



M Law and Politics of International Security
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

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Summary

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The panel considers that the profile of the VU's Law and Politics of International Security (LPIS) programme, with its focus on international security and its approach from the disciplines of law and politics, is a clear choice. The approach to the topics is multi-faceted and from a variety of perspectives, which is appropriate in view of the complexity of the subject matter. The interdisciplinary approach distinguishes the programme from more traditional legal masters. The panel discussed the collaboration between the two faculties involved and understood the positioning within the Faculty of Law. The panel concludes that the programme integrates social responsibility in line with the VU's educational vision. LPIS highlights contemporary societal issues, reflecting the faculty's vision of 'Law in Action'. The panel finds the programme's interdisciplinary focus unique nationally and internationally, combining theories and methods from international law and international relations. The link to the profession is provided by a representative advisory board. Seventeen intended learning outcomes outline the knowledge and skills that students are expected to acquire, demonstrating alignment with academic law programmes and master's standards. Overall, the panel endorses the level and focus of the programme as reflected in the intended outcomes.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The panel concludes that the LPIS programme is well structured and carefully developed, with sufficient space for students to shape their own learning trajectories. Courses emphasize writing, argumentation and research skills and cover topics such as international security and humanitarian law from different perspectives. All learning outcomes are addressed in the curriculum. In line with the VU's educational vision, the curriculum combines theory and practice, promotes social responsibility and encourages personal development through mentoring and small group interaction. The choice of English as the language of the programme is logical and necessary given its international focus. The intercultural exchange enhances learning outcomes, international networking and employability. The panel agrees with the admission criteria and the thorough admission process. The thesis process, with structured supervision in both individual and group settings, is highly valued. Students receive extensive guidance from approachable lecturers and mentoring groups. Students and staff form a close-knit community, and the expertise and didactic skills of staff are among the strengths of the programme. The cohesiveness of the group contributes to the feasibility of the programme and to student learning. Overall, the panel concludes that the educational environment meets the basic quality standards well.

Standard 3. Student assessment

The panel commends the thorough design of assessment policy and practice in the master's programme. The assessment methods are varied and appropriate, and the panel is positive about the standardization and archiving of tests via assessment dossiers. The panel recognizes that lecturers have considerable freedom in the design of tests. Lecturers also determine whether changes to the assessment format are necessary, for instance when the use of language models necessitates change. However, the panel recommends that the programme and the faculty provide more guidance to ensure consistency and to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort. 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 that the weighting of the sub-criteria be reviewed to ensure that it accurately reflects their importance. The Examination Board is fulfilling its assurance role and is proactive in doing so. The panel does advise the Board to organize more frequent formal consultations with programme management, to facilitate a structured discussion on assessment quality.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

In reviewing the theses, the panel found a good standard and a range of approaches reflecting the diverse backgrounds of the students. While interdisciplinary engagement is valuable, attention to legal scholarship and skills remain important for an LLM programme. Productive discussions with the LPIS programme confirmed that this focus is maintained. In addition, graduates find employment in a wide variety of sectors, suggesting that the programme effectively equips them for diverse careers. Alumni interviewed confirmed that they felt well prepared by the programme for their future careers.

Score table

The panel assesses the programme as follows:

Master's programme Law and Politics of International Security

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

Date: 16 July 2024

Dr. Irene Conradie, panel secretary

Introduction

Procedure

Assessment

On 7, 8 and 9 February 2024, the master's programme Law and Politics of International Security of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam 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. Before the VU site visit, 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 organisers 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 February 2023 and August 2023). In consultation with the coordinator, the panel chair selected 15 theses of the master's programme. They took the diversity of final grades and examiners into account. 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;
- 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 LLM MSc., assistant professor of Private, Business and Labour Law at Tilburg University (referee);
- Mr. dr. E.G.D. (Emanuel) van Dongen LLM, 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 Law and Politics of International Security 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:	Law and Politics of International Security
CROHO number:	60685
Level:	Master
Orientation:	Academic
Number of credits:	60 EC
Specialisations or tracks:	-
Location:	Amsterdam
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Language of instruction:	English
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2024

