

## **CIEE Study Center**

University of Amsterdam

Fall semester, Academic year, Spring semester

### **ACB Evaluation Report Amsterdam Spring 2000**

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#### **Evaluation Team**

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If you have feedback about this ACB Evaluation please email [evaluations@ciee.org](mailto:evaluations@ciee.org)

There were thirty two students participating in the Council Study Center in Amsterdam during the Spring 2000 semester, three of whom had continued from the Fall 1999 term.

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#### **Introduction**

The Academic Consortium Board (ACB) of Council is pleased to present the following report on the Council Study Center at the Universiteit van Amsterdam (UvA), The Netherlands. The report of the site visit team was received by members of the Evaluation Committee of the ACB. After review by that committee, the ACB accepted the report, and presents it to the Academic Consortium.

We wish to make clear at the outset that we greatly value the cooperation of the University of

Amsterdam and that this report is a review of Council's program and not a review or evaluation of the UvA as an institution. The review focuses on the program offered by the Council Study Center and on the courses offered by Council as part of the International Study Program at the UvA. In addition, the site visit team has examined Council's relations with the host institution and its analysis has been presented to Council staff.

### **Executive Summary**

A team of two U.S. faculty and one study abroad administrator visited the UvA and evaluated Council's European Studies program. The Council Study Center was established in 1993. The program has two main goals: to provide a rigorous academic program in European Studies through a combination of special program courses and direct matriculation into the university, and to provide a critical appreciation of Amsterdam and The Netherlands.

In Amsterdam, the team was delighted to find an eager and intellectually engaged community of students, staff, and faculty. The program was well integrated into the university structure under the joint responsibility of Council and the UvA's International School for Humanities and Social Sciences (ISHSS). It enjoyed the enthusiastic support of the higher administration, and was professionally managed by a local staff employed by the UvA. The relations between this local staff and the New York office of Council also seemed both cordial and professional.

The team was well satisfied with the academic rigor of the courses, the quality of the classroom and other instructional facilities, the access to research materials in the university's libraries, the students' abilities to gain access to state-of-the-art communications technologies, and the quality of housing. Amsterdam is a diverse and multi-ethnic "world" city that provides wonderful opportunities for academic study. The city boasts a lively art scene (including some of the finest museum collections in the world), ample opportunities for musical and other cultural explorations, and a lively climate for political and intellectual discussions. The program also offers students opportunities to participate in well-organized and academically rewarding excursions into the Dutch countryside and adjoining nations.

Recent and anticipated increases in Council enrollments, and a restructuring of the university's degree programs, which will permit a greater distinction between undergraduate and graduate studies, should provide new opportunities to expand course offerings and address student needs and interests. Several recommendations concerning this growth and restructuring are included in the main report.

### **Methodology**

The evaluation site visit team was composed of:

1. *Dr. Nancy Landale*, Professor of Sociology and Demography, Department of Sociology, The Pennsylvania State University,
2. *Dr. Thomas Hollihan*, Professor and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California, and
3. *Nancy Stubbs*, Associate Director of Study Abroad Programs, University of Colorado at Boulder.

The three members of the site visit team each reviewed the history and evaluation of the program produced by Council-International Study Programs (Council-ISP). They contacted the top three sending institutions and another three (a random sampling of sending institutions in the past five years) from the Academic Consortium to learn of their concerns.

The following documents were reviewed: the course catalog, course syllabi for all program courses, Resident Director end-of-session reports, statistical information on the participants (numbers, gender, and ethnicity statistics, sending institutions, etc.), staff and instructor curricula vitae, the pre-departure orientation handbook, the on-site orientation schedule and materials, student evaluation summaries and all the evaluations from Fall 1997 through Fall 1999, and the International Study Programs analysis of the strengths of the program, its

weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the program.

During the three-day site visit, team members met with the following persons: Dr. Hans de Wit, Vice President for International Affairs, UvA, Dr. Rob Hagendijk, Dean of the International School of Humanities and Social Sciences (ISHSS), Prof. Dr. Harm Pinkster, Vice President for Academic Affairs and chair of the ISHSS Supervisory Board, Drs. Geert de Vries, Mariëtta de Bruïne, Gert Hekma, André Gerrits, Rachel Esner, Lotty van Minnen, Ries Roowaan, UvA and ISHSS faculty who teach courses taken by Council students, Zach Silk, president of the ISHSS Student Advisory Panel and Jonneke Stans, president of the International Student Network.

