



M International Business Law
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

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info@academion.nl

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Summary

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The master's programme International Business Law at VU University is an academic legal programme with a focus on the business law implications of climate change. It aims to provide an education that contains all the classical legal knowledge that an expert business lawyer requires, while incorporating an understanding of the legal challenges created by climate change, and the social and human rights responsibilities of business. In doing so, the programme is in line with the faculty profile Law in Action, which pays attention to the social impact of law in a national, European and international context in addition to applicable law, and with the VU educational vision, which focuses on academic citizenship. The programme offers two tracks: Trade & Investment (T&I) and Climate Change and Corporations (CCC). Both tracks match the professional requirements for the toga professions (*civiel effect*). The panel appreciates IBL's clear and topical profile and the way this has been translated to the programme's intended learning outcomes, which it finds of appropriate academic level. According to the panel, the ILOs reflect the Dublin descriptors for master's programmes. In addition, the profile and learning outcomes are well aligned with the programme's professional field through the Domain-Specific Reference Framework and the Advisory Board. In looking at the two tracks, the panel notices that the CCC track stands out due to its focus on a field of law that is currently under fast development. The panel wonders whether the T&I track should not redirect its gaze towards a more corporate approach, since this is more in line with the programme title International Business Law.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The panel concludes that the master's programme International Business Law is well-structured and carefully built up, with enough space for students to shape their own learning trajectories. The choice for English as the programme language is logical and necessary given the international focus. All learning outcomes are covered in the curriculum. Class sizes are small, so that lively in-class discussions and activating teaching types can be realized. The panel applauds the stimulating, topical and inspiring content and the activating practice- and research-based teaching and learning that is offered in IBL. The panel agrees with the admission criteria and the admission process. It appreciates the fact that the programme is flexible on the grade point average where this seems to get compensated by experience or motivation. The programme is clearly feasible and student support and guidance are adequate. According to the panel, the option of the thesis trajectory with soft deadlines is a best practice in the faculty. Students and staff form a close-knit community and the expertise and didactic skills of staff members are one of the programme's strengths.

Standard 3. Student assessment

The panel praises the thorough design of assessment policy and practice in the master's programme. Testing is varied and appropriate. The panel is positive about the standardization and archiving of tests via assessment dossiers. It notes that lecturers have a lot of freedom in designing tests, and that they decide whether changes should be made to the test format, for instance when the use of language models makes changes necessary. The panel advises the programme and faculty to provide more guidance here. According to the panel, the assessment of the final level is well designed. The thesis assessment form is insightful, partly due to the space for qualitative feedback and explanation it provides. The panel recommends reviewing the weighting of sub-criteria. The Examination Board fulfils its assurance role and is proactive in doing so. The panel does advise the Board to organize formal consultations with the programme management more often, to ensure a structural discussion about test quality.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The panel considers the level of IBL master's theses to be up to standard. The theses reflect the themes and topics that are prominent in the programme. Alumni are in high demand in the job market and end up in a variety of positions. They are pleased with the way they were prepared in the programme.

Score table

The panel assesses the programme as follows:

Master's programme International Business Law

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

Em. prof. mr. Tineke Cleiren, chair

Dr. Fiona Schouten, secretary

Date: 16 July 2024

Introduction

Procedure

Assessment

On 7, 8 and 9 February 2024, the master's programme International Business Law (IBL) of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) was assessed by an independent peer review panel as part of the cluster assessment Law 1. The assessment cluster consisted of 33 programmes, offered by Erasmus University Rotterdam, Nyenrode Business University, University of Amsterdam and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The assessment followed the procedure and standards of the NVAO Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands (September 2018).

Quality assurance agency Academion coordinated the assessment upon request of the cluster Law 1. Fiona Schouten acted as coordinator and panel secretary. Irene Conradie, Peter Hildering, Mariette Huisjes and Jessica van Rossum also acted as secretaries in the cluster assessment. They have been certified and registered by the NVAO. The eight VU programmes were evenly divided between two secretaries. Fiona Schouten was secretary for the bachelor's and master's programmes in Law, the master's programme in Tax Law and the master's programme in International Business Law. Irene Conradie was secretary for the Notarial Law bachelor's and master's programmes, the Law in Society bachelor's programme and the Law and Politics of International Security master's programme.

Preparation

Academion composed the peer review panel in cooperation with the institutions and taking into account the expertise and independence of the members as well as consistency within the cluster. On 2 January 2024, the NVAO approved the composition of the panel. The coordinator instructed the panel chair on her role in the site visit according to the Panel chair profile (NVAO 2016).

The organizers at the Faculty of Law composed a site visit schedule in consultation with the coordinator (see appendix 3). The faculty selected representative partners for the various interviews. It also determined that the development dialogue would take place after the site visit. A separate development report was made based on this dialogue.

The programme provided the coordinator with a list of graduates over the academic year 2022-2023 (between September 2022 and August 2023). In consultation with the coordinator, the panel chair selected 15 theses of the master's programme International Business Law. They took the diversity of final grades and examiners into account, as well as the various tracks. Prior to the site visit, the programme provided the panel with the theses and the accompanying assessment forms. It also provided the panel with the self-evaluation report and additional materials (see appendix 4).

The panel members studied the information and sent their findings to the secretary. The secretary collected the panel's questions and remarks in a document and shared this with the panel members. In a preliminary meeting, the panel discussed the initial findings on the self-evaluation reports and the theses, as well as the division of tasks during the site visit. The panel was also informed on the assessment frameworks, the working method and the planning of the site visits and reports.

Site visit

During the site visit, the panel interviewed various programme representatives (see appendix 3). The panel also offered students and staff members an opportunity for confidential discussion during a consultation hour. No consultation was requested. 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 preliminary findings.

