmes were properly assessed, two site visits were planned (in June and November 2019). Because the University of Amsterdam and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam collaborate in some programmes, the site visits were combined.

Panel members

The panel consisted of the following members:

- 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. A. (Umar) Ryad, professor in Arabic and Islamic Studies at KU Leuven (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. E.J.C. (Eibert) Tigchelaar, research professor in Biblical Studies at KU Leuven (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. G. (Gunnar) de Boel, professor in (Greek) Linguistics and Modern Greek and Byzantine Literature 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. (Rianne) Clerq-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. 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, head of the International Office of the Faculty of the Arts and Philosophy and professor in the Department Languages and Cultures, specialising in South and East Asia, at Ghent University (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. J.L.M. (Jan) Papy, professor in Latin Literature at KU Leuven (Belgium);
- 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, and 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];

- Dr. H. (Helma) Dik, associate professor in Classics at University of Chicago (United States) [referee Greek, Latin and Classics at the University of Amsterdam and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam];
- Prof. dr. L.P. (Lars) Rensmann, professor in European Politics and Society at University of Groningen [referee International Studies 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 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 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 during the site visit to the Radboud University and for the first site visit of Leiden University (June 2019). 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 maternity leave, she was replaced by her colleagues at QANU.

Drs. Trees Graas, employee of QANU also acted as secretary in the site visit of Radboud University. Drs. Mariette Huisjes, freelance secretary for QANU, acted as secretary in the first site visit of Leiden University and the site visit of the University of Groningen. Drs. Erik van der Spek, freelance secretary for QANU, acted as secretary in the second site visit to Leiden University (November 2019). Dr. Mariëlle 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. The selection consisted of fifteen theses and their assessment forms for the programmes, based on a provided list of graduates between the cohorts 2016-2018. A variety of topics and tracks 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.

Site visit

The site visit to Radboud University took place on 18 and 19 March 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. 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.

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 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:

The panel concluded that the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) of the programme North American Studies meet the requirements of the discipline and correspond with the Dublin Descriptors at master's level. It appreciates the attention for interdisciplinary approaches in the programme's aims. Inclusion of oral proficiency in English, a distinct set of achieved transferable professional skills that could be applied and used during a graduate's career and a clarification of what is meant by 'the practices of North American Studies' would further fine-tune and clarify the existing ILOs. The breadth of the programme's profile is a strong point, but it may also be a potential limitation. To future-proof the programme and to continue to be attractive for prospective students, the panel recommends to reconsider the current profile in the coming years, taking the programme's interdisciplinary aspect and its positioning within the Dutch-German border as unique assets that could inspire such a reorientation, just as a truly interdisciplinary methodology would. Potentially, it might be helpful to consider reorganising the programme's current two tracks into one single specialisation with a clear interdisciplinary focus.

Standard 2:

The programme North American Studies is offered in English, as also reflected in the programme's name. This is, considering the nature of the programme, its international outlook and work field, in line with the panel's expectations and rendered in the programme's ILOs. The panel verified that both the teaching and the staff qualifications regarding English proficiency are at an adequate level to tailor towards an English student-learning environment of good quality.

The curriculum of North American Studies comprises a total course load of 60 EC. The programme offers two specialisations: 'Literature and Cultures of North America in International Perspective' (L&C) and 'Transnational America: Politics, Culture and Society' (TA). Both specialisations include a thesis and compulsory thesis workshop and two compulsory seminars related to the theories and grounding of American Studies as an academic field. In addition, both student groups take at least one specialisation-specific course: students enrolled in L&C follow a mandatory seminar on 'Contemporary North American Fiction' and students of TA take the compulsory courses 'The Future of American Power' and 'Religion and American Global Politics'. The panel concluded that this setup results in a coherent structure of the curriculum.

The panel verified that the curriculum and the teaching-learning environment of the master's programme in North American Studies is conducive to achieving the intended learning outcomes. The design of the programme is coherent. Students demonstratively receive sufficient support and guidance and also have ample opportunity to shape their own learning trajectories through electives and free topic choice for their theses. Teaching methods are activating, varied, and student-centred. The teaching quality is considered of a high level. The panel also wants to explicitly praise the staff members' commitment to the students and to the development of the programme. Stress levels are very high and options should be sought to reduce the current work load. The panel advised, amongst other options, to explore whether a solution may be found in a more directive focus of the programme that takes into account the connection between staff research and students' topic choice for theses.

The panel also offered some suggestions towards the development of the current curriculum to connect some courses more comfortably to the programme's rationale, to further strengthen the attention paid to a variety of North American viewpoints next to a strong US orientation and anchor the programme's interdisciplinary approach solidly as methodological choice to the programme's profile. Additionally, teaching towards the achievement of English proficiency at the intended level should explicitly be part of the assessment and outcomes of one of the mandatory courses to make the achievement of this intended learning outcome more transparent. The panel advised to raise students' self-awareness of their unique skills and perspective based on their interdisciplinary programme through teaching methods by highlighting these skills and the attitude achieved more explicitly. Furthermore, the panel supports any programme management initiative, including



strategic partnerships with research centres and other non-academic institutions, directed towards a better scheduling of internships within the programme to reduce the risk of study extensions. Also, the scheduling of period 3 with its challenging combination of electives, mandatory course work and the start of the thesis – and potentially an internship – needs the programme’s continuous attention to further support student learning.

Standard 3

The panel concluded that the assessment system functions at an adequate level. The Faculty has a clear assessment policy and the programme-specific assessment plan is also well-formulated. A Faculty-wide Examination Board (FEX) guarantees the quality of assessment, monitors course assessment, appoints assessors, detects fraud and fulfils all other legal duties in a satisfactory manner. The panel is pleased with the proactive role of the FEX in monitoring and promoting the quality of assessment. Exams and tests are well-designed and of master’s level, continuous feedback next to formative and summative assignments drive student learning and a variety of assessment methods and types assure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The development-oriented attitude of the programme is also clear from this variety of assessment types just as the inclusion of new media as part of the programme’s assessment methods. Criteria and modes of assessment are clearly communicated to students, and communication between the various committees involved in the assurance of the quality of assessment functions well.