Description of the assessment

Organization

The master's programme Law and Politics of International Security (LPIS) is one of twelve programmes organized by the Faculty of Law of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU). The LPIS programme is a collaboration between the Faculties of Law and Social Sciences. The educational portfolio holders of both faculties meet regularly with the programme management. The programme director is assisted by a programme coordinator. The programme director comes from the Faculty of Law, while the coordinator is appointed by the Faculty of Social Sciences. The programme director is functionally accountable to the faculty portfolio holders 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 examination board of the Faculty of Law oversees the examination and assessment policy of LPIS. The LPIS programme committee consists of four members: one lecturer-member from each faculty and two student-members.

Recommendations from the previous accreditation panel

The previous panel suggested that performance criteria should be developed with thesis supervisors to clarify expectations for achieving a grade 6, 7 or 8, with the aim of improving consistency in grading and providing students with clearer guidelines for producing high quality theses. Since 2018, the team of thesis supervisors have been discussing the assessment criteria and working through specific examples to develop a shared understanding. The panel commends the programme for its timely and thorough implementation.

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 in Law and Politics of International Security (LPIS) at the VU aims to provide students with an interdisciplinary approach to international security issues at a high academic level. The programme has a broad academic scope, not only because of its interdisciplinary and international nature, but also because of the study of different approaches to international security issues. LPIS graduates are expected to have a comprehensive understanding of the core concepts of international law and international relations, which are essential for analysing security challenges in their political and social contexts. Social responsibility and personal development are also an integral part of the programme.

With this approach, the programme incorporates the VU's educational vision. Its programmes should contribute to students becoming committed and conscientious academics, exploring boundaries and knowing how to push them when necessary. 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. LPIS integrates contemporary societal issues into its curriculum, emphasizing the social context of legal practice. This is in line with the faculty's educational vision of 'Law in Action', which focuses on an academic, reflective and critical approach to law. The panel has studied the international benchmarking of the programme and considers the interdisciplinary focus of the programme on international security to be unique and distinctive both nationally and internationally. This is due to the combination of theories and methods from international law and international relations, with an emphasis on their interaction in the field

of security. The link with the profession is provided by an advisory board with three members representing the public sector, the non-governmental sector and academia.

The knowledge and skills that students are expected to acquire are outlined in seventeen intended learning outcomes (see Appendix 3). These outcomes reflect a high level of ambition and require an in-depth understanding of the core concepts, theories and methodologies of international law and political science, aligning well with the focus on international conflict and security. The panel appreciates the alignment of the LPIS outcomes with the key characteristics of academic law programmes and the Dublin descriptors for master's programmes, as demonstrated in a detailed table. The programme does not directly prepare students to meet the requirements for the 'robed professions' (judges, lawyers or public prosecutors), but it does provide a partly extra-curricular route for those with a bachelor's degree in Law (see Standard 2). Overall, the panel endorses the level and orientation of the programme as reflected in its intended outcomes.

Considerations

The panel considers that the profile of the LPIS programme, with its focus on international security and its approach from the disciplines of law and politics, is a clear choice. The approach to the topics is multi-faceted and from a variety of perspectives, which is appropriate in view of the complexity of the subject matter. The interdisciplinary approach distinguishes the programme from more traditional legal masters. The panel discussed the collaboration between the two faculties involved and understood the positioning within the Faculty of Law. The panel concludes that the programme integrates social responsibility in line with the VU's educational vision. LPIS highlights contemporary societal issues, reflecting the faculty's vision of 'Law in Action'. The panel finds the programme's interdisciplinary focus unique nationally and internationally, combining theories and methods from international law and international relations. The link to the profession is provided by a representative advisory board. Seventeen intended learning outcomes outline the knowledge and skills that students are expected to acquire, demonstrating alignment with academic law programmes and master's standards. Overall, the panel endorses the level and focus of the programme as reflected in the intended outcomes.