Report

The secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to an Academion colleague for peer assessment. Subsequently, the secretary sent the report to the panel for feedback. After processing this feedback, the secretary sent the draft report to the Faculty of Law in order to have it checked for factual irregularities. The secretary discussed the ensuing comments with the panel chair and changes were implemented accordingly. The panel then finalized the report, and the coordinator sent it to the Faculty of Law of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Panel

The following panel members were involved in the cluster assessment:

- Em. prof. mr. C.P.M. (Tineke) Cleiren, emeritus professor of Criminal Law and Criminal Procedure at Leiden University (chair);
- Prof. dr. E. (Elisabeth) Alofs, professor of Family law, matrimonial property law and inheritance law at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. J.N. (Jan) Bouwman, professor of Tax Law at the University of Groningen;
- Prof. mr. dr. L.H.J. (Maurice) Adams, professor of General Jurisprudence at Tilburg University;
- Prof. dr. M.M.T.A. (Marcel) Brus, professor of Public International Law at the University of Groningen;
- Em. prof. dr. H.E.G.S. (Hildegard) Schneider, emeritus professor of European Law at Maastricht University;
- Prof. mr. dr. S.E. (Steven) Bartels, professor of Private Law at Radboud University;
- Prof. dr. R.A. (Ramses) Wessel, professor of European Law at the University of Groningen;
- Prof. dr. I.J.J. (Irene) Burgers, professor of International and European tax law, and Economics of Taxation at the University of Groningen;
- Prof. dr. mr. T. (Ton) Liefwaard, professor of Children's Rights at Leiden University;
- N. (Noor) Kikken BSc., bachelor's student Tax Law (Fiscaal Recht) at the Erasmus University Rotterdam (student member);
- D. (David) de Wit, bachelor's student Law (Rechtsgeleerdheid) at the University van Amsterdam (student member);
- T. (Tuncay) Yazar, master's student Constitutional and Administrative Law (Staats- en Bestuursrecht), and Labour Law (Arbeidsrecht), at the University van Amsterdam (student member);
- Prof. mr. dr. W.D. (Wilbert) Kolkman, professor of Family Property Law at the University of Groningen (referee);
- Mr. dr. I.M. (Martje) Boekema, assistant professor of Constitutional, Administrative Law and Legal Theory at Utrecht University (referee);
- Mr. dr. J.M. (Jens) Iverson, assistant professor of International Law at Leiden University (referee);
- Prof. mr. dr. A.M. (Aline) Klingenberg, professor of IT Law at the University of Groningen (referee);
- Mr. dr. W.G.M. (Willem) Plessen, associate professor (emeritus) of Labour Law at Tilburg University (referee);
- Mr. M.F. (Melita) van der Mersch, partner and Health Law lawyer at Velink & De Die Lawyers (referee);

- Dr. S.F.W. (Steffie) van den Bosch LL.M. MSc., assistant professor of Private, Business and Labour Law at Tilburg University (referee);
- Mr. dr. E.G.D. (Emanuel) van Dongen LL.M., associate professor of Private, Accountability and Liability Law at Utrecht University (referee);
- Prof. dr. S.A.C.M. (Saskia) Lavrijssen, professor of Economic Regulation and Market Governance of Network Industries at Tilburg University (referee);
- Prof. mr. dr. A.C. (Aart) Hendriks, professor of Health Law at Leiden University (referee);
- Em. prof. mr. D.F.M.M. (Niek) Zaman, emeritus professor of Notarial Corporate Law at Leiden University and advisor at Loyens & Loeff N.V. (referee);
- Mr. dr. S.N. (Simone) de Valk, assistant professor in Labour Law at the University of Groningen (referee);
- Mr. dr. M.D.J. (Matthijs) van der Wulp, assistant professor in Tax law and Fiscal Economy at Tilburg University (referee);
- Mr. dr. W. (Walter) Dijkshoorn, senior lawyer at the Directie Bestuursrechtspraak of the Council of State (Raad van State) (referee).

The panel assessing the master's programme International Business Law at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam consisted of the following members:

- Em. prof. mr. C.P.M. (Tineke) Cleiren, emeritus professor of Criminal Law and Criminal Procedure at Leiden University (chair);
- Prof. dr. E. (Elisabeth) Alofs, professor of Family law, matrimonial property law and inheritance law at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. J.N. (Jan) Bouwman, professor of Tax Law at the University of Groningen;
- Prof. mr. dr. L.H.J. (Maurice) Adams, professor of General Jurisprudence at Tilburg University;
- Prof. dr. R.A. (Ramses) Wessel, professor of European Law at the University of Groningen;
- D. (David) de Wit, bachelor's student Law (Rechtsgeleerdheid) at the University van Amsterdam (student member);
- Prof. mr. dr. W.D. (Wilbert) Kolkman, professor of Family Property Law at the University of Groningen (referee);
- Mr. dr. E.G.D. (Emanuel) van Dongen LL.M., associate professor of Private, Accountability and Liability Law at Utrecht University (referee);
- Prof. dr. S.A.C.M. (Saskia) Lavrijssen, professor of Economic Regulation and Market Governance of Network Industries at Tilburg University (referee).

Information on the programme

Name of the institution:	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive
Programme name:	International Business Law
CROHO number:	60072
Level:	Master
Orientation:	Academic
Number of credits:	60 EC
Specialisations or tracks:	- Trade and Investment - Climate Change and Corporations
Location:	Amsterdam

Mode(s) of study:
Language of instruction:
Submission date NVAO:

Fulltime
English
1 November 2024

Description of the assessment

Organization

The master's programme International Business Law (IBL) is one of 12 programmes organized by the Faculty of Law of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU). Its programme director is assisted by a programme coordinator. The programme director is functionally accountable to the faculty portfolio holder Education and is responsible for the curriculum, including the quality assurance of the associated tests, the organization of education (study guide and feasibility) and the functioning of the quality assurance cycle of the programme (course and curriculum evaluations, mid-term reviews and assessments). The programme falls under a faculty-wide examination committee and has its own programme committee.

