

Project form for faculty plans: International Classroom project

Deadline 1 April 2016

General information	
Project title	Integrating an international perspective within the research master program Clinical and Psychosocial Epidemiology
Intended start date	September 2016
Intended period (1-2 years)	Sept 2016-April 2018 (20 months)
Budget requested (max. € 100.000 per faculty/50% faculty match)	€ 99.000
Faculty contact person	
Name	Prof. dr. A.V. Ranchor
Faculty and department	UMCG, Department of Health Sciences/Health Psychology
Tel.	050-3636274
E-mail	a.v.ranchor@umcg.nl
Project plan	
<p>Summary (max. 150 words): Integrating an international perspective in the training of students to become a researcher is considered essential for their future career. In addition, this may facilitate effective learning and teaching by students and teachers.</p> <p>The aim of the project is to integrate an international perspective in the international two year top research master Clinical and Psychosocial Epidemiology (CPE), with participants from various cultural backgrounds. By interviewing individual students and teaching staff, insight will be obtained in the current state of affairs and needs and preferences of the interviewees. Teaching methods and strategies will be identified that are helpful in integrating an international perspective.</p> <p>These will be implemented in courses and in coach group meetings. It is expected that an international perspective will be integrated in course content, in the training of professional skills, which in turn will enhance informal contacts between students from different cultural backgrounds.</p>	
<p>The Why</p> <p><u>Faculty and/or programme vision on internationalisation</u></p> <p>A key feature of high quality research is collaboration – at a local, national and international level. Especially international collaboration is an important criterion in the assessment of personal grants, for example, in the Innovational Research Incentives Scheme of NWO (Veni Vidi Vici). The UMCG facilitates the training of top researchers in various ways, including through the top research master Clinical and Psychosocial Epidemiology (CPE). Integration of an international perspective would be of added value, especially at a relatively young age, because at this age an international perspective is more likely to be become natural. While the participants in the program are originating from virtually all continents, resulting in great cultural diversity, this cultural diversity has not yet been utilized. Integrating an international perspective in the CPE program from a broad perspective (professional skills, course content, social contacts) is therefore considered essential and will have several implications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students adopt an international perspective, which may benefit their future career, especially because many students continue their career in an international setting; - Learning and teaching become more efficiently, because awareness is raised among both students and teachers. Moreover, teachers learn to address the diverse learning needs of students and are provided information that helps them to select strategies and learning styles that matches the end terms of their courses; <p>In addition, in the long term collaboration between teaching staff and alumni may be strengthened, because students feel acknowledged in their learning needs, which in turn is expected to enhance</p>	

commitment to the UMCG/University of Groningen and facilitate collaboration.

Current situation

The research master Clinical and Psychosocial Epidemiology (CPE) is a TOP research master in the Graduate School of Medical Sciences (GSMS) of the University Medical Center Groningen (UMCG). The aim of the two year multidisciplinary CPE program is to train students to become a researcher in the broad field of health care research and health sciences, thereby integrating knowledge from the fields of clinical epidemiology, health psychology, psychiatry and public health.

Cultural diversity: From the start in 2007, CPE has attracted international students from all over the world (Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America) with different professional backgrounds (e.g., medicine, psychology, public health). After having achieved their MSc degree, students can opt for a PhD position at the GSMS or continue their career elsewhere. After their MSc or PhD, the majority of graduates choose to work abroad for a few years or longer which connects to the increasing global setting of research. These students could benefit from integrating internationalisation as an explicit goal in the CPE program. Until now, this is not the case, while the diverse backgrounds of students offer the unique opportunity to benefit from the cultural diversity among the students.

Teaching methods: The courses in the CPE program most often adopt an interactive approach in small groups. Students appear to have different starting points with this type of teaching and differences in cultural background seem to be one of the underlying causes. These cultural differences correspond to the distinction of student-centred versus teacher-centred: Western students are more familiar with a student-centred approach in which interaction and critical appraisal are essential features, thereby facilitated by the teacher. Non-Western students are more familiar with a classical teacher-centred approach in which the transfer of knowledge by the teacher to the student is the key feature.