Nico Evers, Council Resident Director/Program Manager, ISHSS; Marion Kuyper, Assistant Program Manager at ISHSS; and Danae Troup, Program Assistant.

Meetings were held with the Council students and with several former students who live in the Amsterdam area. Team members attended the two Council courses in session (Dutch Art History and its Interpretations: 17th-20th Centuries, and Social Trends, Social Problems, and Social Policy in the Netherlands). One of the two dormitories used by Council students, on Prinsengracht, was visited. Team members were given tours of various UvA buildings and taken on a North Holland tour and a canal tour of Amsterdam similar to ones offered as a field trip during the semester.

The site visit team jointly drafted and agreed on recommendations, which are made part of this report.

## **Evaluation**

In accordance with the Committee on Program Evaluation Plan for ACB Program Review, the evaluation report is divided into twelve sections below, corresponding with the terms of reference specified in the plan.

### **I. Quality of the Academic Activities Including Teaching and Assessment**

#### *A. Teaching*

The UvA academic year consists of three trimesters. The first trimester corresponds with the U.S. fall semester. Two special courses are taught for Council students only. Students choose one of these and also enroll in regular UvA courses. Most courses in the humanities and social sciences earn 5 semester hours of credit, so the typical course load during the trimester is 2 UvA courses plus one of the Council special courses.

During the spring semester the UvA courses are taken during the second trimester, which ends in late March. Students take the special Council courses during the last six weeks of the program. The UvA courses are special English-language courses offered to international students by the ISHSS. The special Council courses change from year to year, but have two foci: art history and culture or social science and European integration. All courses are taught by faculty assigned by the ISHSS.

Because the second trimester had ended prior to the evaluation visit, the only courses in session were the two Council "core" or "special" courses. Our observations of the teaching were based on student evaluations, discussions with faculty and students, examination of syllabi, and classroom visits to the two core courses.

The panel was impressed with the rigor of the courses and with the commitment of the faculty and their interest in both Council students and the program. The faculty seemed eager to adapt to the needs and interests of American students and recognized the differences between American and European higher education methods. During the meeting with faculty, we were struck by the depth of knowledge many had in their fields. We were delighted to be introduced to faculty who impressed us as active, engaged, and contributing members of their respective

disciplines.

### *B. Assessment*

We expected that at least some American students would have difficulty adjusting to the European system in which students are expected to be more self-disciplined and independent in their academic work. Both the students and the faculty reported, however, that Council participants were able to adjust to the differences in academic style and expectations. Depending on the disciplinary content and the individual instructor, reports regarding the performance of Council students varied. Some faculty felt that Council students were at the top of their classes. Others felt that Council students began with far less basic knowledge of the subject than European students and therefore had to struggle to meet expectations. It did not surprise us that some professors felt that American students have an underdeveloped knowledge of European history. However, the faculty reported that in other subjects (e.g., art history or ethnic and gender studies) Council students are equal to or even more capable than Dutch or other international students.

Council students typically take courses at the "2/3" level. In the Dutch system, this is supposed to indicate a course offered to both undergraduates and graduates. Students can petition to take level 3 courses, which are MA courses in social sciences and humanities. Historically, some Council students have found level 3 courses too challenging. This has led the Council staff to discourage students from taking level 3 courses, thus reducing somewhat the number of courses available. It seems, however, that this problem is likely to be addressed as the UvA moves to develop a clear BA/MA structure. This will make it easier to determine whether courses are being taught at the appropriate academic level for American undergraduate students.

In addition to the need for more 2/3 level courses, there will be a need for more introductory courses at levels 1 or 2 if the program continues to be open to students from disciplines like the sciences, engineering, or business.

### *C. Appropriateness of Academic Offerings*

We were especially pleased to observe the art history course that was being conducted on the day of our visit in the Rijksmuseum. The use of one of the world's great museums to provide real interaction with art is commendable. This is using the study abroad experience for the best possible academic ends, and provides students with an academic experience that could not be duplicated at most American universities. Similar arguments can also be made for the social sciences courses, which often focus on Dutch solutions for managing social problems and conditions. Students are able to use the Dutch experience as a point of contrast for American or European policies.