Previous accreditation panel's recommendations

In the previous NVAO assessment, the panel advised IBL to execute a more in-depth national and international benchmark to further develop the programme's profile in comparison to other relevant master's programmes. It also recommended focusing more on the combination and integration of public and private law. Finally, the panel advised the programme to enhance the selection procedure, as some non-EU students seemed to struggle with their writing skills. The programme was adapted regarding all these aspects since the previous site visit, in a redesign of the structure and profile whereby two of the three tracks were merged into one (see standard 1). The panel concludes that none of the previous panel's objections apply any longer.

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

The master's programme International Business Law aims to provide an ethical, socially responsible, future-oriented curriculum, with a particular focus on the business law implications of climate change. In doing so, the programme aligns with the faculty's 'Law in Action' profile, which focuses on an academic, reflective and critical approach to law. Within the courses organized by the faculty, attention is paid not only to the applicable law (Law in the Books), but also to the social impact of law in a national, European and international context (Law in Action).

With this approach, the programme incorporates the VU educational vision. This aims for its programmes to contribute to students becoming committed and conscientious academics who explore and, where necessary, know how to push boundaries. Based on its academic and social mission, the VU educates students not only for the labour market, but also for the society in which they will have to shape their future. In their educational visions, the VU and the Faculty of Law emphasize the value of academic citizenship: graduates realize that they are part of society and that their education entails responsibilities towards that society. Students are to become skilled as an academic in making well-considered choices that are necessary to contribute to society in a responsible way.

IBL operationalizes this approach by providing an education that contains all the classical legal knowledge that an expert business lawyer requires, while incorporating an understanding of the legal challenges created by climate change, and the social and human rights and responsibilities of business. As the law develops, and climate and social responsibility become unavoidable elements of the business law

framework, the programme wants to create graduates who are able to guide their employers – whether firms, governments, NGOs or international organizations – through this new legal context. As part of this, the students are required to develop understanding of the wider scientific and policy frameworks concerning sustainability and social responsibility. The focus of IBL is on multinational business, where an international environment will be part of its graduate's careers. Graduates are therefore to develop skills in co-operation, communication, and sensitivity to cultural differences.

IBL consists of two tracks:

1. The Trade & Investment (T&I) track covers international and European law concerning international trade, as well as private international law, and offers a general business and economic law curriculum. This track started in September 2023 as two previous tracks which attracted lower student numbers were merged (Law, Markets and Behaviour, and Trade and Transactions).
2. The Climate Change and Corporations (CCC) track is a more specialized track within IBL, focusing specifically on corporate climate obligations – although necessarily having a base of core corporate law, as this is necessary to understand the impact of the climate rules.

IBL links education to research and practice. It originates from the research interests of the teaching staff, who publish on climate and business law, and on the social impact of business law. The Amsterdam Sustainability Institute (ASI) provides an umbrella for sustainability-related research at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and researchers from ASI teach in the programme.

IBL has its own Advisory Board, which ensures the alignment of profile, attainment levels and content with the needs of the labour market. The programme meets the national benchmark as laid down in the Domain-Specific Reference Framework (2015). It trains students for the 'robed professions' (judge, lawyer or public prosecutor) in combination with an appropriate undergraduate programme. The requirements for these professions - as expressed in the covenant between the law faculties, the Council for the Judiciary and the Netherlands Bar Association - are incorporated in the graduation programme (see also Standard 2).

The panel appreciates IBL's clear and topical profile. The programme aligns with the faculty and university profile, which the panel welcomes. According to the panel, Law in Action is an attractive profile. The panel noted during the site visit that the term can and may be interpreted in different ways within the faculty. It can encompass attention to professional skills and a connection of programme content to practice, as well as attention to paid empirical research methods, a theme the faculty is promoting thanks to funds from the Law Sector Plan earmarked for this purpose. The panel appreciates the fact that within IBL, Law in Action is operationalized through a focus on socially responsible law and an understanding of the legal challenges created by climate change as well as the social and human rights and responsibilities of businesses.

In looking at the two tracks, the panel notices that the CCC track stands out the most due to its focus on a field of law that is currently under fast development. The connection with corporate business underlines the specific VU focus due to its proximity to the Zuidas (Amsterdam Business District). The track has also received much (media) attention in educating 'climate lawyers'. The T&I track has a less topical and more general focus. The panel wonders if this track should redirect its focus somewhat towards a more corporate approach, since this would be more in line with the programme title International Business Law. More in general, the panel suggests to maintain clarity about the fact that the title 'Business Law' refers more to the 'business' field in which graduates will probably end up than to the specific academic discipline with that name.

The aims and vision of the programme have been translated into a set of 11 intended learning outcomes (ILOs, see Appendix 1). These describe what a student is to have mastered by the end of the programme. The ILOs clearly reflect the Dublin descriptors for master's programmes and are in line with the Domain-Specific Reference Framework and with the professional requirements from the 'robed professions' (judge, lawyer or public prosecutor). The panel agrees with the intended learning outcomes, which reflect the focus of the programme and are of appropriate academic master's level.

Considerations

The master's programme International Business Law at VU University is an academic legal programme with a focus on the business law implications of climate change. It aims to provide an education that contains all the classical legal knowledge that an expert business lawyer requires, while incorporating an understanding of the legal challenges created by climate change, and the social and human rights responsibilities of business. In doing so, the programme is in line with the faculty profile Law in Action, which pays attention to the social impact of law in a national, European and international context in addition to applicable law, and with the VU educational vision, which focuses on academic citizenship. The programme offers two tracks: Trade & Investment (T&I) and Climate Change and Corporations (CCC). Both tracks match the professional requirements for the toga professions (*civiel effect*). The panel appreciates IBL's clear and topical profile and the way this has been translated to the programme's intended learning outcomes, which it finds of appropriate academic level. According to the panel, the ILOs reflect the Dublin descriptors for master's programmes. In addition, the profile and learning outcomes are well aligned with the programme's professional field through the Domain-Specific Reference Framework and the Advisory Board. In looking at the two tracks, the panel notices that the CCC track stands out due to its focus on a field of law that is currently under fast development. The panel wonders whether the T&I track should not redirect its gaze towards a more corporate approach, since this is more in line with the programme title International Business Law.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 1.

