Report on VU Amsterdam’s Communication and Information Studies programme development dialogue, 15 February 2019

Introduction

Three topics were discussed in the course of the development dialogue: the curriculum of the Bachelor’s programme in CIS, transition processes and connections to the job market.

1 The curriculum of the Bachelor’s programme in CIS

At the programme’s request, the discussion focused partly on the pros and cons of a broad Bachelor’s programme which in fact combines several narrower tracks. The panel raised the following points on this issue:

- Many broad CIS programmes offer opportunities for specialization at some point during the three-year Bachelor’s (e.g. two collective years followed by specialization in year 3 or division into separate tracks). The panel did not express a preference for a particular structure.
- Five tracks is a lot. Three clearly defined tracks offering a slightly wider focus than the current five could be an ideal solution.
- Language and Media is a strong label. The panel expressed the view that the labels of the linguistic specializations did not appeal to the imagination.
- The term ‘effective communication’ was not necessarily seen as being strong. The panel advised a sharper focus on the linguistic aspect of communication or on developing writing skills, using terms such as ‘writing and media’ and ‘creative writing’.

2 Transition processes

Curriculums within the Humanities have been subject to constant change in response to changing student needs, developments in the field of study, trends in society and evolving entry requirements on the job market. The panel expressed the following views on this situation:

- The only way for such changes to be successfully implemented is as part of a collective process that can count on strong and widespread support. This calls for a strong narrative which outlines a credible perspective for the future.
- Support from the university is a crucial component, for instance by giving people sufficient time to go through a transition, and support in the form of a process supervisor and further training or retraining for staff.
- A transition is always an investment, even when aimed at achieving financial savings or turning loss-making programmes into financially sound ones.

3 Connection to the job market

Students argue that the programme is not doing enough to connect to the job market, while teaching staff have the impression that a strong effort was being made in this regard. The panel made the following recommendation:

- Identify the moments when teaching staff believe they are providing this connection and make them more explicit, either by organizing specific, clearly labelled sessions within a course or by devoting an entire course to the subject (e.g. along the lines of the University of Twente’s ‘Prepare your Future’ course).