Moreover, there are different perspectives on professional skills such as writing and network building. For example, while Western students learn to cite other researchers by paraphrasing, non-Western students learn to literally cite other researchers, because this is considered respectful. These cultural differences are not always clear and individual teachers have to find their own way in how to deal herewith.

Design of the program: knowledge of methods and theories, and research are achieved during methodological and theoretical courses in which various teaching methods are applied. During the first six months, obligatory courses are scheduled. Application of these skills takes place during the master thesis project that starts in March of the first year and lasts until July of the second year. The students are embedded in the department of the supervising PI, which often is culturally diverse (30-35% of the PhD students are from abroad). Also during this period, a few more obligatory courses and elective courses are scheduled. Research and professional skills are further developed during biweekly coach group meetings under supervision of a senior researcher. Coaches supervise a group of 5-6 students that are most often mixed in terms of cultural diversity. Each student formulates his personal learning goals.

Strengths and weaknesses

Strengths:

- CPE is characterized by small scale courses with ample room for interaction and discussion
- CPE attracts students from all over the world
- open and accepting atmosphere among students and staff
- biweekly coach group meetings which are used to promote professional and scientific skills. These meetings offer the opportunity to promote an international perspective with respect to professional skills and may help to enhance informal contacts among the participants.
- internationalisation as an explicit goal in the CPE research master is supported by the GSMS board.

Weaknesses:

- lack of explicit attention for internationalisation within the CPE program so far
- as a consequence, courses do not explicitly adopt an international perspective
- as a consequence, knowledge of useful teaching methods and strategies to address cultural diversity in courses and coach groups among teaching staff is limited

New opportunities

The cultural diversity among students offers the unique opportunity to promote an international perspective at a young age. The design of the CPE program (e.g. coach group meetings, interactive small scale courses) facilitate the integration of an international perspective in a broad sense, meaning in course content, professional skills and informal contacts.

Verifiable objectives

The aim of the proposed project is threefold:

- (a) To get insight into the current state of affairs:
 - How is cultural diversity related to the learning process and professional skills of students and their needs regarding learning and professional skills?
 - To what extent is internationalisation addressed in training of professional and research skills on the one hand and course content on the other?
- (b) To develop strategies and identify teaching methods how to utilize cultural diversity in relation to professional and research skills of students as well as in course content
- (c) To implement an international perspective in the CPE program, focusing on professional skills, course content and informal contacts

Motivate the choice of program(s)

The CPE program is a two year top research master that aims to train students to become a researcher. An international perspective is considered essential for students' future career because it facilitates international collaboration and for those students who aim to continue their career abroad it facilitates adaptation to the new cultural context. The combination of courses – most often taught in small groups - and coach group meetings provides a useful basis to integrate an international perspective.

As mentioned previously, CPE attracts students from all over the world, which could benefit from each other's perspectives when it comes to professional skills, such as planning, time management, network building and usage, collaboration, and learning approaches.

Approach

The project will be carried out in three steps, from assessment to implementation. Although all parts of the program will be addressed, the focus will lie on the obligatory courses and on the coach groups.