Given the growth of the Council program, and the fact that substantial numbers of students are being attracted whose interests lie in the area of media studies, communications, and business, the program might consider developing new core course(s) in those disciplines.

Finally, the students are especially enthusiastic about the opportunity to take courses in the International School with international students. We view this as a real strength of the program.

## **II. Quality and Appropriateness of Services**

### *A. Pre-departure services*

Students receive a packet of information upon their acceptance into the program. This packet contains information about the program (the Handbook), group travel arrangements, etc. Two to three weeks before their departure, a second mailing with a list of program participants, a map of Amsterdam, and other information pertinent to the program is sent. The materials are very comprehensive. They seem to contain everything a student needs to be ready for the

experience.

The students were asked if they had any difficulty working with Council staff in New York prior to leaving. There were no complaints. Several commented that they got prompt and helpful service from Jeff Sherman, the former Program Advisor.

#### *B. Orientation*

Students receive an orientation on arrival in Amsterdam that consists of group meetings, a tour of North Holland, a canal tour of Amsterdam, and a group dinner to allow them to get acquainted with each other. The orientation in the fall semester lasted 3-4 days. Because of the academic calendar, students arriving in January 2000 had to begin classes the day after arrival. This caused the orientation schedule to be abbreviated, and some students commented that they felt unprepared when the term began. We are told that classes in spring 2001 will begin in the second week of January, allowing time for the longer orientation. If the schedule reverts to the first week of January in the future, Council should work to ensure that there is more time for an orientation.

#### *C. Academic Advising*

The current level of academic advising in Amsterdam seems competent and professional. Students seemed satisfied by and large with the advising they received. If the program continues to grow, additional advising help may be required.

#### *D. Housing*

Students are very satisfied with their housing. Most live in Prinsengracht, a spacious, airy building conveniently close to the building on Spuistraat where the Council office is located and the humanities and core courses are taught. It has a splendid view of the canal and a nice walled garden in the back. Students mostly live two to a room, sharing a kitchen with about 10 other residents.

Vice President de Wit informed us that the UvA is developing additional housing for students in response to increased demand. He indicated that the growth of the Council program would not cause housing shortages in the future. Once this new housing is available, Council students will not be placed in the Prinsengracht complex.

#### *E. Student Activities*

There are two new student organizations in ISHSS. One, the International Student Network, was developed to provide social opportunities for international students. Parties, excursions, and other activities are sponsored for both international and Dutch students. There is a mentoring service available that matches Dutch students with new international students. This is a good opportunity for Council students to meet their Dutch counterparts.

The Student Advisory Panel is an advisory board for the administration of the ISHSS. Council students are able to participate in this panel. The SAP recently did a survey of international students and submitted a report on student satisfaction with the current academic structure. The report commented on the perceived quality of education, the availability of professors, and the proposed separation of the BA and MA curriculum, among other things.

Council provides museum passes to the participants. Given the number of fine museums in Amsterdam, the committee feels this is very appropriate.

### **III. Quality and Appropriateness of the Students Who Participate**

The students on the program seem to be academically prepared for their courses. They also represent a wide variety of academic disciplines and are drawn from a good mix of public and private institutions. We were pleased to note that there seemed to be a balance of men and women, and that ethnic minorities were represented in the program, at least this term. In

1998-99 the eligibility requirements were changed to require a minimum 3.0 grade point average. This seems to have improved the match between Council students and the demands of the academic program. The number of students failing courses appears to have dropped since this change was instituted. Several students identified themselves as sophomores, though most are juniors and seniors. In order for students to have a wide selection of courses and the greatest chance of academic success, we feel that the junior and senior years are the most appropriate times to participate in the program.

#### **IV. Quality of Facilities**

##### *A. Office and Class Space*

The office is conveniently located in the building where humanities classes are taught. It is one large room, so there is little private space for staff or space for counseling students. The cafeteria one floor below is available for quiet meetings except during the lunch hour.

Classrooms are adequate. The UvA buildings are not luxurious, but there is adequate space and basic classroom equipment.