Recommendations to further improve the current assessment system include: the need for digital access to course files for those invested in the assurance and monitoring of assessment, the creation of a good follow-up system for courses that received recommendations for improvement in either the annual random selection check or the full programme review, the further diversification of assessor pairs in the future and for close monitoring of the substantiation of final grade decisions to further enhance objectivity of grading and transparency of assessment. Additionally, the panel advised to include a criterion for English proficiency as part of the thesis assessment and a criterion for students’ ability to reflect on the connection between an internship and the North American Studies programme and vice versa for the internship assessment.

Standard 4

The panel considered the master’s theses of appropriate quality. They demonstrate that students achieve the intended learning outcomes, including the aims regarding the high level of English written command. Theses address a great variety of themes due to students’ free topic choice. Some are well-conceived and compelling, other theses would benefit from further historical contextualisation, a narrowing down of the research question and a clearer embedment to the field of North American Studies. Some further attention should be paid to the thesis abstracts. In spite of the difficult job market, graduates often manage to find a position in a relevant field and/or at an academic level. In order to improve the outlook of its students, the programme could draw on its graduates to show different perspectives and options through an alumni organisation. The panel is pleased that initiatives have been developed to facilitate further alumni engagement.

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, dr. Els Schröder, 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: 12 September 2019



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

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 (NAS) offers students the opportunity to acquire expertise on North America in a variety of fields: history, literature, (popular) culture, politics and law. Students follow one of two specialisations. The first specialisation 'Literatures and Cultures of North America in International Perspective' (L&C) focuses on the study of the production and reception of North American literature and culture from the 20th and 21st century, offering an analytical comparative perspective that takes into account perceptions from within the United States (US) and outside the transatlantic context. The second specialisation 'Transnational America: Politics, Culture and Society' (TA) focuses on the study of the changing role of the US in international politics, analysing the politics, military, diplomatic and cultural relations between the US and other nations. The panel considers the diversity and breadth a strong point of the programme. From discussions with the management, the panel learnt that the more literature-focused L&C specialisation is less popular with students than the TA track focusing on politics, culture and society. This means that all staff members need to show flexibility in the way in which they organise their classes and the programme. As a result, catering towards both specialisations is considered a true concerted effort of the NAS programme's relatively small staff – a commendable feat according to the panel. Notwithstanding this positive valuation, the panel is concerned that the staff is also overstretching itself – especially as student numbers within the programme remain limited.

To further develop the NAS programme and continue to be attractive for prospective students, the panel suggests to rethink the current profile in the coming years. It considers in particular the programme's interdisciplinary aspect and its positioning within the Dutch-German border region truly unique assets. It would therefore suggest to embrace these characteristics and translate them into one single track with attention for both literature and politics with a transnational (i.e. transatlantic) orientation in its contents as pinpoint. Also, the interdisciplinary aspect could be developed into a fully interdisciplinary methodology and approach, which would truly set the programme apart within the Dutch field. The panel suggests to also pay hereby close attention to the way in which digital tools are connected to the programme's focus, its willingness to internationalise, and its overarching profile. These ideas were enthusiastically received and responded to during the site visit by the programme management, establishing trust with the panel in the programme's development-oriented attitude and future.

Intended learning outcomes

Four general intended learning outcomes (ILOs) have been determined for all students of the programme. These ILOs pay attention to academic knowledge acquisition, to the concepts, theories, methodologies and practices underlying American Studies, to academic analytical skills and to the necessary skills to present research in good and correct written (American) English. For both specialisations, two further ILOs have been set. For the specialisation L&C, these comprise the understanding and knowledge of literary and cultural forms in context combined with analytical and interpretation skills regarding manifestations of contemporary (North) American literature and culture. For the specialisation TA, the programme aims that students achieve an understanding and knowledge of the changing position of the US at the world stage and the interpretation of repercussions due to these changes and that they will be able to analyse North American politics, culture, religion and society in their contexts and from a comparative and translational perspective. The panel concludes that the ILOs are in line with the Dublin Descriptors and with the expectations



of the academic field for a programme at master's level, as follows from the emphasis on independent research skills, analytical capability and the obtainment of an active critical and reflective attitude in the programme aims. It appreciates in particular the attention for interdisciplinarity.

The panel has some suggestions to further refine the current ILOs. First, they are now mainly focused on the academic discipline of North American Studies rather than targeted towards professional expectations and qualifications. This finding ties in with an observation by the programme's alumni, who stressed during the site visit that more could be done to raise awareness among students regarding the specific professional skills obtained. The panel therefore strongly recommends to explicitly include transferable and professional skills in the ILOs. Second, the panel noted during the site visit that many students felt that North American Studies suffered from an image problem: employers were often unaware of the specific nature of the programme and students found it hard to explain what North American Studies set apart from other degree programmes. This results in the panel recommendation to clarify what is meant by 'the practices of American Studies as an interdisciplinary field' (ILO3). A more precise description of these practices may prepare students to articulate their knowledge base in a more concise manner and raise their self-awareness regarding their unique profile and skill set. Third, English proficiency is at the moment only defined as being obtained in written work (ILO4). The panel considers the excellent oral communication skills of both students and graduates, demonstrated and observed during the site visit, worthy of inclusion.

Considerations

The panel concludes that the intended learning outcomes of the programme North American Studies meet the requirements of the discipline and correspond with the Dublin Descriptors at master's level. It appreciates the attention for interdisciplinary approaches in the programme's aims. To further fine-tune the current ILOs, the panel has some suggestions. Inclusion of oral proficiency in English, a distinguished set of achieved transferable professional skills that could be applied and used during a graduate's career and a clarification of what is meant by 'the practices of North American Studies' would support students to accurately communicate their achieved skills and profile when entering the labour market.