Phase 1

- A. A first step is to assess the actual cultural diversity among the students regarding experience in the past academic year with teaching methods, professional skills and informal contacts with fellow students. Attention will be paid to their actual experience, preferences and needs.
Method: qualitative interviews will be held among the current first year students (2015 cohort) and the first year students starting in 2016 (2016 cohort) of the CPE program. There are currently 19 students participating in the first year, originating from Western Europe (N = 9, of whom 3 are from the Netherlands and 6 from Germany), Africa (N = 6), Latin America (N = 2), Eastern Europe (N = 1), and Asia (N = 1). No data are available yet for the 2016 cohort.
All students will be invited to participate in a qualitative study by means of individual qualitative interviews. A topic guide will be designed that will guide the interviews. Participation is voluntary. Given the clear link with the master program and given that no personal or sensitive information will be asked, it is expected that willingness to participate will be high.
- B. Parallel to step A, the extent to which internationalisation plays a role in the training of professional skills and is addressed in course content will be assessed.
Method: course coordinators of obligatory courses (N = 11) and coaches (N = 4) will be interviewed individually. Current practices with regard to teaching methods and attention to cultural diversity in coach groups will be examined. In addition, participants will be asked about the suitability of their specific courses for integrating an international perspective (in relation to their end terms), and about the support they need to realise this. Thesis supervisors (N = 19 for the 2015 cohort) will be interviewed in focus groups about current practices and their need for support.
It is expected that all courses will be suitable for integrating an international perspective. Theoretical courses (Psychiatric Epidemiology, Public Health, Health Psychology) will be suitable for integrating an international perspective on the content level; in fact, the coordinators of Public Health and Health Psychology have already consented to do so. Courses focusing on transfer of knowledge of different research methods and statistics may seem less suitable; however, there are two ways in which it might be possible to adopt a more international perspective. First, when it comes to application of such knowledge, integration of an international perspective is possible (integration at application level). Second, examples presented during the lectures may explicitly concern both Western and non-Western studies, populations and settings (integration at example level). It will be discussed with the course coordinators of methodological and statistical courses to which extent there are opportunities

to discuss applications in their own courses and to which extent this should be (further) discussed during coach group meetings.

As to coach group meetings, an international perspective can be integrated in two ways. First, in the development of professional skills – this is already targeted during coach group sessions, but now with more explicit attention for diversity, for example when it comes to network building and utilization. Second, by adding internationalisation as a learning goal, which means that students will learn among other things about habits, customs, formal and informal manners in the represented countries. An important prerequisite for achieving these goals is an open and friendly atmosphere, which may enhance informal contacts among the students. Informal contacts are considered important because these may make students feel more comfortable in a group setting and may facilitate operating in classes in which interactive discussion is required.

Phase 2

A workshop will be organised for course coordinators and coaches, during which the concept of culture will be introduced and its relation to learning approaches, based on Hofstede's model of national culture with attention for relevant dimensions including collectivism vs individualism and power distance. In addition, results of Phase 1 will be presented. Useful strategies (e.g., how group formation may enhance an international perspective) and teaching methods will be discussed to address students' diversity and needs and to integrate an international perspective.

Next, it will be discussed how these strategies and methods can be used in their own courses (and translated to learning goals and evaluation methods) or coach group meetings and how reconciliation between courses and coach group meetings can be achieved. We will also offer an opportunity for individual follow-up meetings for those who need more support.

In addition, when there is a large discrepancy between students in or an overall need to develop essential skills, such as critical appraisal and participation in interactive discussions, concrete suggestions will be made how development of these skills can be integrated in existing courses and coach group meetings. Promoting an open and friendly atmosphere in order to make students feel more comfortable will be included as a strategy.

A second workshop will be held for thesis supervisors in which the results of Phase 1 will be presented and in which strategies and methods for tailored supervision of students will be discussed.

Phase 3

In the last phase, course coordinators and coaches will be asked to actively integrate an international perspective in their courses and coach group meetings; coaches will work together on this in order to prevent large differences between the coach group meetings. This process will be coordinated by one of the project members (Alferink and Jansen) who are already involved in the coordination of CPE.

Each course coordinator will be asked to provide information on how internationalisation is going to be implemented in relation to the end terms of the courses.

During coach group meetings, students can set their own personal goals, including professional skills.

Adopting an international perspective will be added as an overall goal.

Expected results

It is expected that an international perspective will be integrated in a large part of the courses, reflected by new and/or adapted learning goals and corresponding evaluation methods. Furthermore, it is expected that the coach group meetings will contribute to the development of professional skills and adoption of an international perspective and will promote an open and friendly atmosphere. All these activities together are expected to enhance informal contacts among students from different cultural backgrounds.

Evaluation

Course content: We will examine in how many of the courses an international perspective is integrated and in which ways: on the content level, on application level or on example level.