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

The master's programme IBL is made up of specialization-specific mandatory courses (54 EC in the CCC track, 42 in the T&I track) and restricted electives (6 EC in CCC, 18 in T&I). The mandatory courses include the 12 EC master's thesis. With Contract Law and Psychology of Negotiations (6 EC) and EU Internal Market Law (6 EC) as compulsory courses, as well as one compulsory integrative course and various electives, T&I meets the 'civil effect' requirements for robed professions. In CCC, these are also met: the common core contains the three compulsory courses (18 EC) Anatomy of Corporate Law, Climate Change Liability, and Climate Change and Financial Regulation, as well as four mandatory integrative courses. The programme is offered in English, in line with its international focus.

Both tracks build up from general to more specific content. The elective space in CCC is limited to 6 EC. This is due to the fact that the track is thematic and therefore has a more multidisciplinary setup, making it necessary for courses to cover a wider range of scientific as well as policy frameworks. CCC students interviewed by the panel understood why this setup was chosen, and feel they have enough space in the

courses, written tests, and thesis to place their own accents. T&I offers students more elective options (18 EC), which is very much appreciated by them. The programme also provides extracurricular options that IBL students make frequent use of, such as an internship, a Research track (18 EC) for talented and well-performing students, and the Climate Change and Sustainability Law Clinic. In this clinic, students work on real-world cases and research tasks for clients, such as environmental NGOs, under supervision of teaching staff members. The clinic is open to students from other master's programmes as well, but especially relevant for CCC students. The panel learned during the site visit that many students choose to take part. In the past, IBL students have helped run high-profile and successful legal actions through this clinic.

Both tracks connect to the faculty's Law in Action perspective. They do so through the frequent involvement of guest lecturers from key organizations and through using many real-world cases and examples. Especially in CCC, due to the fast development of the academic and professional fields touching upon the programme, the courses deal with topical examples and state of the art developments. Also in T&I, topical issues are addressed, and links with practice and the nearby business district enhance the societal relevance of what is taught, for instance through an arbitration class at De Brauw which was cited as a positive experience by T&I students. The courses make use of the various backgrounds of their international student body by facilitating in-class discussion and group collaboration. Teaching staff often has links with practice, and this connection contributes to the realization of Law in Action in the courses.

The panel studied the curricula of the two tracks and found that they are well-structured and carefully built up, with enough space for students to shape their own learning trajectories both in the electives and within the mandatory courses. The panel discussed the choice for English as the programme language as well as the English language name with IBL stakeholders and agrees that this is a logical and necessary choice given the international focus and the international professional field linked to the programme. All learning outcomes are covered in the curricula. Skills are taught throughout the various courses through group and individual assignments, presentations, essay-writing, role-playing, and moot court participation (in CCC). Class sizes are small (between 25-60 students, and usually around 30) so that lively in-class discussions and activating teaching methods can be realized. Students whom the panel interviewed found their programme inspiring. In the case of the CCC track, students saw themselves as trailblazers and members of a new and budding community of climate lawyers. T&I students were happy with its action perspective, and the attention paid to ethics and critical thinking. The panel applauds the stimulating, topical and inspiring content and the activating practice- and research-based teaching and learning that is offered in IBL.

The programme finds that one point of improvement would be to increase the attention paid to oral and presentation skills. Previously, the thesis included a final oral exam, but this was discontinued so that the thesis trajectory could become more flexible and allow students to spread the workload throughout the year. The panel encourages enhancing oral skills, although it notes that these are already trained and assessed in various courses. Students mentioned to the panel that they are often required to produce essays, and presentations might help in alleviating the resulting work pressure.

Admission, guidance and feasibility

Students can be admitted to the programme when they hold a law degree at academic level or equivalent, such as a professional bachelor's (hbo) Law, followed by a premaster. They are selected based on merit and motivation. Students demonstrate their motivation in a motivation letter and through relevant extracurricular academic and/or legal work experience. They demonstrate merit and academic excellence by overall grade average, thesis, academic English proficiency, proficiency in (legal) research methods and techniques and recommendations. A minimum GPA of 7.2 according to the Dutch grading system is required, although a somewhat lower score may be compensated by a strong score on another element. In about 50%

of applications a brief online meeting is scheduled with the applicant for clarification and exchanging mutual expectations.

The majority of students graduate within a year and a half, and after 2 years around 90% have completed their studies. Students who do not graduate within an academic year often write their thesis in the second year. As the thesis is the main cause for delay, students are provided with the option of following a schedule which leads to finalization of the thesis before the summer. Not everybody chooses this option, as it requires students to pick the topic for their thesis early in the year, while many potentially interesting fields of research still lie ahead of them. Students also sometimes accept internships during the programme, in which case they choose to take one or two courses in the next academic year.

Students receive academic guidance primarily through their teachers. During the site visit, they reported to the panel that they consider their lecturers to be approachable and ready to help them. In addition, there is one contact person per track students can turn to for help and (personal) advice. Aside from such programme-specific guidance, there is a broader faculty structure in place. Study advisors inform, advise, and guide students with study-related questions and/or problems and personal circumstances that may affect their studies. If necessary, the study advisor refers students to other forms of help or guidance, either within or outside the VU. The faculty-wide department Career Services connects students, faculty, alumni, and the business community. Students can turn to Career Services for all their career-related questions.

The panel agrees with the admission criteria and the admission process. It appreciates the fact that the programme is flexible on the grade point average where this seems to be compensated by experience or motivation. The programme is feasible, with most students finishing in under two years in spite of them taking extracurricular options. Support and guidance are adequate and appreciated by the students. According to the panel, the option of the thesis trajectory with soft deadlines is a best practice in the faculty. The structured trajectory helps students graduate on time. Students also told the panel that they are supported in looking for a thesis topic from the start of the programme, which ensures that they do not leave this until late even if they choose not to take part in the thesis schedule.