The panel considers the breadth of the programme a strong point, but it sees it simultaneously as a potential limitation. The expertise needed to live up to the raised expectations demands maximum flexibility from the programme's small staff, which makes the programme vulnerable in the panel's view. To future-proof the programme, the panel recommends to reconsider the current profile in the coming years and to focus the programme's profile more concisely. The panel considers the programme's interdisciplinary aspect and its positioning within the Dutch-German border region truly unique assets, and suggests that any reorientation takes these characteristics as leading principles. The (further) use of digital tools could potentially also be part of such a reorientation, embedded as part of a truly interdisciplinary methodology. Scaling down to one specialisation that combines the strengths of the current tracks is hereby worth exploring.

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

Curriculum

The curriculum of North American Studies comprises a total course load of 60 EC. The programme offers two specialisations: 'Literature and Cultures of North America in International Perspective' (L&C) and 'Transnational America: Politics, Culture and Society' (TA). Both specialisations include a thesis and compulsory thesis workshop (20 EC) and two compulsory seminars related to the theories

and grounding of American Studies as an academic field (15 EC). In addition, both student groups take at least one specialisation-specific course: students enrolled in L&C follow a mandatory seminar on 'Contemporary North American Fiction' (10 EC) and students of TA take the compulsory courses 'The Future of American Power' (10 EC) and 'Religion and American Global Politics' (5 EC). The panel finds that this setup offers the curriculum a coherent structure.

According to the panel, students have ample opportunity to shape their own educational experience within the programme. Electives complete both specialisations; students may choose from a list of courses, including any of the compulsory courses of the other specialisation variant. They also have the option for completing an internship (5 or 10 EC). In addition, students are free to choose their own thesis topics. The panel was informed by the students that the freedom of choice propagated for the electives to cross over to the other specialisation variant is optional rather than current practice. Most students were very satisfied with the available options oriented towards their specific specialisation, although the allowance to freely choose was strongly appreciated as it creates optimal flexibility to tailor towards one's individual wishes.

The panel studied several courses during the site visit. As suggested above under standard 1, the panel recommends the programme to explore the option of merging the two specialisations into one track that would focus on transnationality with an interdisciplinary method that takes into account both political and cultural approaches as a defining feature. This would also have certain advantages for the teaching of the curriculum, as it would clearly situate interactive, innovative and interdisciplinary teaching and research methods as leading principle for course design. It could provide a solid framework to reframe some of the current courses on offer (notably those on US Constitutional Law and on the Politics and Cultures of the Black Freedom Struggle) to more comfortably fit the general rationale and approach of the programme. Additionally, it would provide ample opportunity to further strengthen the connection between teaching and staff's research interests, enriching both students' and staff's perspectives.

This panel suggestion ties in with the panel's evaluation of the mandatory seminar on the theories and practices underlying American Studies. The panel considered this course to be very thorough, well-designed and instructive and offering a good transnational point of departure. In its view, this particular course presents an excellent reference point to narrow down the curriculum's focus. At the same time, this seminar is a good example of the ways in which interdisciplinary approaches enrich the field and methodology of North American Studies.

During the site visit, the panel also discussed the attention paid to the various cultures within Northern America with staff members, students and management. It learnt from these discussions and its study of the curriculum that the Canadian perspective is solidly part of two seminars and that native American culture and African American culture is at the forefront at one seminar in the L&C track. In the TA specialisation, interaction between the US and its direct neighbours is addressed, but seems mostly approached from a US perspective. The panel would welcome a more explicit acknowledgment of a variety of North American viewpoints next to a strong US orientation including the interaction with Mexico in all seminars. The panel's observation regarding the suitability of transnationality as overarching theme may be a way to address the interplay between the various cultures of North America in a more consistent way, next to other potential avenues for redesign.

The programme North American Studies is offered in English, as also reflected in the programme's name. This is, considering the nature of the programme, its international outlook and work field, in line with the panel's expectations and rendered in the programme's ILOs. Although English proficiency to CEFR1 level is included as programme aim in the self-evaluation report, the panel noticed that no course or seminar explicitly pays attention to the achievement of this skill at the desired level. Staff members stressed that students were rigorously corrected and advised in all presentations, assignments and tests during the year. Students confirmed this practice and also pointed out that English proficiency is part of the admission criteria for the programme – prospective students need to demonstrate a sufficient level to be able to achieve the required level of proficiency



during their training in the master's programme. The panel had no reservations regarding the demonstrated level of English command in the students' theses. Also, the panel considered students' English communication skills of excellent level. It recommends, however, to make this programme goal an explicit learning outcome for one of the mandatory courses – e.g. the thesis – and to make its assessment more transparent.

The elective on US Constitutional Law (10 EC) is only offered in Dutch due to scheduling demands at the Law Faculty. This is not considered a limitation by the students and graduates with whom the panel met during the site visit. Based on a study of the curriculum, the panel acknowledges that non-Dutch speakers have sufficient choice within the programme and it also noticed that communication is transparent regarding the language requirements for this particular course. Students, however, mentioned the differences in study climate between this course and other electives – the law course is considered less engaging and less student-centred than many of the other elective options. This was acknowledged by staff members, who indicated to actively try to address this in the discussion groups pertaining to this course. Any reorientation of this elective might be wanting to consider both its student-engagement level and the language barrier for international students.

The panel also heard from students that they found the connection between theoretical frameworks and concepts hard to translate to their theses, an observation in line with the panel findings regarding the studied theses. Staff members emphasised that they always referred students back to the mandatory foundation course on Theories and Practices, when students had questions regarding theory and/or concepts during the thesis trajectory. This is considered sound practice by the panel. It would nonetheless like to suggest to also pay more explicit attention to the contents of this course in the Thesis Colloquium, which regularly brings together all students during the final two semesters. Exercises to implement the use of theory, frameworks and concepts may be a useful addition to the existing assignments of either or both Theories and Practices and the Thesis Colloquium.