Professional skills and adoption of an international perspective: we will examine how often diversity was explicitly addressed as a topic during the coach group meetings, based on agendas and minutes of these meetings. Progress in professional skills will be evaluated in the coach groups; students have to formulate their own personal goals at the start, which almost always includes one of more professional skills.

Overall evaluation In addition, all students will be invited in an evaluation study to examine their satisfaction with the new approach, awareness of intercultural issues, intercultural sensitivity, adoption of an international perspective by themselves, adoption of an international perspective at program level, informal contacts (contact with students from other backgrounds related to the CPE program and outside the CPE program) and other relevant concept that come up during the interviews. Indicators will be developed to measure these concepts.

Course coordinators and coaches will be asked about their experiences and satisfaction with the new approach and to identify impeding and promoting factors when implementing internationalisation. Data will be collected by means of a questionnaire that will be repeated three times: March 2017 (start of implementation), September 2017 (start of 2017 cohort), March 2018 (end of implementation). Data will be collected among second year (2016 cohort) and first year students (2017 cohort) and analysed and presented for both year groups separately.

Based on the student and staff evaluations, concrete suggestions for further implementation of internationalisation in the CPE program will be formulated.

Use of the IC conceptual framework and parameters

The proposed plan is clearly related to the IC conceptual framework. All key characteristics of the International Classroom at RUG (www.rug.nl/internationalclassroom) are present in the current plan. The plan is based on a clear vision of the importance of internationalisation and utilizing cultural diversity in the training of students in the research master CPE.

Learning outcomes: at program level there is a focus on development of intercultural and global competences, based on the idea that adopting an international perspective benefits the future career of students and that long term international collaboration between staff and students is promoted (link with employability and career perspective). At course level, diverse learning needs of students are assessed and addressed. Cultural diversity is especially present among students, and the plan is based on valuation of cultural diversity and the idea that this could be utilized to the benefits of students and staff. By integrating an international perspective in courses on the content, application and example level, the context is extended beyond the immediate Dutch experience.

Teaching and learning: at program level the proposed plan raises awareness of the added value of the international classroom, in both students and staff. Intercultural sensitivity, skills and an international attitude in teachers will be raised by individual interviews and workshops; progress will be evaluated after the first year. As a result, an international perspective will be integrated in the courses and in the coach groups, addressing course content and development of professional skills, such as critical thinking. Progress will be monitored through evaluation of personal goals in coach group meetings.

Assessment: a diversity of assessment methods is being used in the CPE program, including written exams, writing proposals, and presenting. The master thesis includes writing and presenting an extended proposal and, one year later, the thesis. These skills receive attention during the courses that precede the master thesis project. Based on the information obtained in the individual interviews with students, teacher will receive feedback on the diversity in starting points among the students. In Phase 2 of the proposed project, insight into how culture affects learning approaches will be enhanced and useful strategies and learning methods will be identified in how to use this diversity and how to apply this on course level.

Project organization

Stakeholders involved

Project group
CPE students
Course coordinators / Coaches / Thesis supervisors
Program board CPE / Board of examiners CPE
GSMS board

Activities and timeline

- September 2016: start of the project
- October-December 2016: Phase 1 (interviews with students from 2015 and 2016 cohorts, teachers and thesis supervisors, analyzing interviews, writing a report)
- January-February 2017: Phase 2 (identification of strategies and teaching methods, workshop, individual follow-up meetings)
- March 2017-March 2018: Phase 3 (integration of an international perspective in courses and coach groups, evaluation among students from the 2016 and 2017 cohorts)
- April 2018: final reporting

Project group

Members – vacancy; dr. Marike Alferink (program coordinator CPE and MPDI); dr. Desiree Jansen (program manager research master programs UMCG, focusing on quality control); dr. Hanke Dekker

(Onderwijs Instituut OWI, educational consultant, expertise in teaching and learning professionalism); prof. dr. Adelita Ranchor (member of program board and course coordinator CPE; project leader). A junior researcher (vacancy) will set up and carry out the project, supervised by the project leader (prof Ranchor) during all phases. Dr Alferink will participate in facilitating recruitment of students, course coordinators and coaches. She and Dr Jansen will coordinate the implementation in the coach group meetings (Alferink) and in the courses (Jansen). All five project members will participate in the development of strategies and identification of teaching methods, under supervision of Dr Dekker.