##### *B. Library*

The UvA library collections are impressive. There are many titles available in the English language. On the other hand the library is decentralized. While this is common on many U.S. campuses, it requires an adjustment on the part of many Council students who are accustomed to centralized collections. Some students also complained that the filing and information retrieval systems are different, and that the hours of operation are shorter than those of the home campus. This did not appear to pose significant problems, but did require some adjustment and additional planning on their part.

##### *C. Computer and e-mail facilities*

The UvA appears to provide students with access to current communication technologies. The humanities building has a computer room with multiple computers and printers. Still other computers are available elsewhere. While students noticed differences in availability of computing resources compared to their home institutions, we feel the UvA has made significant investments in new communication technologies.

#### **V. The Program's Plans for Improving its Teaching and Services**

The Dean of the International School and the Resident Director of the Council Program both seem to be directly involved in conversations with faculty about teaching effectiveness. This includes attention to student satisfaction with courses and the preparation of course materials and syllabi with the needs of diverse American student populations in mind.

As the program grows, Council should consider the possibility of developing additional core courses, perhaps in those academic disciplines sending the greatest number of students.

#### **VI. Relationship with the Host University**

The University of Amsterdam seems to be a highly decentralized institution where many of the academic decisions are left to the individual Faculties of the humanities and social sciences. Drawing upon the resources of both of these Faculties, the International School of Humanities and Social Sciences provides opportunities to centralize and focus the university's efforts to provide educational programs for international students. The Council program connects with the UvA through the ISHSS.

Under the leadership of Vice President Hans de Wit and Dean Rob Hagendijk, the UvA has made significant strides in internationalization. The Council program has been integral to these

efforts and has clearly profited from their attention and strategic vision. This is evidenced by the increases in enrollment and by student achievement and satisfaction. It is also noteworthy that this program consistently attracts students from some of America's finest universities.

The day-to-day operation of the Council program is smoothly integrated into the UvA structure through the close relationship of Nico Evers to the ISHSS. We feel that the current system in which the UvA employs the resident director is highly effective and instrumental in maintaining the positive relationship between Council and the institution. The UvA is considering several changes, both structural and academic. As planning proceeds, they are carefully considering the implications of these changes for the Council program and the maintenance of its high quality.

## **VII. The Perceived Satisfaction of the Consortium Member Institutions**

Six institutions were contacted, including several large public, large private, and small private institutions. None had anything but praise for the program, the services offered in New York and Amsterdam, the quality of housing, and the academic rigor of the experience.

## **VIII. The Perceived Satisfaction of the Student Participants**

Student evaluations from Fall 1997 through Fall 1999 were examined. For the most part, students stated that courses were intellectually challenging, although there were comments that the style of Dutch instruction (which challenges students to become more personally involved in their own learning) led some to believe that the courses were not as academically demanding as those they were accustomed to at their home institution. It is noteworthy that students participating in the program this semester did not express this same opinion. This may be a reflection of the fact that the faculty have been engaged in conversations with the program's leadership which has led them to adopt practices more consistent with American students' expectations. It may also be simply that this group of students better appreciates the differences between US and Dutch academic styles.

The only significant complaint presented by the current program students concerned the timing of and requirements imposed by the core courses. In the spring, the core courses are offered after students have taken regular second-trimester courses and are structured more on the American model. That is, classes meet two or three times a week instead of once, more assignments are made, and strict deadlines are imposed for turning in work. After the relative freedom of the Dutch courses, students found this restrictive. They felt that the course demands cut too much into their well-developed social lives.

Students were very pleased with the opportunities available to them in the city, with the friendliness of the Dutch people, and with the flexible schedule afforded by the Dutch academic system that allowed them to explore Amsterdam and the surrounding areas in accordance with their preferences. In the evaluations reviewed, students were nearly unanimous in agreeing that the program met their expectations and that they would recommend it to their peers.

## **IX. Safety and Security Issues**

Amsterdam is a large city, but is very safe by American standards. Like any big city, there is the possibility that one might be a victim of pickpockets, thieves, or traffic accidents. Bicycle theft is endemic, which is why everyone buys old and inexpensive bikes. The orientation materials cover the possible safety hazards and offer practical advice that appears to be quite adequate.