Teaching staff

The teaching team consists of 17 staff members drawn from three faculty sub-departments: business law, European law, and international law. Aside from formal meetings, they have regular informal contact. Almost all of the teaching team are active researchers, publishing on topics directly relevant to the substance and ethos of IBL and the courses they teach. All teachers for the CCC track, and most of those for T&I, are members of the Amsterdam Centre for Climate Change, Corporations and the Law. A number are also members of the research group Boundaries of Law, which investigates the lines between different legal disciplines and between legal and social issues. The teaching team includes a number of staff members who are involved in legal practice, government and NGOs. Every teaching staff member with an appointment of 0.4 fte or more is to have obtained or is in the process of obtaining a UTQ (university teaching qualification). Lecturers who are newly employed and do not yet possess the UTQ will generally be given the opportunity to start the course quickly, in addition to the Start-to-teach day offered by the VU Centre of Teaching and Learning (CTL). Currently, 13 out of the 17 teaching staff members of IBL hold a UTQ or equivalent. Four staff members hold a senior qualification (STQ).

The panel concludes that the teaching staff of IBL is well equipped to teach in the programme. They combine expertise, sufficient English level, and didactic skills, and ensure a link to research and practice. Students praised the staff as approachable and engaging. They feel they are being taught by experts and invited into their circle and network. According to the panel, IBL's teaching staff is one of the programme's strengths.

Considerations

The panel concludes that the master's programme International Business Law is well-structured and carefully built up, with enough space for students to shape their own learning trajectories. The choice for English as the programme language is logical and necessary given the international focus. All learning outcomes are covered in the curriculum. Class sizes are small, so that lively in-class discussions and activating teaching types can be realized. The panel applauds the stimulating, topical and inspiring content and the activating practice- and research-based teaching and learning that is offered in IBL. The panel agrees with the admission criteria and the admission process. It appreciates the fact that the programme is flexible on the grade point average where this seems to get compensated by experience or motivation. The programme is clearly feasible and student support and guidance are adequate. According to the panel, the option of the thesis trajectory with soft deadlines is a best practice in the faculty. Students and staff form a close-knit community and the expertise and didactic skills of staff members are one of the programme's strengths.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 2.

Standard 3. Student assessment

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

Findings

Assessment policy and system

Assessment in the programme follows the assessment policy of VU Amsterdam. It relates to the VU Educational Vision (2021) and the VU Assessment Policy (2022) and is described in the Handbook Educational Quality – VU Assessment Framework 2019. On a faculty level, these policies have been translated into the *Nota Toetsbeleid* (September 2022). According to this document, tests are to comply with criteria concerning validity of content and understanding, reliability, and transparency. The programme has an assessment plan that sets out the rationale behind the mix of testing and assessment methods selected. The assessment plan maps the manner in which the learning objectives of each course are assessed and how these objectives align with the ILOs. Education and assessment are carried out, evaluated and recorded in a course-specific assessment dossier. The faculty collects these assessment dossiers centrally. While this system is still under development within the faculty, IBL management proactively implemented it, drafting instructions and a standard format for the course coordinators.

Assessment in IBL is varied and includes writing essays, group papers, a critique of a legal standpoint, or an analysis of a negotiating situation. Students also give presentations, participate in a moot court or in-class discussions, and take exams. All examinations are prepared by the teaching staff involved in the course, under the guidance of the course coordinator and, as much as possible, in accordance with the peer review principle. Written and oral assignments are assessed based on criteria that have been made known to the student in advance. Feedback is provided in various ways and at various moments, and all course coordinators organize feedback sessions.

The faculty is aware of the increasing impact of language models such as ChatGPT. At the moment, it is left up to individual teaching staff members to decide how to adapt their tests when this seems necessary in view of these recent developments. The VU is preparing central frameworks to regulate the use of generative

AI in educations and signal possible pitfalls. The VU Centre for Teaching & Learning is currently preparing a customized course for the faculty on AI applications.

The panel agrees well with the way testing and testing policy are designed in the master's programme. It notes that assessment is varied and appropriate. Through mechanisms and means such as the four-eyes principle, rubrics or answer models and the use of a test plan and test templates, the programme guarantees that the testing is sufficiently clear and transparent. The panel is positive about the standardization and archiving of tests via assessment dossiers. The panel observes that lecturers have a lot of freedom in designing tests, and that they decide whether changes should be made to the test format, for instance when the use of language models makes changes necessary. The panel advises the programme and the faculty to provide more guidance here, so that lecturers do not have to reinvent the wheel themselves and know what is acceptable within the faculty.

Assessment of the final level

Assessment of the final theses is carried out using standardized online assessment forms on which the assessment criteria are clearly stated. Each thesis is assessed by at least two independent examiners. The first assessor is also the thesis supervisor. The final version of the thesis is submitted to a second assessor, who forms an independent opinion. The first and second assessors consult each other on the substantiation of their assessments and the grade to be awarded. They then complete the assessment form. In the event of a disagreement on the grading of the thesis (1 point or more), the Examination Board may engage a third assessor to determine the final grade.

The panel is pleased with the way the assessment of the final level is done in the programme. It finds that the the two assessors function in a sufficiently independent manner. The assessment form contains relevant criteria and offers much space for qualitative substantiation of the scores given. The panel noticed that in practice, assessors make use of this space. The assessors are required to score the criteria as excellent, good, amply satisfactory, satisfactory, or unsatisfactory. The definition of these judgments is described in a rubric. The panel does see some room for improving the assessment form. It is unclear how the scores on subcriteria add up to the final grade, since they are not explicitly weighed. The panel recommends adapting the form to address this.