Master students also have the chance to discuss the various approaches to North American Studies in interactive workshops at the RUDESA Spring Academy. At this annual event, scholars and students from the University of Wyoming, the University of Duisburg-Essen and Radboud University partake in discussions and exercises, creating a true international classroom setting. This is considered a true asset of the programme by the panel. Potentially, this could also provide another feedback moment to discuss the theoretical and methodological framework of research projects to further raise students' capacities to use and implement theories and concepts to underpin individual research projects. The panel also appreciates the good connections between the programme and several cultural institutions in the Arnhem-Nijmegen area and German border region. These ties provide ample opportunities for students to explore relations between the various North American and European perspectives involved, in particular through an angle of memorial culture through the former battle grounds of World War II.

Guidance, support and feasibility

The panel considers that the support structure and guidance for students is well established and implemented in the programmes. The student advisor is the students' first point of contact regarding choices about the curriculum, scheduling issues, study strategies and planning. Master students are also assigned a personal mentor with whom they meet at least twice during the year to discuss their achievement of their personal milestones. Mentors also provide student support regarding their choices regarding internships, thesis topics and their progress during the thesis trajectory and career advice. During the site visit, students and alumni indicated that they consider the organisational structure and information provided to students to be very accessible and of good quality. Additionally, the panel noted that feedback, both on structural matters and at course level, is adequately monitored, addressed and followed up.

The panel witnessed that the department's network is helpful in the search for high-quality and diverse internships through staff members personal contacts and networks. Nevertheless, students would like further support. The panel suggests looking for further alumni engagement to open up

further opportunities for students. It learnt that the faculty had recently appointed an alumni officer in order to search for further alumni engagement, which the panel approves. The programme also encourages students to engage in internships abroad with support of the Career Service Arts. Successful international internships include placements at the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy in Berlin or the Embassy of the Netherlands in Washington DC or Ottawa. The programme management and students acknowledge, however, that international internships are the exception rather than current practice and that students often have to commit themselves for a longer period than correspond to the study load assigned for the internship (5 or 10 EC) to be able to secure such a challenging opportunity. This results in study extensions. Students do not consider this problematic as they see an internship as an important addition to their experience that raises their employability.

Regarding scheduling, students indicated that it was hard to follow an internship at its dedicated moment in the programme, as the start of an internship now was scheduled for the same period as the kick-off of the thesis trajectory. Students also indicated that period 3 was rather intense with its combination of electives, mandatory courses, the RUDESA seminar, the start of the thesis trajectory and potentially the start of an internship. This feedback was recognised by the programme management and staff members, who indicated that they were exploring options to bring forward the Thesis Colloquium to facilitate students who opted to take up an internship. Also, a combined route of thesis and internship is currently considered with the aim to offer students a chance to embed their thesis research within a professional context. Based on a study of the schedule and curriculum, the panel considers the programme feasible in one year, although it recognises that in particular the scheduling of period 3 needs the programme's continuous attention to better facilitate students' learning experience. It acknowledges, however, that meaningful internships could easily result in study extensions, if not strictly capped by the programme – this last option seems not necessarily desirable as it hinders students in making their own choices, as also agreed to by the panel. The panel fully understands the challenges that the programme faces in this respect and trusts that the programme will continue to give its scheduling high priority in the coming years. With respect to a combined route for the thesis and internship, the panel stresses the need to closely guard the academic nature of the internship and to pay explicit attention to the interplay between the internship and the programme's profile in its assessment methods, as further elaborated upon under standard 3.

The preparation for the thesis in the master's programme is clearly structured. At the start of the year, students receive information about the different fields in which they can situate their research and about the different supervisors. At that moment, they make a preliminary choice for their thesis subject. Later in the year they can change or adapt the subject before they start researching and writing. All students partake in the Thesis Colloquium, which meets on a regular basis throughout the last two semester and offers practical support and an opportunity for feedback to all students. The amount of guidance students receive from their supervisors can vary between thesis projects. This offers room for different approaches between supervisors tailored to students' specific needs and wishes. The panel noticed that both the supervisors and the students seemed to be happy with this freedom, because it allows for a more individual approach. It considers this approach indeed a positive as long as care is taken that the individual trajectories do not diverge too much and as long as it is transparent how much support students received during the process.

Teaching methods

In line with the programmes' educational approach of creating an interactive and inter- and multidisciplinary learning environment, teaching is done in small-scale, interactive groups of at most 20 students in general using various approaches to the study of North American Studies from different disciplines. This small-scale setting allows for intensive contact among students and between students and lecturers. Teaching mainly takes the form of seminars, in which students actively participate. Students are challenged to reflect critically on the texts they read and to express their ideas to peers and professors, for example by writing Personal Response Papers in which students critically engage with the presented text(s). On a regular basis they also give presentations, moderate discussions and present topics on the spot in class. The panel also noticed a wide variety



of assignments and assessment methods, which should result in active student engagement. It also learnt that courses are rigorously evaluated, resulting in quick feedback rates and changes to the setup and design resulting in a good report between students' expectations and experiences.

The panel is positive about the fact that the department experiments with new ways of studying and that several courses combine in-class teaching with hands-on learning outside of the classroom: students engage in field trips to museums and sites of American memory, collaborate in fieldwork, participate in setting up exhibitions in collaboration with the nearby National Liberation Museum and engage in oral interviews for research projects. Small class sizes and the use of digital learning methods, such as pecha kucha presentations and blended learning, are motivating students to take an active role just as initiatives that aim to flip the classroom. The management aims to increase the use of innovative and digital teaching methods, which the panel appreciates and encourages as long as attention is paid to the methodological underpinning of the use of digital tools.

In line with the perceived image problem of North American Studies as discussed under Standard 1, the panel advises the programme to pay further attention throughout its courses to raise students' self-awareness of their unique skills and approach to the field of cultural and political studies as gained throughout the programme. This would help students to communicate their profile more articulately and reflect more carefully on their professional and academic skills when exploring internship and job opportunities during and after their studies.

