



university of
 groningen

faculty of arts

Academic year 2021-2022

Assessment Plan

Master North American Studies



1 / Vision of teaching and assessment

The assessment policy of the programme is built on the UG policy on assessment⁸ and follows from its research-oriented vision in which a learning environment focused on activating students is key. The programme's assessment policy is also directly linked to its intended learning outcomes (in particular the programme's focus on interdisciplinarity, critical and cultural theory, internationality, and inter-Americanness). The emphasis lies on what students should know, understand and be able to do in order to have the best possible preparation for a research career as well as for entering the labour market. Students are thus endowed with a balanced combination of domain-specific and generic competences at Master's level.

The various modes of assessment are considered tools that stimulate and guide our students' learning process while at the same time also helping instructors verify whether students have reached the intended learning outcomes. To ensure the quality of the programme and the students' progress within it, assessment is both formative and summative, and as such has two functions:

1. To provide feedback to students about their performance, which also helps establish whether there are lacunae in the programme and/or individual course modules (formative; during the course unit).
2. To assess whether the learning outcomes of the degree programme, and its individual course units, have been achieved (summative; at the end of the course).

The programme's assessment system is designed in such a way that the forms of assessment suit the programme's intended learning outcomes in the various phases of the degree. The assessment plan enables us to monitor that all intended learning outcomes are covered in the courses.

Assessment takes a variety of forms across the different seminars, from research essays that develop students' ability as independent investigators to in-class group discussions, presentations, and class participation. All course syllabi contain details about the modes of assessment, the criteria of evaluation, the relative weight of the various components of the aggregate grade, and the deadlines for written assignments. In keeping with the programme's educational vision of providing a research-intensive learning environment, all forms of assessment ask students to conduct independent research and to engage critically with their findings. Given that the acquisition of advanced-level English language skills is an important learning outcome of the programme, in-class participation is part of the assessment for many course modules, and the production of research essays is important throughout the entire programme. All course syllabi are made available to students on Nestor before the start of classes.

In each course module, the programme uses grading guidelines with clearly specified criteria for each assignment. These guidelines, which are either incorporated into the course syllabus or posted separately on Nestor, guarantee a consistent and transparent assessment throughout course units. The Master's dissertation and the Internship are assessed on the basis of specific lists of criteria that are outlined in the Master's Dissertation Guidelines and the Master's Internship Guidelines, respectively (see Appendix 4). All Master's dissertations are graded independently by two examiners. Prior to embarking on an internship, students, together with their academic internship supervisor (a member of the academic staff) as well as their workplace supervisor, define the specific and generic learning outcomes of the internship. At the end of their internship, students write a final report in which they describe their actual work



experience. The report is assessed by the student's academic supervisor in consultation with the workplace supervisor to ensure that the learning outcomes have been met.

Individualized feedback is given to students on all modes of assessment, either in written format (on essays), or orally (for presentations) to facilitate their active learning process. Written assessment reports by first and second readers are available for all Master's dissertations.

The degree programme is based on a set of interrelated components that cumulatively enable students to achieve the programme's intended learning outcomes. At the end of their degree programme, students will have acquired sophisticated levels of knowledge and understanding of theories of cultural analysis; in-depth domain specific specialized knowledge and understanding of the society, culture, and politics of the U.S. and its relations to the wider hemispheric context; and advanced-level writing, speaking, presentation and argumentation competences in English. The limited statutory length of the programme (2 semesters) means that the progressive dimension of the programme is particularly to be found in the trajectory from the 40 ECTS of specialist course work to the Master's Dissertation (20 ECTS); or, where applicable, from the 30 ECTS of specialist course work to the student's graduate course work in the Americas, and then on to the Master's Dissertation.

At the end of the second semester, the degree programme culminates in a capstone project, the Master's Dissertation. It is assessed on the basis of a clearly defined list of criteria that are outlined in the Master's Dissertation Guidelines (see Appendix 4). In the first semester, a series of workshops take place within research seminars, in which instructors discuss dissertation topics, proposals, and research techniques. At the beginning of the dissertation process, students submit a dissertation proposal that asks them to draw up a preliminary project sketch, formulate tentative arguments and/or research questions, and conduct research in order to be able to situate and contextualize their project. On the basis of this proposal, students are assigned a supervisor whose research interests most closely match the proposed topic. Students then draw up a provisional schedule together with their supervisor for submitting individual chapter drafts and the final version. The supervisor meets regularly with the student throughout the entire dissertation writing process and gives extensive chapter- by-chapter feedback. After the final version has been submitted, each dissertation is graded independently by two academic staff members to ensure consistency and transparency. Students receive a copy of the Master's Dissertation Report on their work.

2 / How to follow the assessment cycle (from design to evaluation and optimization)

The programme complies with the faculty's guidelines for the design and evaluation of tests, which are shown schematically in the figure below.