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

Curriculum

The one-year LPIS programme (60 EC) embodies three key features: a multidisciplinary approach combining elements of international law and international relations; a thematic focus centered on international security; and an interactive, international academic community in which both staff and students actively participate in research and knowledge development. The curriculum consists of four compulsory core courses (30 EC), two restricted electives (12 EC) and a master's thesis (18 EC). The programme is offered in English, in line with its international focus.

The LPIS curriculum focuses on progressive knowledge and skill development through various courses, with an emphasis on writing, reasoning and research skills. Lectures and/or interactive seminars are the usual teaching format. The mandatory courses are strategically structured to build upon each other, ensuring coherence and alignment with the programme's objectives. Students begin with a multidisciplinary course, Theories and Approaches to War and Collective Security, in which war and collective security are approached from different theoretical angles in international law and political science. The two monodisciplinary courses deepen knowledge and understanding: the International Security Studies course explores various political science perspectives on global security challenges, while International Humanitarian Law focuses on the legal principles governing conduct during armed conflict, providing students with insights into the rules and regulations guiding humanitarian efforts in war zones. The fourth mandatory course, Politics of International Law, takes an interdisciplinary approach. By challenging the assumptions underlying international legal principles, such as cyber warfare and humanitarian intervention, students develop a deeper understanding of the complexities and uncertainties inherent in international law. In addition, the course aims to refine research and writing skills for the thesis. A set of eight elective courses allows students to explore topics related to core themes, including human rights, international criminal law and broader international crimes, and complements the compulsory courses. The panel found that the degree of interdisciplinarity varied. Some courses were not truly interdisciplinary given the background of the lecturers. Nevertheless, the panel sees a consistent combination of law and politics, with a focus on international security, throughout the courses.

The curriculum of the master's programme in Law and Politics of International Security (LPIS) is closely aligned with the educational vision of the VU and the Law in Action principle. The programme maintains a societal orientation by addressing real-world issues in assignments and the thesis, informed by research and discussions with practitioners. The programme works closely with professionals from a variety of backgrounds to strengthen the link between theory and practice. LPIS also fosters responsibility, training students to consider the social implications of legislation and policy decisions. LPIS emphasizes personal development through mentorship, small group interaction at the start of the year and thesis supervision. The panel clearly sees in the teaching and learning environment how the programme aligns with the VU-wide educational vision and the faculty's Law in Action teaching concept, and how this adds value for students.

In addition, the master's programme offers motivated and talented students the opportunity to follow the faculty's extracurricular, selective research track (18 EC). This teaches legal research at an advanced level. Furthermore, students with a bachelor's degree in law may fulfil the requirements for the 'robed professions' by taking two additional courses: Human Rights Protection in Europe (6 EC) as an elective component to fulfil art. 10, and Integration of European and International Law (4 EC) as an extra-curricular component to fulfil art. 10 and 11 of the 'Convenant civil effect'. The panel concludes, after reviewing a faculty overview, that the LPIS programme, with the additional courses, meets the requirements set forth by the 'Convenant civil effect'.

Language and internationalization

The international focus of the programme is reflected in the language of instruction, the content, the international staff, and the significant enrolment of international students. The current mix of Dutch and international students helps to bring out the added value of an international classroom. The panel discussed the choice of English as the language of the programme and the English name during the visit and agreed that this was a logical and necessary choice given the international focus. The use of English in the LPIS programme enhances the quality and thus the achievement of the intended learning outcomes by facilitating a diverse, international exchange of perspectives and expertise. It also fits in with the theme of international security and the English-language academic literature on the subject. The international focus

appeals to those seeking a combined legal and political approach to international security issues and enhances their employability in international organizations. As such, the programme fosters an international learning environment, broadening students' perspectives and networking opportunities.

Admission, guidance and feasibility

Students can be admitted to the programme when they either hold an academic bachelor's degree in Law, with at least one course in the field of international law; or Political Science, with at least one course in international relations; or International Relations; or a bachelor's degree at academic level with at least 18 EC in courses in International law and/or international relations and/or international security. They are selected based on merit and motivation. Students demonstrate their motivation in a motivation letter and through relevant (extracurricular) academic work and (substantiated) interest in international law, politics and security issues. 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 3.4, or 7.5 according to the Dutch grading system, is required. Two members of staff, one from the Faculty of Law and one from the Faculty of Social Sciences, read the applications and provide advice to the Admissions Board.

