

Summary development interview Research Master faculty of theology and religious studies.

28-01-21

1. Welcome by the board

The dean welcomes everyone and thanks the panel members for their hard work on the report. This meeting will be a constructive discussion on how to develop the program of the Research Master.

2. Increasing student enrollment, particularly international students

Low student enrollment is an issue for all the programs including the Research Master. One of the reasons is that the specificity of a research master is quite unknown to international students and colleagues. The distinction between a research MA and a regular MA can be brought up more, by explaining why it is beneficial to study for two years. Also, success breeds success: the more international students a university has, the more international students apply.

The first step is to work on a clear vision for the program and to have clear why the faculty aims for more international students. It should be made more explicit that the program wants to attract internationals not primarily for the numbers, but also for a more diverse student body which is especially important for the topic of religion. It also matches with the staff population: 60 percent is international. This message can be made more explicit in the vision and mission of the program. Further, the faculty can think about who they want to attract. Next to internationals, they can focus more on professionals who are looking for opportunities for deeper reflection on the issues they encounter in their work from day-to-day.

Another point is to look into a better story to tell students about the possibility to apply for a PhD position after the ReMa. Although some students noted that doing a PhD may not be the best path for everyone since the added value for a career outside academia may be low, for many students the future prospect of doing a PhD is an important reason to follow a Research Master program. Furthermore, it is important for society to have people with the skills that are developed while doing a PhD, including critical reflection and analysis, synthesis of a wide range of materials, raw data collection and analysis and communication skills.

The faculty is in the process of developing a communication strategy regarding job market prospects for all students, including the ReMa students, such as explicating the transferable skills that students and PhD candidates develop and will continue to do this.

A third idea is to develop a direct relationship with other master programs from different international universities. This is one of the important ways to draw students to the university.

Summarizing:

- **focus on the question: why do we want more international students and make this more explicit in the vision.**
- **Be more explicit about the prospects of doing a PhD and the job prospects after doing a PhD.**

- **Focus on relationships with other universities**

3. Improving the mentoring system and the time toward completion

The faculty has already implemented some changes with regard to the mentoring system. First, students and mentors are now encouraged to meet once a month to maintain regular contact. Second, more guidelines on topics that may be discussed during these meetings have been shared with the mentors and students. Third, the faculty plans to develop a workshop for mentors at the beginning of the next academic year but they still have to think about the content. It is advisable to incorporate some guidance on recognizing psychological issues in this workshop so mentors can better assess what type of guidance is called for. Fourth, the faculty is considering involving PhD students as mentors as well.

Information provision and navigating the bureaucracy around the individualized programme was an issue. Information provision has already improved. However, some students raised the issue that students who already have a clear plan on what they want to do, do better than students who are less assertive. The mentoring system can help support those students. It is also important to encourage staff to reassure students that it is okay to schedule meetings with them once a month. There should not be a threshold to discussing their plans and any other issues.

Another point the faculty can look into, is to be aware of the freedom in choice that students have. The program allows a lot of choices for students. This is one of the strengths of this program: you can tailor the program to your needs. But it would be good if one person had the general overview of all the individualized programs and signed off on them. At the moment the situation might be a little bureaucratic, with students having to collect many different signatures for their study plan. This can be brought back to one person.

Summarizing:

- **The faculty is already doing a lot of helpful things to improve this issue**
- **It is important to encourage students and mentors to meet up, especially since the idea exists that assertiveness pays off more.**
- **The faculty should look into the number of people who are involved in the bureaucracy of developing the individualized program of the students.**

4. Standardizing the evaluation of traineeships with non-traditional end products

The issue of this kind of evaluation is that there isn't always a written product. At the moment, the faculty is discussing a standardized template with criteria for non-written activities. This is still in development.

An idea might be to evaluate a reflection of the student. Or a report which reflects on how things work in the sector they have done an internship in.

There are some programs in other universities where both a PhD and a non-written product are evaluated. The faculty can get in touch with these programs to see how they do this kind of evaluation.

Summarizing:

- **A non-written product can be evaluated through the reflection report of students**
- **The faculty can ask for expertise with other faculties who have this kind of experience.**

5. Closing