

# SUMMARY

Health and Society. Environmental Sciences. Future Planet Studies. Language and Cultural Studies. These are just a few of the current range of Bachelor's programmes at Dutch universities. Broad, cross-disciplinary Bachelor's programmes like these have become popular. The same goes for the Master's phase, where we find such programmes as Environment & Society Studies, Urban Studies, Earth, Life & Climate, Literature, Culture & Society and Regenerative Medicine & Technology. The landscape of the university has changed dramatically since the introduction of the Bachelor-Master system. Before, students specialised in a specific subject. Now, they are more likely to choose a broader focus, and thus an interdisciplinary programme.

What is the best way to interweave interdisciplinarity into higher education? That is the question at the heart of this foresight study, with which The Young Academy intends to launch the debate about interdisciplinarity in university education. The study is based on input by The Young Academy's members, who represent a broad spectrum of disciplines. Based on a series of meetings, a survey and interviews, The Young Academy has identified the obstacles and opportunities that members experience when setting up and implementing interdisciplinary programmes in academia.

Interdisciplinarity in higher education means:

*Teaching by teams or individuals that integrates and applies information, data, techniques, methods, perspectives, concepts and theories from two or more disciplines or fields of study for the purpose of addressing practical or theoretical problems whose solutions lie beyond the scope of a single discipline.*

The members of The Young Academy believe that interdisciplinary education can offer added value. The question is: what phase in a student's academic career is best suited to this type of education? Most of the members consider a basic grounding in one discipline essential. They favour a system in which students first study a single

discipline in-depth before broadening their horizon. As long as that basic grounding is missing, it is better to provide interdisciplinary education in small doses.

Students may require a broad interdisciplinary education to prepare themselves for the multifaceted labour market and the growing demand for multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary research. The more closely multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary research institutes are involved in teaching, the more interdisciplinary research and education will reinforce each other in a positive direction. There are also certain courses of study that are, by definition, cross-disciplinary, such as biomedical technology and gender studies. Problems and obstacles encountered when introducing interdisciplinarity in higher education are: the risk that disciplinary programmes will be crowded out, practical impediments such as separate budgets and organisational structures, testing and assessment issues, and an imperfect correspondence with occupational profiles.

The Young Academy makes specific recommendations that can help instructors, administrators and students give interdisciplinarity a place in education.

Recommendations for teaching staff:

- Work together on deepening and enhancing knowledge. Genuine curiosity is a prerequisite.
- Do more to get an inside view of other disciplines. Create a platform where disciplines can come together.
- Check whether students are sufficiently equipped and have the right expectations.
- Start with a relevant theme that covers different disciplines.
- Start with a small team to facilitate coordination.
- Work with a coordinator who monitors the course from start to finish.
- Define the attainment aims of a course; this should involve more than a test of the individual disciplinary contributions.
- Avoid superficiality; do justice to the uniqueness and beauty of each subject.
- Summer or winter school may be an option beyond the faculty structure.
- Teach interdisciplinarity in proportion to disciplinaryity. Interdisciplinary education can only exist by the grace of disciplinary instruction.

Recommendations for university administrators:

- Declare your support for interdisciplinary education, for example by incorporating it into your university's vision or mission.
- Back up this vision in specific ways, for example by introducing interdisciplinary minors.
- Make cross-faculty teaching possible by adapting the rules that impede or obstruct it. Make firm agreements about how instructors are to be deployed.
- Make it possible for Master's students and PhD candidates to develop their

interdisciplinary interests and to do interdisciplinary research.

- Set aside funds for people who wish to devote themselves to interdisciplinary teaching and give the networks, platforms or centres that are set up as a result financial support.
- See that there is an even balance between interdisciplinary initiatives and the retention of the traditional disciplines.

Recommendations for students:

- Seek out existing and well-organised interdisciplinary academic programmes.
- Seek out opportunities outside the official programmes. On paper, the opportunities to train in more than one discipline are almost unlimited.
- Never lose sight of consistency in your study programme. Ask instructors or counsellors to advise you on the right combinations of subjects and learning pathways.
- Seek out existing interdisciplinary research groups or research institutes for inspiration and advice on meaningful forms of interdisciplinarity.
- Don't forget that interdisciplinarity requires you to have a firm basis in at least one discipline.