About 60% of students graduate nominally and 82% complete their studies within two years. The panel is satisfied with the progress of students within LPIS, especially given the number of students who take up internships, jobs and/or a second master's degree alongside their studies. The panel feels that the master's thesis process has a positive impact on this. The thesis process involves discussing initial ideas with potential supervisors at the thesis market and selecting a topic relevant to international security with an interdisciplinary approach. After submitting a topic statement, students are assigned a supervisor. The second assessor is always from the other discipline, which fits in with the broad scope of the programme. Students present preliminary ideas at mandatory poster sessions, develop and submit a detailed thesis proposal, and finally complete and submit the thesis by the specified deadlines. Students attend four to five thesis seminar meetings to discuss their work in progress, and individual feedback is also provided by the supervisor. The students the panel spoke to were positive about this structure and the guidance provided.

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 a mentorship system. At the beginning of the academic year, each student is assigned to a mentor group led by a member of staff. The mentor group meets several times a year, either individually or as a group, with pre-distributed discussion questions and required written input. Students greatly appreciate this arrangement. 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. This includes practical matters related to studying with a functional disability, complementing the provisions in the Teaching and Examination Regulations (TER) and the information provided by the Infopoint Studying with a Functional Disability (SMF) regarding studying at the VU and campus accessibility. 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 endorses the admission criteria and the thorough admission process. It also supports the recent changes to improve transparency. The programme is clearly feasible, with most students completing in less than two years, despite taking extra-curricular options. Support and guidance are adequate and valued by students. The panel highly appreciates the way LPIS invests in group cohesiveness: this increases feasibility

by encouraging links between fellow students and between students and staff, but also enriches international and cultural exchange. According to the panel, the thesis trajectory is a best practice in the faculty. The structured process helps students to graduate on time. Students also told the panel that they are supported in finding a thesis topic from the beginning of the programme.

Teaching staff

The core teaching team, which teaches the compulsory courses, including the supervision and second reading of theses, consists of seven members drawn from the Faculties of Law and Social Sciences. They are all active researchers publishing in the fields of international law, international relations and security studies. Every member of the teaching staff with an appointment of 0.4 FTE or more is to have obtained or be in the process of obtaining a UTQ (University Teaching Qualification). Lecturers who are newly appointed and do not yet hold a UTQ are generally given the opportunity to get started quickly, in addition to the Start-to-teach day offered by the VU Centre of Teaching and Learning (CTL). Currently, six members of the LPIS core teaching staff hold a UTQ or equivalent, and one is in the process of obtaining the Dutch University Teaching Qualification (BKO). Two members of staff hold a Senior Teaching Qualification (STQ).

The panel concludes that the LPIS teaching staff are very well equipped to teach on the programme. They combine strong subject expertise, a sufficient level of English and evident didactic skills, and ensure a strong link with research. The panel also found the teaching staff to be enthusiastic and energetic. Students value staff as approachable, committed and engaging. Visiting lecturers are invited to provide a broader professional and academic perspective. Students feel they are being taught by experts and invited into their circle and network. According to the panel, the LPIS teaching staff is one of the strengths of the programme.

Considerations

The panel concludes that the LPIS programme is well structured and carefully developed, with sufficient space for students to shape their own learning trajectories. Courses emphasize writing, argumentation and research skills and cover topics such as international security and humanitarian law from different perspectives. All learning outcomes are addressed in the curriculum. In line with the VU's educational vision, the curriculum combines theory and practice, promotes social responsibility and encourages personal development through mentoring and small group interaction. The choice of English as the language of the programme is logical and necessary given its international focus. The intercultural exchange enhances learning outcomes, international networking and employability. The panel agrees with the admission criteria and the thorough admission process. The thesis process, with structured supervision in both individual and group settings, is highly valued. Students receive extensive guidance from approachable lecturers and mentoring groups. Students and staff form a close-knit community, and the expertise and didactic skills of staff are among the strengths of the programme. The cohesiveness of the group contributes to the feasibility of the programme and to student learning. Overall, the panel concludes that the educational environment meets the basic quality standards well.