Amsterdam is a Western European city with excellent medical facilities, clean water, and high standards of food storage and preparation. The Dutch policy with regard to some "soft" illegal

drugs (marijuana and hashish) is markedly different from that in the United States. While this may be a concern to some parents, it did not emerge as an issue in our discussions with students or the faculty. The program orientation contains frank and admonitory advice about drug usage.

## **X. The Program's Compliance with Council's Policies**

The program appears to comply with all Council policies.

## **XI. The Quality of Administration and Management of the Program**

### *A. Resident Director*

Nico Evers is an excellent resident director. He is knowledgeable, conscientious, available to students, and enjoys the confidence of his superiors and the respect of his subordinates.

### *B. Other Council Assistants*

Marion Kuyper works half time in the Council office as the Assistant Resident Director and half time in the ISHSS administrative office. She is particularly outgoing and friendly; the students seem to have no trouble confiding in her or coming to her for advice. Danae Troup participated in the program during the fall 1997 semester. She is working this semester only on a temporary basis. She has not only assisted with student service by living in the dorm with the students, but has helped upgrade computers and has tackled some of the projects that a busy RD must put off (like doing statistics for this review).

### *A. Future Needs*

The substantial growth of the program thus far and the projections of future growth have markedly increased the demands on the Resident Director. While the assistance of Danae Troup has temporarily eased the burden, it is clear that Nico Evers will need permanent assistance to maintain the current high level of service to students and to Council.

## **XII. Future Prospects and Plans**

We are delighted to report that this program seems to be very effective. It is based upon a secure intellectual foundation and seems to enjoy the full support of the faculty and upper administration of the University of Amsterdam. Future prospects that appear encouraging include the possibility that the program will expand beyond its current focus on European studies by including additional core courses in subjects that may vary according to student interests and disciplinary needs. The clear division between undergraduate and graduate courses and program management will, when implemented, make appropriate course offerings easier to identify and more numerous for Council students.

The provision of additional housing units to accommodate Council students is another indication that the future of this program appears to be secure.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We would like to thank New York staff Christine Wintersteen, Program Officer, Jeff Sherman and Leslie Cummings, Program Advisors, and Janet Grunwald, Executive Assistant, for helping to arrange our visit. We would also like to thank Dean Rob Hagendijk, Prof. Dr. Harm Pinkster, and Vice President Hans de Wit for their insights into the program. Our visit was scheduled and managed perfectly by Nico Evers. We were graciously received by Marion Kuyper and Danae Troup. We were also delighted that so many faculty gave generously of their time to come and meet with us. Finally, we would like to thank those students from the current and preceding years who shared their insights and experiences with us.

## **Summary of Recommendations**

1. The program should carefully consider the optimal maximum size of enrollment so that the number of American students does not lead to an imbalance in the International Studies program.
2. The program should consider placing a ceiling on the number of students sent by any one U.S. institution to avoid imbalance among the American students.
3. As the program has matured, the academic focus of the students has broadened beyond the original European Studies emphasis. A gradual broadening of the courses available in the UvA (such as economics and communications), as well as the introduction of one or more new core courses in additional subject areas, should be planned.
4. If the program is going to grow by admitting students majoring in disciplines like science, engineering, and business, there will be a need for more introductory courses at levels 1 or 2 so they can satisfy non-major requirements at the appropriate level.
5. Council should be attentive to student complaints about the organization of the spring semester, in particular the placement of the core courses after the first trimester courses have ended. Consider alternatives to the current scheduling of the spring core courses, e.g., starting the courses during the second trimester; scheduling class only on Tuesday, Wednesday, and/or Thursday; allowing students to choose to complete two trimesters of regular ISHSS courses instead of one; etc.
6. Because it appears that American undergraduates who are juniors and seniors have the greatest academic success, Council should emphasize in its promotional materials and catalog that the program is best suited to students at this level of study.
7. On-site orientations should not be curtailed because of an early start to the spring semester. The program should have ample warning when the second UvA trimester is scheduled to begin during the first week of January. When this occurs, the Resident Director and staff must work to fit all of the normal orientation information into the first two weeks of classes.
8. Council should support the hiring of a permanent, full-time assistant to the Resident Director. The current number of students justifies this; any further growth in enrollment will make a full-time assistant absolutely necessary to maintain the current high level of service.

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