Teaching staff

The panel concludes that the programmes are taught by a dedicated and well-qualified staff. The didactic quality of permanent staff members is safeguarded by the obligation to obtain a basic teaching qualification (UTQ). The programme also pays attention to English proficiency when hiring new staff members, if not native speakers of English. Students are pleased with their staff's command of English and the ways in which staff members help them to achieve the intended level of proficiency during their studies. All staff members are actively involved in research, engage in networking events, foster international collaborations and participate in the research of the Institute for Historical, Literary and Cultural Studies. The panel also found staff members very engaged during the site visit: all were very committed to teaching and expressed a strong interest in further innovation of their teaching methods and of the programme's orientation and contents as a whole.

In the panel's view, staff quantity is sufficient to teach the programme. Notwithstanding this observation, the panel also acknowledges that staff members experience a very high workload and work hard. This is partly due to the admirable commitment of staff members to the programme and their students. They often go the extra mile: they offer excellent support and feedback in class to their students, who in turn consider their staff responsive and approachable. The informal and direct ways of communication allow students to feel at home at the programme. Graduates of the programme also praised their former teachers' dedication, who often maintained relations with alumni well beyond graduation and offered support and advice regarding job opportunities.

Besides staff's commitment, the current setup of the programme may also contribute to the experienced workload, potentially overstressing the staff. The programme allows for maximum freedom of choice for students – in their thesis topic choice and in the broad range of the programme provided in two diverse specialisation tracks. This is to be praised from the viewpoint of students. According to the panel, however, this situation also builds pressure on staff that need to present the utmost flexibility regarding their students' topic and curriculum choices. To address the high workload, the panel recommends, again, to explore the options to focus the programme in a more directive manner. Catering towards a single track within the programme with a clear interdisciplinary approach would present further clarity regarding teaching duties for staff members and supervisors. This could help staff members to tie their research more closely to the programme's orientation, while also stimulating students to demarcate research topics closer to staff members' research interests and expertise. Naturally, the panel only offers these suggestions as a possible solution out of many; other lines of enquiry also present itself and are supported by the panel as long as the

reduction of staff members' work load is the leading principle. The panel noted the programme management's awareness of these matters and was pleased to hear that they also felt a need to review and address the staff's perceived stress.

Considerations

The programme North American Studies is offered in English, as also reflected in the programme's name. This is, considering the nature of the programme, its international outlook and work field, in line with the panel's expectations and rendered in the programme's ILOs. The panel verified that both the teaching and the staff qualifications regarding English proficiency are at an adequate level to tailor towards an English student-learning environment of good quality.

The panel concluded that the curriculum and the teaching-learning environment of the master's programme in North American Studies is conducive to achieving the intended learning outcomes. The design of the programme is coherent. It is currently divided into two specialisations whose interdisciplinary content results in challenging courses. The panel ascertained that both tracks could be finished within the assigned study duration. Students demonstratively receive sufficient support and guidance and also have ample opportunity to shape their own learning trajectories through electives and free topic choice for their theses. Teaching methods are activating, varied and student-centred. The RUDESA Spring Academy is considered an excellent initiative by the panel, just as the connections between the programme and several cultural institutions in the Arnhem-Nijmegen area and German border region are considered a strong asset. The panel advises to raise students' self-awareness of their unique skills and perspective based on their interdisciplinary programme through teaching methods by highlighting these skills and the attitude achieved more explicitly.

The teaching quality is considered of a high level. The panel also wants to explicitly praise the staff members' commitment to the students and to the development of the programme. Teachers often go the extra mile to support their students, even beyond graduation. The panel feels that the programme management needs to remain aware that staff members stress levels are very high and that options should be sought to reduce the current work load. The panel advises, amongst other options, to explore whether a solution may be found in a more directive focus of the programme that takes into account the connection between staff research and students' topic choice for theses.

This suggestion is also connected to some suggestions regarding the curriculum. The panel feels that a focus on transnationality with an interdisciplinary method that takes into account both political and cultural approaches could strengthen the current curriculum. It could provide a solid framework to connect some current courses more comfortably to the programme's rationale, further strengthen the attention paid to a variety of North American viewpoints next to a strong US orientation and anchor the programme's interdisciplinary approach solidly as methodological choice to the programme's profile. According to the panel, the current mandatory seminar on Theories and Practices could be an excellent point of departure to inspire such a reorientation. In addition, this course could serve as a reference point to strengthen students' methodological grounding in their theses, for example by searching for more explicit references to this course in the Thesis Colloquium. Additionally, teaching towards the achievement of English proficiency at the intended level should explicitly be part of the assessment and outcomes of one of the mandatory courses to make the achievement of this intended learning outcome more transparent.

Based on a study of the schedule and curriculum, the panel considers the programme feasible in one year, although it recognises that in particular the scheduling of period 3 needs the programme's continuous attention to better facilitate students' learning experience. Moreover, the panel supports any programme management initiative directed towards a better scheduling of internships within the programme to reduce the risk of study extensions.

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*Examination Board*

Since 2015, assessment at North American Studies is overseen by the Faculty Examination Board (FEX) in which all bachelor and master programmes, a total of 18 programmes, are represented by at least one member. The panel ascertained that the FEX is composed according to all legal requirements: next to programme representatives, a chair and external independent member with assessment expertise are part of its composition. They are supported by an official secretary. The FEX also installed an Assessment Advisory Committee ('toetsadviescommissie'; TAC) to support the committee with its monitoring tasks. At programme level, the representatives within the FEX are supported by a programme-specific advisory board, known as the programme-specific examination committee ('deexamencommissie'; DEX). The panel verified that the various committees involved in the assurance of the quality of assessment are well-aware of the remit of their assignments and communicate on a regular basis. Students confirmed that they knew who to approach with issues regarding assessment and complaints.