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 LPIS 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. At faculty level, these policies have been translated into the *Nota Toetsbeleid* (September 2022). According to this document, tests must meet criteria regarding 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 shows how the learning objectives of each course are assessed and how these objectives align with the ILOs. Teaching and assessment are carried out, evaluated and recorded in a course-specific assessment dossier. The faculty collects these assessment dossiers centrally.

LPIS uses a variety of assessment formats as evidenced by the assessment plan. The programme places a strong emphasis on paper assignments, as this is considered to be a good assessment format to assess writing skills as well as argumentation and research skills. Students also give individual and group (video) presentations and complete writing assignments. Additionally, in the electives, students participate in an advocacy competition, write legal and policy advice, 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 the light of these recent developments. The VU is preparing central frameworks to regulate the use of generative AI in education and to signal possible pitfalls. The VU Centre for Teaching & Learning is currently preparing a customized course for the faculty on AI applications.

The panel commends the way in which assessment and assessment policy are designed in the LPIS programme. It notes that assessment is varied and appropriate. Through mechanisms and means such as the principle of dual control, rubrics or answer models and the use of an assessment plan and templates, the programme guarantees that assessment 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 considerable degree of freedom in the design of tests, and that they decide whether changes should be made to the test format, for example if the use of language models makes changes necessary. While this allows for flexibility, the panel recommends that the programme and the faculty provide more guidance on adapting assessments in light of language models. This will ensure that lecturers do not have to reinvent the wheel in developing appropriate assessment methods and will know what is acceptable within the faculty.

Thesis assessment

Theses are assessed using standardized online assessment forms, which clearly state the assessment criteria. Each thesis is assessed by at least two independent examiners. The first assessor is also the thesis supervisor and responsible for the plagiarism check of the final version of the thesis. This version is

submitted to a second assessor from the other discipline for an independent evaluation. The first and second assessors discuss the reasons for their assessments and the grade to be given. They then complete the assessment form. In the event of a disagreement (1 point or more), the Examination Board may appoint a third assessor to determine the final grade.

The panel is satisfied with the way in which the final level is assessed in the programme. It considers that the two assessors act with sufficient independence. The assessment form contains relevant criteria and provides ample 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), responsible for ensuring the quality of examinations. The EB annually reviews the programme's assessment plan to determine if assessment methods align with the learning objectives they test and whether these objectives sufficiently reflect the programme's learning outcomes. The results of this evaluation are documented and sent to the programme management. The EB also regularly checks whether assessment dossiers are present, accurate and complete. The EB holds periodic consultations with programme management. A growing number of written exams are now created digitally using Testvision assessment software. After completing the evaluation of an examination, the software programme offers an analysis of each test item. The outcome of this analysis is documented and discussed with the responsible examiners.

The EB annually ensures the reliability of thesis assessment by means of a sample drawn from the thesis database. This sample is assessed anonymously, focusing on criteria such as problem definition justification, method, structure, use of sources and argumentation. The grade obtained by the EB is then compared with the grade given by the supervisors. If there is a discrepancy exceeding one 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 thesis assessment.

The panel noted that the EB adequately performs its quality assurance role through checks on courses and final theses. The 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 discussions on 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 urged programmes to prioritize the completion of dossiers. The panel recommends 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 currently operates quite autonomously, and the panel sees opportunities to enhance coordination and maintain awareness of current developments within the programme.