Examination Board

The master's programme falls under a faculty-wide Examination Board (EB). This Board is responsible for ensuring the quality of examinations. The Examination Board periodically reviews the programme's assessment plan to determine whether assessment methods match the learning objectives they test, and whether these objectives are sufficiently in line with the learning outcomes of the programme. The results of this evaluation are recorded in writing and sent to the programme management. The EB also periodically checks whether the assessment dossiers are present, correct and complete. The EB holds periodic consultations with the management of the programme. Written exams are increasingly created digitally, using Testvision assessment software. After completing the evaluation of the examination, this programme offers an analysis of each test item. The outcome of the analysis is recorded in writing and discussed with the responsible examiners.

The EB annually ensures the reliability of thesis assessment by means of a sample from the thesis database. It reads theses without any knowledge of the accompanying assessment form and marginally assesses them on criteria such as problem definition justification, method, structure, use of sources and argumentation. The grade obtained is then compared with the grade given by the supervisors and if there is a difference of

more than 1 point, the assessment form is reviewed for possible explanations. If no explanation is found, the EB consults with the supervisor or course coordinator with the aim of improving the thesis assessment.

The panel noted that the EB adequately performs its quality assurance task through quality checks on courses and final theses. Panel and EB discussed the Board's assurance policies and practices. The panel concluded that the EB is well embedded in faculty quality assurance systems and proactively contributes to discussion around current issues, such as language models. The EB discontinued its initial sampling of assessment dossiers in the academic year 2022-2023 when it found that their completion was not yet up to standard in all programmes, and ensured that programmes prioritized completing the dossiers. The panel does recommend that the EB organize more frequent formal consultations with the programme management to ensure that there is a structural conversation about assessment quality. The EB now functions quite autonomously, and the panel sees opportunities to achieve more coordination and keep a finger on the pulse of current developments in the programme.

Considerations

The panel praises the thorough design of assessment policy and practice in the master's programme. Testing is varied and appropriate. The panel is positive about the standardization and archiving of tests via assessment dossiers. It notes that lecturers have a lot of freedom in designing tests, and that they decide whether changes should be made to the test format, for instance when the use of language models makes changes necessary. The panel advises the programme and faculty to provide more guidance here. According to the panel, the assessment of the final level is well designed. The thesis assessment form is insightful, partly due to the space for qualitative feedback and explanation it provides. The panel recommends reviewing the weighting of sub-criteria. The Examination Board fulfils its assurance role and is proactive in doing so. The panel does advise the Board to organize formal consultations with the programme management more often, to ensure a structural discussion about test quality.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 3.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings

The panel read 15 master's theses from IBL, representing all tracks (6 for CCC and 9 for the two tracks that were merged into T&I per September 2023). It found that all theses demonstrated the quality that may be expected of a master's programme in International Business Law. The theses clearly reflected the subject matter and topical themes that are central to the programme. The panel found that some theses diverged from business law, which may be a consequence of the less corporate focus of the T&I track and its predecessors (see Standard 1).

The programme keeps in touch with its graduates and found that its graduates are successful in entering the labour market. CCC graduates end up in a variety of fields, such as NGOs, the banking industry, government, law firms, consultancy and academia. Students from the T&I-track have no record yet, as 2023-2024 is the first year of the track's current form. However, past graduates from the programme had no trouble finding a variety of positions in law firms, government, consultancy, academia and elsewhere. Alumni from both tracks told the panel that they found themselves in demand when entering the job market. Alumni were satisfied with the way the programme equipped them for the labour market and mentioned that IBL

provided them with a useful network in the field, particular in the case of CCC, which links to a small community.

Considerations

The panel considers the level of IBL master's theses to be up to standard. The theses reflect the themes and topics that are prominent in the programme. Alumni are in high demand in the job market and end up in a variety of positions. They are pleased with the way they were prepared in the programme.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 4.

General conclusion

The panel's assessment of the master's programme International Business Law is positive.

Development points

1. Investigate whether the T&I track should redirect its gaze towards a more corporate approach, since this is more in line with the programme title International Business Law.
2. Ensure that faculty and programme management provide more guidance in determining and changing assessment types, for example when taking the use of language models such as ChatGPT into account. Provide programme and faculty frameworks that support lecturers in such choices.
3. Review the weighting of subcomponents on the thesis assessment form with other programmes within the faculty.
4. Organize more frequent formal consultation between the Examination Board and the programme management to ensure a structural discussion about assessment quality.

Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

A) Knowledge and understanding

1. The IBL graduate has thorough knowledge and understanding of the strategically chosen disciplines of the IBL programme.
2. The IBL graduate explains the relationship between the disciplines of international business law and recognizes the legal issues under discussion.
3. The IBL graduate recognizes the actors of the international business law environment and how they interact with each other, while acknowledging legal and cultural differences. The Master's graduate analyzes the role of governments and the horizontal economic relationships between them, the vertical relationship between them and private business and, finally, the horizontal relationships between private companies. Consequently, the graduate discerns the legal position of various parties and understands how the conduct of these parties can influence legal positions.

B) Application of knowledge and understanding

4. The IBL graduate applies critically the acquired knowledge to concrete legal problems.
5. The IBL graduate evaluates practical problems and synthesizes them into legally manageable solutions.
6. The IBL graduate researches and evaluates scholarly literature, case law and legal and policy documents.
7. The IBL graduate applies, synthesizes and critically evaluates existing theories and case-law.
8. The IBL graduate independently applies research methodologies and researches and writes a jurisprudential study of some size. The IBL graduate evaluates the value of research findings, synthesizes and compares re-search results to theoretical debates within particular fields of law.

C) Handling complexity and formulating judge-ments

9. The IBL graduate analyses complex issues in relation to international business and recommends useful legal solutions. An IBL graduate formulates an independent and well-substantiated opinion on complex legal issues and evaluates the existing debates on various international business law topics.