Coordination in faculty and communication with stakeholders

Communication with CPE students, course coordinators, coaches and thesis supervisors is part of the proposed project.

The project plan will be discussed with the program board and the director of CPE and the GSMS board for further suggestions. The director of CPE and the GSMS board have already been informed and support the plan. Outcomes of the project will be reported to the GSMS board, CPE program board and CPE board of examiners, and in between, they will be consulted if this is needed.

Required additional expertise from central level and/or external expertise

Additional expertise is needed from the Language and Policy project. We will contact dr. R. Bakels from the faculty committee Language and Policy.

Sustainability and dissemination

Relevance for other programmes in the faculty

When successful, the results may be transferred to other master programs including the Medical and Pharmaceutical Drug Innovation (MPDI) topmaster program and the Innovative Medicine program of the UMCG.

In addition, almost all course coordinators, teachers and coaches in the CPE program are also involved in the supervision of PhD students. Similar to the master students in the UMCG, there is great cultural diversity among PhD students (30-35% of the PhD students are from abroad and by the expected bursary program this percentage might increase). Insights and specific strategies that are obtained during this project and by integrating an international perspective in courses and coach group meetings may be used to more effectively supervise PhD students.

Sharing, developing and embedding the results faculty-wide

A booklet will be written including a perspective on internationalisation, the results of the qualitative study (Phase 1), suitable strategies and teaching methods (Phase 2) and actual used strategies and methods (Phase 3). The booklet will be distributed among teachers, coaches and PhD supervisors within the GSMS.

Moreover, the GSMS offers a supervision course to all PhD supervisors in the UMCG. An optional module is cultural diversity. Given that the GSMS supports the current proposal and given that the first applicant (Ranchor) was involved in the design of the course for PhD supervisors, a possibility is to promote cultural diversity to a standard module in the course.

If applicable (optional)

Synergy with International Classroom project and/or Learning Communities Project

Relation with objectives, activities and approach for the other projects

There is an obvious relation with the Learning Communities (LC) project and the Language & Culture Policy (LCP) plan.

LC: The setting of the CPE research master fits the definition of learning communities which is defined as a group of students with a fixed group of lecturers, in which students study at the same pace and complete joint assignments. The aims of the proposed project and of CPE in particular relate to all aims and learning outcomes of the LC project. Unique relations between the current proposed project and the LC project: strengthening the bonds among students and to a lesser extent between students and staff; learning to understand large, overarching themes (internationalization); learning to understand other people's views and cultures.

LCP: The proposed project matches the aim of the LCP plan create intercultural awareness and to develop appropriate intercultural competences.

Finances

Budget (requested)

Junior employee (vacancy)

September 2016 – February 2017 20 hours a week (= 26 weeks = 520 hours)

March 2017 - April 2018: on average 12 hours a week (= 60 weeks = 720 hours)

In total: 1120 hours * 75 EUR = € **93.000**

Material

Data collection: recording devices € 500

Material for workshops: € 2.000

Printing of booklets: € 2.000

Attendance of relevant workshops and conferences by junior researcher: € 1.500

Material total: € **6.000**

Total: € 99.000

Matching

Prof Ranchor will supervise the project during 20 months

September 2016-February 2017: 0.2 FTE

March 2017-April 2018: on average 0.1 FTE

Dr Alferink will facilitate the project and coordinate implementation during 1 year (Sept 2016-Sept 2017): 0.1 FTE

Dr Jansen will facilitate the project and coordinate implementation during 20 months (Sept 2016 – April 2018): 0.1 FTE

Dr Dekker will give educational input when setting up and carrying out the project during 20 months: 0.15 FTE