3 / Assessment dossier

a. The assessment dossier

The requirements of the assessment dossier are set out in §4 of the 'Protocol for Quality Assurance in the Assessment of Course Units' drawn up by the Board of Examiners. When requested (e.g. as part of the three-year evaluation cycle), the examiner of the programme provides the Board of Examiners with an 'assessment dossier' containing the following:

- a) the syllabus
- b) the list of marks, comprising all marks that count towards the final mark
- c) - for assessments in the narrower sense of the word (i.e. tests): the test that was set, incl. model answers/key
- for written assignments: the formulation of the assignment, information about the assessment method (assessment criteria and standards) if this is not listed in the syllabus, and a selection of completed assessment forms
- d) the assessment blueprint, minutes of peer-support meetings, evaluations and self-evaluations of course units, etc., if available.

b. Parties involved

In 'Rules and responsibilities for the assessment of the Faculty of Arts', laid down by the Faculty Board of Arts on 28 May 2019 (modified on 13-02-2020), all parties involved in fulfilling duties related to the assessment are described.

With regard to the assessment dossier, the following guidelines and responsibilities are relevant.

If a course is part of the periodic evaluation of Board of Examiners, the lecturer (or course coordinator) is requested to provide the information for the assessment dossier (upload on the Nestor site of the course). If, as a result of the evaluation, shortcomings are found in the basic quality of the assessment, the Board of Examiners will draw up a recommendation to the Cluster Board. The Cluster Board is responsible for drawing up an improvement plan with concrete measures to improve the identified shortcomings. The Board of Examiners will automatically include the course in question in its next assessment round.

4 / Assessment timetable

Overview of learning outcomes of the degree program + matrix

Appendix 1



Schematic overview of time periods intended for assessment, modes of assessment used	Appendix 2
Overview of the intended learning outcomes of the course units and their modes of assessment	Appendix 3
Additional regulations for the graduation dossier (BA thesis evaluation forms)	Appendix 4

The objectives of the degree programme, set out in the learning outcomes of the degree programme (Appendix 1), form the guiding principles. All course units together fulfil a role in working towards these learning outcomes. This is reflected in a coherent curriculum with a transparent structure. The matrix of learning outcomes (Appendix 1) defines the course units that include summative assessments and distinguishes between a) course units with assessments that *lead up to* the attainment level set out in the programme-level learning outcomes and b) course units with assessments *at this attainment level*. This distinction is expressed as follows:

- Lower case “x” indicates that the course is working towards the realization of this learning outcome
- Upper case “X” indicates that the learning outcome is fully realized in this course

In parallel with the curriculum, the assessment programme (Appendix 2) offers an overview of modes of assessment and exam periods. In order to gain insight at the programme level into whether the chosen modes of assessment tie in with the learning outcomes of the course units and create a balanced mix in the run-up to the programme-level learning outcomes of the degree programme, the intended learning outcomes of the course units are related to their modes of assessment (Appendix 3).

Specific rules may apply to certain components of the graduation dossier (e.g. for the thesis: approval of the thesis proposal, amount of supervision, resit). These rules are set out in Appendix 4.

5 / Safeguarding of assessment quality by the Board of Examiners

The Board of Examiners is responsible for safeguarding the quality of assessment at both the degree programme level and the level of individual course units.

a. Safeguarding of assessment quality at degree programme level

The Board of Examiners annually issues advice on each degree programme’s draft assessment plan for the coming academic year.

b. Safeguarding of assessment quality at course unit level

The Board of Examiners aims to evaluate the assessments for all course units in a degree programme in a three-year cycle – in other words, to examine a course unit’s assessment once every three years, bearing in mind the position of the course unit in the curriculum and in a specific learning pathway. In addition, a substantiated selection of theses is evaluated.



6 / Archiving

Archiving of course material including assessments is carried out in accordance with faculty policy.

7 / List of documents relevant to assessment

Faculty vision of teaching and assessment – see

<https://myuniversity.rug.nl/infonet/medewerkers/let/onderwijs/vision-for-education>.

Rules and Regulations – the internal regulations of the Board of Examiners.

Teaching and Examination Regulations (TER = OER; *Onderwijs- en examenregeling*) – a legally binding document that applies to the entire cohort of students who start a degree programme in a certain academic year. The TER may also contain transitional arrangements for previous cohorts.

Matrix of learning outcomes – an appendix to the Assessment Plan that specifies the course units with *summative* assessment leading up to or at the level specified in the programme-level learning outcomes and the course units with formative assessment.

Placement manual – a manual for the placement course unit.

Syllabus – a document that sets out the details of the TER and the Assessment Plan at course unit level in accordance with the information in Ocasys.

Assessment Plan – a document that is enclosed as an appendix with the TER and is therefore legally binding.

Assessment programme – a schematic overview of time periods intended for assessment, modes of assessment used and, if relevant, learning pathways (previously known as the ‘assessment plan’).

Assessment protocol – the implementation of the TER, Part A, Article 8.7.