Considerations

The panel commends the thorough design of assessment policy and practice in the master's programme. The assessment methods are varied and appropriate, and the panel is positive about the standardization and archiving of tests via assessment dossiers. The panel recognizes that lecturers have considerable freedom in the design of tests. Lecturers also determine whether changes to the assessment format are necessary, for instance when the use of language models necessitates change. However, the panel

recommends that the programme and the faculty provide more guidance to ensure consistency and to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort. 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 that the weighting of the sub-criteria be reviewed to ensure that it accurately reflects their importance. The Examination Board is fulfilling its assurance role and is proactive in doing so. The panel does advise the Board to organize more frequent formal consultations with programme management, to facilitate a structured discussion on assessment 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

Prior to the site visit, the panel reviewed a sample of fifteen recently completed theses. The panel found the overall quality of the theses to be of a decent to good standard. In all the theses examined, the level of work was consistent with expectations for master students. The panel observed a range of thesis approaches, with some emphasizing the legal perspective and others incorporating a strong political science angle. This reflects the diverse backgrounds that students bring to the LLM programme. While a broad approach is valuable, the panel noted that some theses were limited in their legal focus. In a productive discussion with the programme, the panel was reassured that the programme shares the importance of including (social) legal scholarship and skills, which is consistent with the programme's expectation that students develop a multi-faceted perspective. The panel encourages the programme to continue to ensure that the theses are fully aligned with the Master of Laws degree.

The panel also assessed the career readiness of graduates. The programme has established a dedicated LinkedIn group, the LPIS Alumni Group, which currently has over 300 members. The panel observed that graduates are finding employment in a variety of sectors, including academia, government ministries (particularly foreign affairs, defence, justice and security), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the private sector. In addition, the programme's regular alumni days provide valuable opportunities for interaction. This event coincides with the advisory board meeting and facilitates engagement between alumni, board members and current students. These interactions provide valuable insights into career paths and industry trends, potentially enhancing graduate career readiness. In particular, interviewed graduates identified structuring arguments, dealing with different perspectives and engaging in constructive debate as valuable for their future careers.

Considerations

In reviewing the theses, the panel found a good standard and a range of approaches reflecting the diverse backgrounds of the students. While interdisciplinary engagement is valuable, attention to legal scholarship and skills remain important for an LLM programme. Productive discussions with the programme confirmed that this focus is maintained. In addition, graduates find employment in a wide variety of sectors, suggesting that the programme effectively equips them for diverse careers. Alumni interviewed confirmed that they felt well prepared by the programme for their future careers.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets Standard 4.

General conclusion

The panel's assessment of the master's programme Law and Politics of International Security is positive.

Development points

1. 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.
2. Review the weighting of subcomponents on the thesis assessment form with other programmes within the faculty.
3. 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

The students graduating with a Master's degree will have the following knowledge and understanding:

- 1) International conflict and security law, including jus ad bellum, jus in bello and jus post bellum;
- 2) Contemporary theories of international security, as developed in political science (especially IR theory);
- 3) The nature and development of contemporary armed conflicts;
- 4) The overlaps and differences between the legal and political science approaches to international security;
- 5) The interrelationship between international law and international politics in the area of international security;
- 6) The difficulties involved in the application of 'traditional' legal and political science concepts to contemporary armed conflicts.

Being capable of:

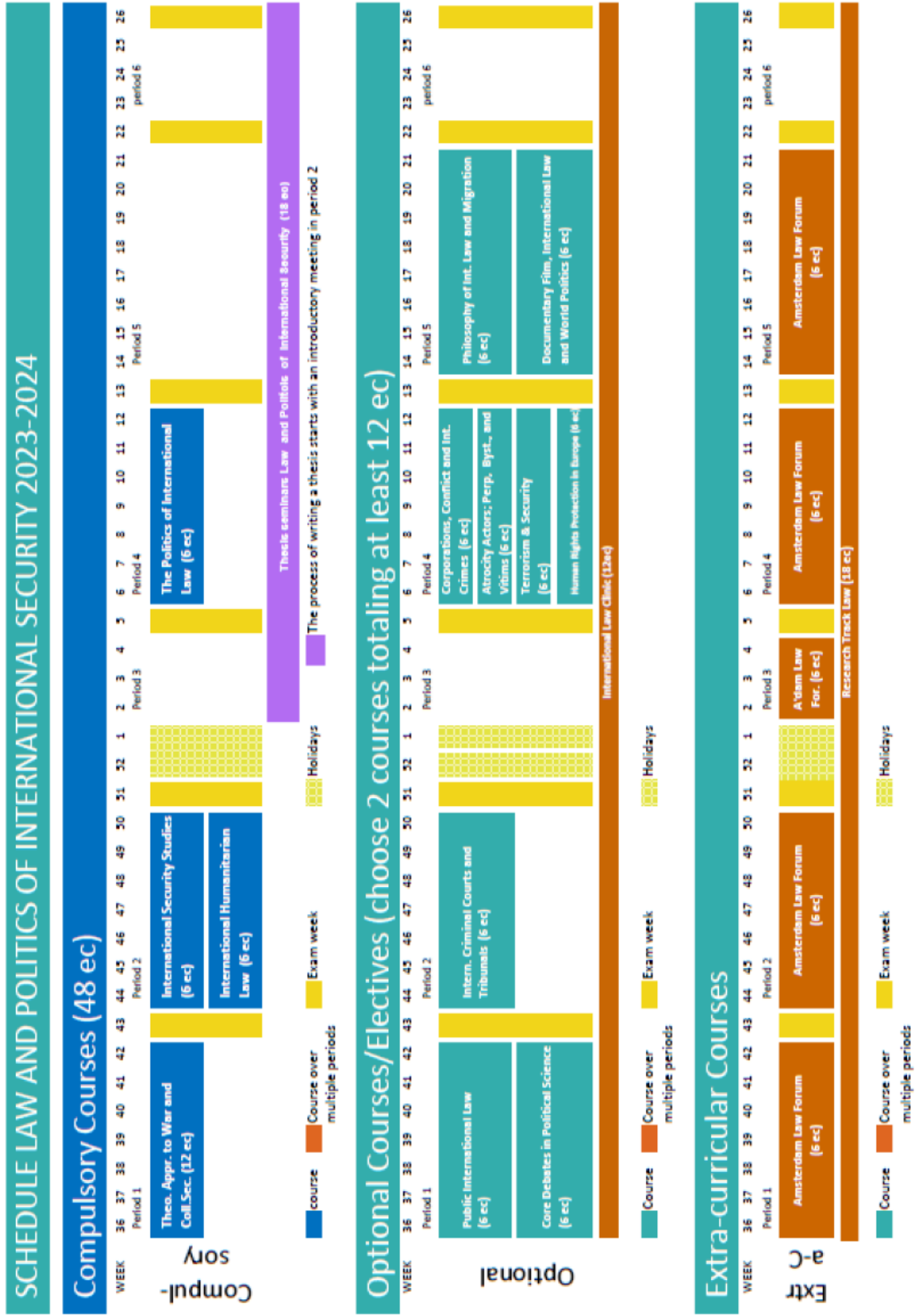
- 7) Identifying and applying theoretical approaches from international law and political science;
- 8) Identifying the differences and overlaps between the various methodologies used in law and political science;
- 9) Independently setting up a legal and political arguments in the area of international conflict and security law;
- 10) Independently applying research methods and interpret results;
- 11) Independently setting up, carry out and report the result of research project;
- 12) Critically reflecting on research results and relating those results to theoretical debates within the selected domains.

Show evidence of:

The student graduating with a Master's degree will have a critical, creative and innovative attitude with regard to:

- 13) The way in which problems in the area of international conflict and security are framed in academic, legal and policy debates;
- 14) The existing legal framework in the field of international conflict and security;
- 15) Existing policy solutions in the field of international conflict and security;
- 16) Existing scientific theories in the area of international security;
- 17) Academic research as well as research results.

Appendix 2. Programme curriculum



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 and 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 Law and Politics of International Security. Information on the theses is available from Academion upon request.

The panel also studied other materials, which included:

- Previous NVAO report
- Self-evaluation report M Law and Politics of International Security
- 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
- Teaching and Examination Regulations (TER) Master LPIS 2023-2024
- Factsheet Master LPIS 2023
- Convenant Master Law and Politics of International Security
- Assessment plan and assessment matrix Master LPIS
- Master's Thesis Guide Law and Politics of International Security 2021-2022