

Educating the Leaders of the Future

ALBERT CORNELISSEN, PRESIDENT

Windesheim University of Applied Sciences (the Netherlands)

HONORS DEAN: JOSEPHINE WOLTMAN ELPERS

LEADERS OF THE FUTURE

Some students want to broaden their perspectives while others want to deepen their knowledge, and it is vital to challenge students to the level of their ability and interest. However, in regular programmes the possibilities for individualization and differentiation in content and didactics are often limited. The main focus of a regular degree programme is how to guarantee the bachelor's level for all students. Focusing on the average student alone, though, might cause Windesheim to lose the interest of students who are looking for an additional challenge.

It is difficult to predict what tomorrow's world will look like. All we know for certain is that we are educating the professionals of and for the future, the next generation. Because knowledge is changing rapidly, we need to teach our students not only what we already know but, on top of that, how to build new knowledge and insights.

Besides knowledge, students also need to develop the capacity both to excel in the present and to shape a new and a better society fitting their generation. To find new possibilities and new solutions, our future professionals must be able to cooperate across disciplines and cultures, to be critical and creative. As talented students will become the leaders of the future, Windesheim's challenge is to find the best way to educate them.

WINDESHEIM HONOURS COLLEGE

Our answer to the challenge is the Windesheim Honours College and Honours Programmes. At our honours college we offer the English BBA programme Global Project and Change Management. This program is accredited as “small scale and intense” by the NVAO—the accreditation organization of the Netherlands and Flanders—and receives excellent marks. Our students are being challenged in diverse areas throughout their bachelor's programme and are offered an additional challenge when compared to the regular programmes of Windesheim.

One of the didactic pillars is that we address these students from the start as professionals. By cooperating with professionals from [inter]national businesses and institutions and on real-life projects from day one onwards, they learn to cooperate, to come up with new solutions, and to develop their professional skills in diverse settings.

In the third and fourth year, students are able to tailor their own subjects by choosing a project management field as an area of expertise. Students thus have the opportunity to specialize their knowledge and skills in the direction of global health, urban dynamics, social entrepreneurship, and/or civil society. In addition, the programme is globally oriented with an international internship that gives Dutch students as well as international students a challenge abroad. Windesheim provides the support for this programme.

The difference between this bachelor's degree and similar programmes at research universities is that it is less academic and more practically oriented, directed toward the future working environment of our alumni. It also offers international students a unique opportunity to combine the best in education from both a research as well as a practical perspective. For all of it students, the degree programme provides small-scale personal guidance and strong interaction with staff members.

COOPERATION WITH DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES

In addition to our honours college, Windesheim offers honours programmes, which give our most talented students a sense of community by inviting the best students from different study programmes, thus creating a multidisciplinary learning environment. The main goal of this multidisciplinary set-up is to broaden the students' perspectives: to have them acquire new twenty-first-century skills and knowledge that the regular programmes do not offer and to have them create new knowledge on shared themes together with lecturers, professors, and companies.

Challenging gifted students to excel is possible if students are set in learning situations in which they must show above-average achievement, task commitment, and creativity. In our honours programmes, students are invited to create and analyze new ideas and to judge the usability of ideas in a specific situation. They learn to challenge accepted practices with innovative ideas.

WICKED PROBLEMS

Our honours programmes address the wicked problems of our times, problems that can't be solved from the perspective of a single discipline. Wicked problems can only be solved by all stakeholders of a system and require an approach from multiple angles. Consequently, the programmes are set up for students who are interested in more than only their own bachelor's programme or specialization, who have a wide interest in society. We offer our students an opportunity to work together with peers who each have different perspectives and a different approach to tackling problems. They learn from each other to look at problems in different ways and to work together and complement each other, all bringing knowledge from their own fields.

HIGHER-ORDER THINKING

Although lecturers provide context in their teaching materials, they are no longer the only source of knowledge. They are the coaches of our students, who in turn are the future leaders. Students can find information everywhere but must learn how to handle the different sources, how to validate information, how to synthesize and leverage it, how to communicate it, and how to use it to solve problems. It is becoming more and more important to put the emphasis on the skills that will be needed in the future rather than the facts or content.

The Windesheim Honours College and Honours Programmes pay a lot of attention to higher-order thinking: analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Professionalism in the twenty-first century differs from professionalism in earlier centuries. We need to reconsider some of the classical tools we use in education, the types of problems students have to solve, and how to gather and discuss data collected via sources such as cell phones, social media, crowd-sourcing, online surveys, and RSS feeds. As students collaborate using chat, Skype, Google wave, Google docs, Twitter, and Facebook, skills in explaining, justifying, and evaluating opinions and sources are becoming increasingly important. These skills require higher-order thinking. In addition, soft skills such as communication and empathy will be necessary in the world of future professionals, the world for which we want to prepare our students.

HIGHER STANDARDS

As a university of applied sciences, Windesheim plays a central role in its region. Every year we deliver thousands of graduates to our society, ready to find their place and their role as professionals. During their studies, we not only teach them the standards of their future profession but also make them aware of their own moral values. We challenge them regularly with contrasting values in order to teach them to build bridges within society. We have set our own standard higher than is formally required because we are convinced that we are more than just a degree-granting institution. The Windesheim Honours College and Honours Programmes play an important role by challenging our most talented students to realize their full potential so that they are optimally prepared for their future.

President Cornelissen may be contacted at
awca.cornelissen@windesheim.nl.