The FEX develops faculty-wide assessment policy and protocols, which feed into the practices at programme level. It introduced a new adaptive website for responding to student requests in 2018 and is currently drafting new privacy regulations. In addition, the FEX also provides staff training on themes related to assessment in collaboration with the Department of Education Support. The panel is pleased that the board actively promotes the further enhancement of the quality and transparency of assessment and invests in staff development. The panel also supports the peer-review approach promoted by the FEX in all its initiatives, which is aimed at engaging staff members in strengthening the quality of assessment and creating support for changes within the existing practices. It noted that the FEX has worked hard over the period of assessment to enhance its grip on the assurance of the quality of tests and examinations. The independency of second assessors for theses has been strengthened just as the quality of written tests and examinations by introducing peer-review practices and the consequent use of answer models and the introduction of (improved) assessment forms. The panel applauds these initiatives.

All programmes within the FEX's remit are fully reviewed one by one, two programmes each year, resulting in a cycle of full programme assessment at least every 4,5 years. These monitoring activities are cyclically administered by the TAC. Besides these full reviews, 10% of every programme's courses is reviewed annually at random. The TAC also reviews the assessment forms for the final papers for all bachelor's and master's programmes, in this way monitoring the final achievement level and the achievement of all intended learning outcomes. The TAC reports back to the FEX. The outcomes of these evaluations, combined with expert advice, are shared amongst all programmes and staff members via digital means to strengthen the awareness of good practices. They also inform the creation of further guidelines, which are in turn circulated amongst all programmes. The panel was informed by members of the TAC, FEX and NAS-DEX that these checks bear fruit: in the second round of full programme checks, a much larger proportion of all course files was complete.

The panel noticed that currently no clear follow-up procedures exist for courses that received recommendations for improvement either in the full programme review or as a result of the annual 10% sample review; as a result, it would be possible that improvements at a flagged course stay unchecked for 4,5 years whereas the evaluation of taken measures would be desirable. This finding was acknowledged during the site visit by all committees involved. The various representatives of the FEX, TAC and NAS-DEX responded positively to the panel suggestion to highlight these courses and to automatically revisit improved courses in the annual cycle with the random sample. The panel looks forward to policy and/or protocol changes by the FEX following this positive response.

The programme-specific examination committee North American Studies (NAS-DEX) checks, on behalf of the FEX, the thesis assessment forms, checks for plagiarism in theses using detection software and annually checks all course files regarding assessment. The NAS-DEX also assigns on behalf of the FEX the second assessor for each thesis candidate, whereas the FEX appoints the first assessors. Furthermore, the NAS-DEX is involved in the annual quality evaluation of the 10% of randomly selected courses together with the TAC. The Faculty-wide reach of the FEX is considered an advantage by the NAS-DEX, who indicated that it reduced their workload and had allowed for greater uniformity in practices, protocols, procedures and policies over the period of assessment. The NAS-DEX indicated to the panel that they need digital access to course files to exercise their job in an organised and structured manner. Currently, NAS-DEX members are spending (too) much time on negotiation with individual staff members for access about their course files and assessment samples. The panel considers this wish very reasonable and recommends the Faculty to take up this request with some urgency as access to course files lays at the basis of the controlling and monitoring responsibility of the FEX.

Assessment and assessment system

Assessment at the master's programme North American Studies follows the faculty-wide policy which is in line with the university-wide assessment system. Additionally, the programme has a programme-specific assessment plan. The panel found that these documents are well designed and clearly formulated. Staff members confirmed to be well-aware of these policies and documents and that they are incorporating the requirements following from these in their assessment design and practices. As a result, assessment in the programmes is well-organised and clearly regulated.

The way in which the intended learning outcomes are assessed throughout the programme is laid down in the assessment plan. Each course has to be completed with a grade of 6 or above, while partial exams may be assessed with a 5.5 or higher. The panel was pleased to learn that assessment can be formative or summative, and also includes feedback on drafts of student papers. It observed in the studied course files that their assessment clearly reflects the required level of the programme. Assignments for midterm evaluations and final exams are co-signed and evaluated by peers based on the assessment requirements and level requirements, assuring the quality of these assessments. To further strengthen the assessment practices, the panel advises the programme to introduce clear rubrics for tests and examinations. Rubrics enhance the transparency on the criteria on which students are tested and therefore improve the communication.

The panel noted that the programme uses a good variety of assessment types, including take-home exams, research papers, written exams, individual and group assignments and oral presentations and tasks. Assessment and exams studied during the site visit were of the intended master's level. During the site visit, students and staff members also gave examples of new and creative assessment types, such as the evaluation of a student's performance as discussion leader and the creation of podcasts and blogposts as part of course assignments. This is considered good practice by the panel and shows the development-oriented attitude at the programme, just as the wish to include new media as part of the programme's curriculum and assessment.

Internships are evaluated by the internal programme supervisor based on feedback by the on-site supervisor and the final report of the student. Criteria include knowledge (theoretical insight, practical insights, knowledge application), attitude (towards supervisor and colleagues, initiative, commitment, independence, cooperation skills), practical work (quality, tempo, accuracy, creativity), communication skills (oral and written), quality of report and personal development. This seems adequate to the panel. It would, however, recommend to include in the internship assessment an element that connects the internship to the programme. For example, by adding a student reflection on the added value of the internship as part of the North American Studies programme and vice versa.

Thesis assessment is done according to defined criteria by two assessors, who fill out the assessment form independently and then send their evaluations to the NAS-DEX. This committee checks the



evaluations and asks both readers to assess the final grade in a personal conversation or via e-mail. In case of discrepancies, doubts, or high or low grades, a third assessor is involved. Assessment criteria include an evaluation of the research question, use of theory and background literature, method, results and the presentation of the conclusion and discussion. All of these main criteria have been subdivided in different categories to help assessors to review the criteria, which also results in greater transparency for students regarding the aspects for which they have been graded. The panel would advise closely monitoring the filing of the final grade decision. It noted in the study of assessment forms that most grade decisions were supported by a clear reasoning and sound argumentation, but that some were rather limited and did not clearly substantiate the final decision.

The panel found the assessment forms that it studied as part of the thesis assessments adequate and noted that they are generally well-used, for which it commends the programme staff. The design of the form, currently an Excel sheet, could use some further attention. In addition, the programme may want to consider the use of rubrics to the various categories assigned to each criterion to further enhance the transparency of the thesis assessment for students. As suggested under Standard 2, the programme also advises to include a criterion for English proficiency (both written and oral command, for example achieved through a thesis defence or as part of the student presentation during the RUDESA Spring Academy).