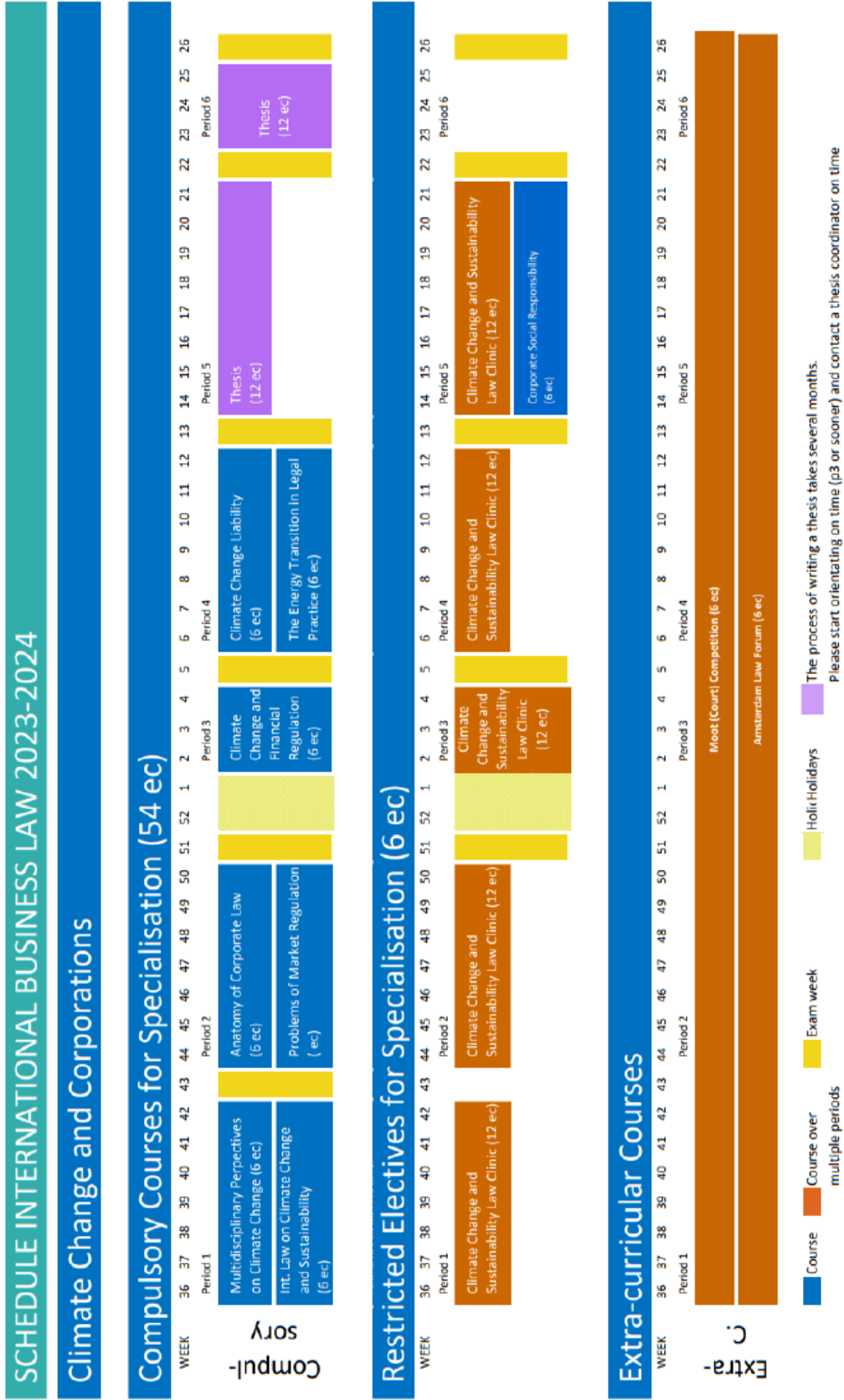
D) Communication

10. The IBL graduate describes and demonstrates in a critical manner both orally and in writing the design, the research methods and methodologies, the theoretical foundations and conclusions of their research to lawyers and non-lawyers. The IBL graduate has an effective and clear verbal and written proficiency in English legal terminology.

E) Learning skills

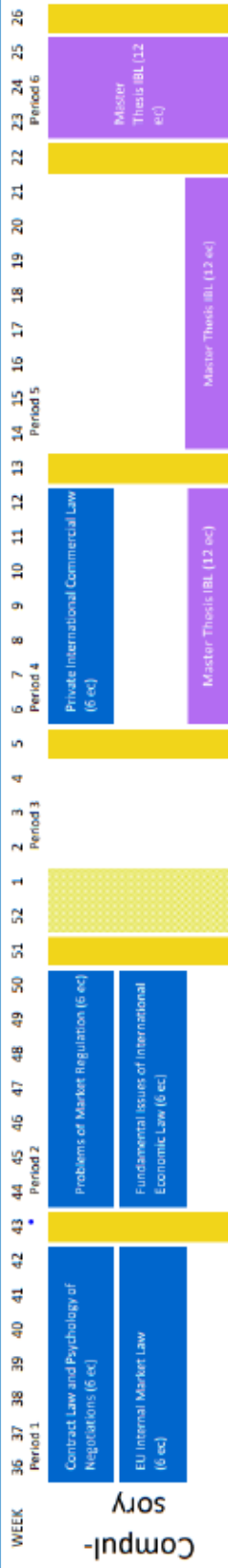
11. The IBL graduate has a self-critical attitude that enables her/him to independently acquire new knowledge and to improve the analytical, critical and creative thinking, the research and communicative skills.

Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

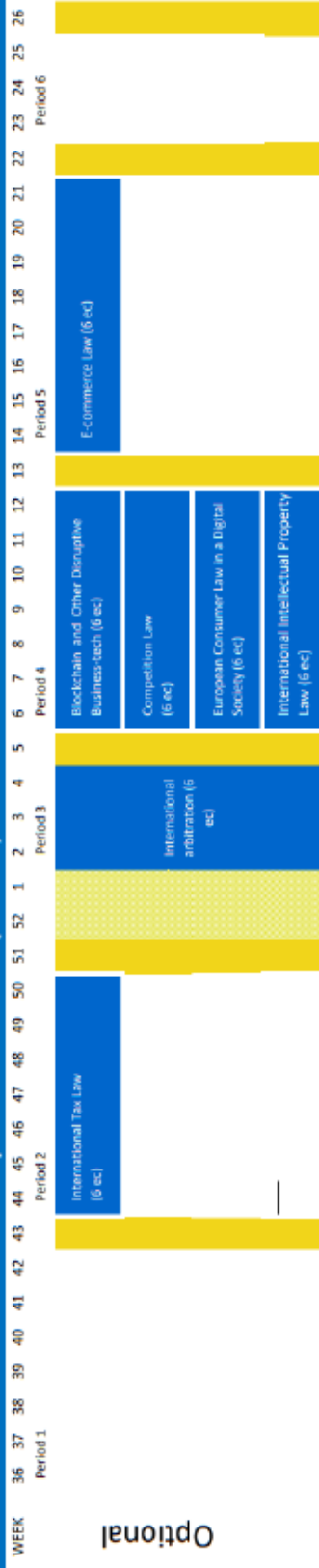


Trade en Investment

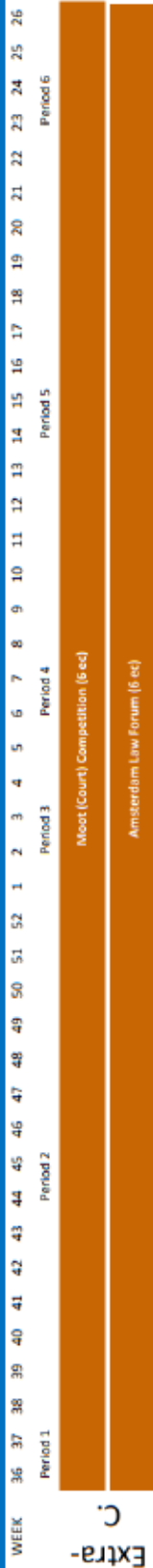
Compulsory Courses for Specialisation (42 ec)



Restricted Electives for Specialisation (18 ec)



Extra-curricular Courses



- Course
- Course over multiple periods
- Exam week
- Holi Holidays
- The process of writing a thesis takes several months. Please start orientating on time (p3 or sooner) and contact a thesis coordinator on time

Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

Day 1: 7 February 2024

09.00	09.30	Arrival panel and welcome
09.30	10.00	Preliminary meeting panel (intern) & consultation hour
10.00	10.30	Conversation with faculty management
10.30	10.45	Break
10.45	11.15	Conversation with programme management B and M Rechtsgeleerdheid
11.15	11.45	Break
11.45	12.15	Conversation with students & alumni B Rechtsgeleerdheid
12.15	12.45	Conversation teaching staff B Rechtsgeleerdheid
12.45	13.45	Lunch
13.45	14.15	Conversation with students M Rechtsgeleerdheid
14.15	14.45	Conversation with alumni M Rechtsgeleerdheid
14.45	15.15	Conversation with teaching staff M Rechtsgeleerdheid
15.15	15.45	Break
15.45	16.45	Conversation with Exam Board
16.45	18.00	Composing preliminary findings B and M Rechtsgeleerdheid (panel intern); possibility for asking additional questions management B and M Rechtsgeleerdheid

Day 2: 8 February 2024

08.45	09.00	Arrival panel
09.00	09.30	Conversation with programme management B Law in Society en M LPIS
09.30	09.45	Break
09.45	10.15	Conversation with students & alumni B Law in Society
10.15	10.45	Conversation with teaching staff B Law in Society
10.45	11.15	Break
11.15	11.45	Conversation with students & alumni M LPIS
11.45	12.15	Conversation with teaching staff M LPIS
12.15	13.15	Lunch
13.15	14.45	Composing preliminary findings B Law in Society and M LPIS (panel intern)
14.45	15.15	Conversation with programme management B and M Notarieel Recht
15.15	15.45	Break
15.45	16.15	Conversation with students & alumni B and M Notarieel Recht
16.15	16.45	Conversation with teaching staff B and M Notarieel Recht
16.45	18.00	Composing preliminary findings B and M Notarieel Recht (panel intern); possibility for asking additional questions management B Law in Society, M LPIS, B and M Notarieel Recht

Day 3: 9 February 2024

08.45	09.00	Arrival panel
09.00	09.30	Conversation with programme management M Fiscaal Recht and M International Business Law
09.30	09.45	Break
09.45	10.15	Conversation with students & alumni M Fiscaal Recht
10.15	10.45	Conversation with teaching staff M Fiscaal Recht

10.45	11.15	Break
11.15	11.45	Conversation with students & alumni M International Business Law
11.45	12.15	Conversation with teaching staff M International Business Law
12.15	13.15	Lunch
13.15	14.30	Composing preliminary findings M Fiscaal Recht and M International Business Law (panel intern); possibility for asking additional questions management M Fiscaal Recht and M International Business Law
14.30	15.30	Final conversation programme management (all programmes)
15.30	16.00	Preparing feedback (panel intern)
16.00	16.30	Feedback

Appendix 4. Materials

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied 15 theses of the master's programme International Business Law. Information on the theses is available from Academion upon request.

The panel also studied other materials, which included:

- Previous NVAO reports
- Self-evaluations and appendices
- Regeling voor eindwerken Faculteit der Rechtsgeleerdheid 2022
- Kader kwaliteitszorg RCH 2023
- Annual report Examencommissie Rechtsgeleerdheid 2022-2023
- Annual report Career Services Rechtsgeleerdheid 2022-2023
- Faculteitsreglement 2017
- Facultaire Nota Toetsbeleid 2022
- Domain-specific Framework of Reference WO Rechtsgeleerdheid 2015
- Convenant civiel effect 2016
- Law in ACTION: Onderwijsvisie Faculteit der Rechtsgeleerdheid 2023
- Civiel effect in de VU-opleidingen 2023-2024 svz november 2023