By and large, the panel agreed with the grading of studied theses, although it warns for leniency in grade decisions as some of the studied assessments seemed slightly high. The panel wonders whether these high assessments might be connected to the great variety of thesis subjects amongst the studied theses, as discussed in full below under Standard 4. The panel also noticed that many theses were read by the same couple of staff members. This coupling of assessors has some benefits for both students and staff, but may also result in a form of unintended and undeliberate bias in the assessment. The panel would therefore argue for further shuffling and diversifying the assessor pairs in the future.

Considerations

The panel concluded that the assessment system functions at an adequate level. The Faculty has a clear assessment policy and the programme-specific assessment plan is also well-formulated. A Faculty-wide Examination Board (FEX) guarantees the quality of assessment, monitors course assessment, appoints assessors, detects fraud and fulfils all other legal duties in a satisfactory manner. The FEX is supported in its tasks by an active Assessment Advisory Council, a dedicated programme-specific examination board (DEX) and advised by the University Department of Education Support. The panel is pleased with the proactive role of the FEX in monitoring and promoting the quality of assessment. To further improve the current assessment system, the panel has some recommendations. The panel strongly supports the wish for digital access to course files for those invested in the assurance and monitoring in assessment to reduce staff members workload. It also suggests creating a good follow-up system for courses that received recommendations for improvement in either the annual random selection check or the full programme review, for example by returning to these courses in the following year next to the random course selection check.

Exams and tests are well-designed and of master's level, continuous feedback next to formative and summative assignments drive student learning and a variety of assessment methods and types assure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The development-oriented attitude of the programme is also clear from this variety of assessment types just as the inclusion of new media as part of the programme's assessment methods. Criteria and modes of assessment are clearly communicated to students, and communication between the various committees involved in the assurance of the quality of assessment functions well. Thesis assessment in both programmes is done by two assessors who fill out the assessment form independently and then discuss the final grading. In case of discrepancies, doubts, or high or low grades, a third assessor is involved. The assessment forms are clear and usually filled out in ample detail. By and large, the panel agreed with the grading of studied theses. The panel would argue for further shuffling and diversifying of the assessor pairs in the future and for close monitoring of the substantiation of final grade decisions to

further enhance objectivity of grading and transparency of assessment. The panel also advises to include a criteria for English proficiency as part of the thesis assessment criteria. With respect to the assessment of internships, the panel recommends to also assess students' ability to reflect on the connection between an internship and the North American Studies programme and vice versa.

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

Prior to the site visit, the panel read a selection of fifteen theses which serve as students' master proof. In general, the panel considered the level of the theses appropriate for master's level and they demonstrate that the intended learning outcomes are achieved. Students of the programme are free to choose their own research question and area, which often results in a degree of personal engagement in the choice of subject. This is considered by students an attractive asset of the programme. Notably, many thesis abstracts seemed less well-conceived than the thesis itself: in some cases, the main research question in the abstract did not correspond to the main question addressed in the thesis itself and some abstracts were far too long and too descriptive. The panel therefore recommends supervisors to pay close attention to students' abstracts and to guide students in the way in which to render their research and its outcomes succinctly. A word limit for the abstract may hereby be instrumental just as clear instructions regarding the difference between a summary and an abstract.

The panel was impressed with the quality of some of the theses, which it considered original, well-conceived and addressing compelling subjects. These theses were analytically sound, gave evidence of a thorough research process and presented the results clearly and articulately in excellent English. The panel thought that the majority of theses was of satisfactory quality demonstrating a good command of English proficiency, with an adequate albeit not very deep analysis. In its view, these students did not problematize the context or the concepts underlying the research thoroughly. Additionally, some research questions could be better framed and would have benefited from a clearer link to the field of North American Studies. In the panel's view, this observation is linked to the free topic choice for students. Free choice is attractive, but could potentially result in staff members supervising theses outside of their direct expertise area. When asked, teaching staff indicated that they discussed amongst themselves beforehand whether they felt sufficiently knowledgeable to supervise the suggested topics and they redirected students and asked for colleagues' input where necessary. The mechanisms in place to prevent a mismatch between students' subject choices and staff members' expertise thus seem to be adequate. Nevertheless, the panel advises the programme to reflect on this observation in combination with the noted high grading of some theses under Standard 3 which might be connected to these findings. The panel trusts the programme to act upon these observations accordingly.

From talking to alumni, the panel concludes that they clearly feel that they were well-educated. Graduates named various academic skills – analytical and writing skills, information management, argumentation and cultural awareness – that they considered useful for entering the work field. Also, they considered the ways beneficial in which the programme widened their perspective, knowledge of cultural phenomena and views. When asked regarding the specific advantages of studying North American Studies, graduates proffered the multi-faceted approach of American culture that also allowed for the analysis of the influence of American culture on other cultures. In addition, the use of different media in teaching was also considered a defining feature of the programme. Although finding entry positions is not always easy, graduates felt that the majority of them found a relevant position at academic level within an acceptable time frame. They praised in particular the involvement and support of staff members for their help in exploring options, even long after graduation. They considered taking an internship really helpful for maximising their employability. Engagement with



alumni was named as another potential addition to prepare students for the job market, for example by (voluntary) coupling up between students and graduates. Graduates would also support further alumni engagement through an official alumni organisation, which is currently in its initial stage.

Considerations

The panel considers master's theses of appropriate quality. They demonstrate that students achieve the intended learning outcomes, including the aims regarding the high level of English written command. Theses address a great variety of themes due to students' free topic choice. Some are well-conceived and compelling, other theses would benefit from further contextualisation, a narrowing down of the research question and a clearer embedment to the field of North American Studies. Some further attention should be paid to the thesis abstracts. In spite of the difficult job market, graduates often manage to find a position in a relevant field and/or at an academic level. In order to improve the outlook of its students, the programme could draw on its graduates to show different perspectives and options through an alumni organisation. The panel is pleased that initiatives have been developed to facilitate further alumni engagement.

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 programmes as 'positive'.

Conclusion

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

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing the Master's in North American Studies,

1. the student has advanced scholarly insight and knowledge of North American history, politics, (popular) culture, media and society of the 20th and 21st centuries. He/she is capable of combining insights from multiple academic disciplines in order to interpret and analyse connections between developments within these areas
2. he/she is capable of analyzing processes of socio-cultural and political exchange, mutual perceptions and intercultural confrontations, both within and outside of North America.
3. he/she has an advanced understanding of the theory and practice of "American Studies" as an interdisciplinary scholarly field, and is able to describe and explain historical and contemporary developments in "American Studies" in North America and in Europe.
4. he/she has the scholarly and theoretical knowledge and the methodological skills to independently formulate research questions, to carry out a (preferably interdisciplinary) research project, to critically approach and utilize relevant sources, and to communicate the results of his/her research in a scholarly work written in good and correct (American) English.

Specialization Literatures and Cultures of North America in International Perspective

In addition to the general exit qualifications of the Master North America Studies, the program has established the following two additional exit qualifications: After completing the program "Literatures and Cultures of North America in International Perspective,"

5. the student has acquired an advanced scholarly understanding and knowledge regarding the diversity of literary and cultural forms of expression in North America of the 20th and 21st centuries. He/she is capable of interpreting these both in their social, political and cultural contexts and from a historical, comparative and international perspective.
6. he/she is capable, at an advanced scholarly level, of analyzing and interpreting manifestations of contemporary (North) American literature and culture, including film, visual arts, digital media and music, as well as examining and describing their reception and transmission within and outside North America.

Specialization Transnational America: Politics, Culture and Society

After completing the program "Transnational America: Politics, Culture and Society,"

5. the student has acquired an advanced scholarly understanding and knowledge of the changing position of the United States on the world stage in light of developments within US foreign policy, cultural diplomacy and the role of religion, race and ethnicity in international relations. He/she is capable of interpreting the political and cultural repercussions, in particular for the relationship between the US and Europe.
6. he/she capable of analyzing (contemporary issues in) North American politics, culture, religion and society, and of understanding them in their historical, social and cultural contexts and from a comparative and transnational perspective.



APPENDIX 2: OVERVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM

	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4
Compulsary for both programs	American Studies: Theories and Practices (10 ec)		Transatlantic Transfer and Cultural Mobility (5 ec)	
	MA-Thesis Colloquium and Workshop MA-Thesis (20 ec)			
			RUDESA Spring Academy (ties in with Transatlantic Transfer seminar)	
"Literatures and Cultures"	Contemporary North American Fiction (10 ec)			
"Transnational America"	The Future of American Power (10 ec)			
			Religion and American Global Politics (5 ec)	
Electives	Elective courses or internship (10/15 ec)*			
			Indigenous Studies: History, Literature, Politics (5 ec)	
		Politics and Cultures of the Black Freedom Struggle (5 ec)		
			US Constitutional Law (10 ec)	
				The Representation of Violence at the US-Mexican Border (5 ec)



APPENDIX 3: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

Dag 1: 18 maart 2019

Tijd	Onderdeel
08.45 - 09.00	Ontvangst commissie
09.00 - 11.00	Vorbereidend overleg commissie, inzien van documenten GLTC, OHS en NAS
11.00 - 11.45	Gesprek met inhoudelijk verantwoordelijken bachelor GLTC & master OHS
11.45 - 12.30	Gesprek met studenten bachelor GLTC (inclusief leden opleidingscommissie)
12.30 - 13.30	Lunch + inloopspreekuur (13.00-13.30; ook voor NAS)
13.30 - 14.15	Gesprek met studenten master OHS (inclusief leden opleidingscommissie)
14.15 - 15.00	Gesprek met docenten bachelor GLTC & master OHS
15.00 - 15.30	Gesprek met alumni
15.30 - 16.45	Vorbereiding eindgesprek GLTC & OHS
16.45 - 17.15	Eindgesprek met formeel en inhoudelijk verantwoordelijken GLTC & OHS

Dag 2: 19 maart 2019

Tijd	Onderdeel
08.45 - 09.00	Aankomst commissie
09.00 - 09.30	Inzien documenten, voorbereiden gesprekken
09.30 - 10.15	Gesprek met inhoudelijk verantwoordelijken NAS
10.15 - 10.30	Pauze
10.30 - 11.15	Gesprek met studenten NAS (inclusief leden opleidingscommissie)
11.15 - 12.00	Gesprek met docenten NAS
12.00 - 12.30	Gesprek met alumni NAS
12.30 - 13.15	Lunch
13.15 - 14.00	Gesprek met examencommissie (GLTC, OHS, NAS)
14.00 - 15.00	Vorbereiding eindgesprek NAS
15.00 - 15.30	Eindgesprek met formeel en inhoudelijk verantwoordelijken NAS
15.30 - 16.30	Opstellen voorlopige bevindingen
16.30 - 16.45	Vorbereiding eindpresentatie (voorzitter panel + secretaris)
16.45 - 17.30	<i>Paralelsessies:</i> Ontwikkelgesprek GLTC en OHS (locatie: E 9.14) Ontwikkelgesprek NAS (locatie: E 7.18a)
17.30 - 17.45	Presentatie voorlopige bevindingen
17.45	Afronding en afsluitende borrel



APPENDIX 4: THESES AND DOCUMENTS STUDIED BY THE PANEL

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied fifteen theses of the master's programme North American Studies. Information on the selected theses is available from QANU upon request.

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):

General:

- Diaries and minutes Board of Examiners
- Diaries and list of action points Programme Committee NAS 2017-18 t/m 2018/19
- Assessment Policy Faculty of Arts

NAS course work for the following modules:

- Contemporary American fiction
- Futures of US power
- Theories and practices