Appendix 1. Overview of learning outcomes of the degree program + matrix

<i>Dublin Descriptors for MA Level</i>	<i>Learning Outcomes for the MA Degree Programme in North American Studies articulated in Key Competences</i>
<p>Acquiring Knowledge and Understanding</p> <p>Graduates have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances what is typically associated with the Bachelor's level and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context.</p>	<p>A Master's Degree Programme in North American Studies is awarded to students who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 a. have demonstrated in-depth interdisciplinary knowledge and understanding of specific cultural, social, historical and political developments on the American continent, notably at the interstice between culture, politics and ethics. 1 b. have demonstrated in-depth knowledge and understanding of the U.S.'s hemispheric and international relations, with particular emphasis on the role of the media in the production of cultural memories, historical truths, beliefs, and ideologies as well as national and individual identities; cultural and political identity formations of ethnic minorities in the Americas; formative dynamics of print culture and digital media in the formation of American history, culture and national identity; the impact of individual U.S. regions on the formation of national identities 1 c. have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the socio-political dimensions of American society, in terms of how it makes fundamental choices about its future in the face of a unique and overwhelming diversity of attitudes, behaviors and perspectives
<p>Applying Knowledge and Understanding</p> <p>Graduates have the ability to apply their knowledge, understanding and problem-solving abilities in new and unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study; they are also able to integrate their knowledge and process complex materials.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 a. have the ability to formulate and refine a significant research problem, as well as to gather, select, and critically evaluate all relevant information from a wide variety of print, archival, and electronic resources, whilst demonstrating high standards of textual analysis and conceptual thought 2 b. have an advanced-level ability to independently and creatively use and integrate relevant theories and methodologies of the core disciplines of American Studies (including cultural studies and cultural theory, political science, media studies and film theory, history, literature, and/or sociology) 2 c. are able to apply highly complex and abstract theoretical and methodological tools to new, unfamiliar contexts, and in particular to develop possible solutions – on the basis of theoretical, ethical, and practical reasoning – for specific cultural and socio-political problems in past and/or contemporary multicultural societies, notably those in the United States and the Americas 2 d. have the ability to formulate logical, critical, conceptually and theoretically sophisticated and original argumentative essays of different length and complexity, whilst demonstrating a significant degree of creativity and flexibility in adopting multiple perspectives and in approaching problems with the theoretical and methodological tools offered by several different disciplines



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 e. can make constructive contributions to group projects, deal with criticism, respect divergent opinions, give constructive feedback, assume responsibility for certain tasks, and (in higher-level courses) assume a leadership role in coordinating and integrating contributions by various group members 2 f. have the ability to plan and complete appropriate coursework, and organize and carry out a substantial research project within an established time frame 2 g. have shown an advanced awareness of and commitment to scholarly standards in terms of accuracy, ethical behavior, and the breadth of the sources used and cited in assignments and in the final dissertation
<p>Making Informed Judgments and Choices</p> <p>Graduates have the ability to formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information that includes reflecting on the social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 a. ability to conduct a medium-length research project, develop a significant and at least partly original research problem, integrate complex theories and methodologies of relevant core disciplines of American Studies (including cultural studies and cultural theory, political science, media studies and film theory, history, literature, and/or sociology, as appropriate), formulate responsible and ethical judgments, and present the results in the form of an MA thesis (including critical apparatus) of about 15,000 words that fully conforms to academic standards 3 b. have displayed originality and independent thought in formulating and refining a significant research problem and in providing abstract, theoretically-founded critical analyses of complex social, cultural, historical, ethical and political issues related to the chosen research topic(s) 3 c. are able to select and integrate relevant theories and insights offered by a range of disciplinary domains to critically examine cultural and socio-political challenges stemming from different forms of injustice and inequality in contemporary multidisciplinary societies (particularly in the United States and the Americas), and to articulate possible solutions on the basis of theoretical, ethical, and practical reasoning 3 d. have the ability to form well-grounded opinions about complex social, political, and economical issues in contemporary U.S. society, as well as the role that ideology and media play in those issues, and are able to engage with others in informed debate over those opinions 3 e. are able to continuously re-examine their views of the United States and contrasting cultures (notably in the Americas) in the light of their own lives and employment experiences
<p>Communicating Knowledge and Understanding</p> <p>Graduates have the ability to communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 a. ability to communicate effectively and convincingly the results of one's research and to present complex and highly abstract information to both academic and non-specialist audiences in English by making effective use of appropriate communication registers 4 b. have the ability to work and communicate effectively in an international and intercultural context. 4 c. have the ability to communicate effectively and to present complex scholarly information at an advanced level of English language competence to both academic and non-academic audiences by making informed use of digital technologies, including online learning environments, digital databases and communication systems 4 d. have demonstrated proficiency in the target language of English at C2 level (near native) in the areas of listening and reading, in written and spoken production (based on the CEFR)



Capacities to Continue Learning:

Students have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.

- 5 a. have the requisite domain-specific and general knowledge, understanding and skills to study autonomously and to formulate and refine an original research problem
- 5 b. possess the appropriate learning skills and strategies to independently identify and fill specific knowledge gaps and stay up-to-date at an advanced level with current developments in the domain of American Studies and related fields
- 5 c. have acquired the requisite intercultural awareness and respect to successfully undertake advanced academic course work and experiential learning at a partner institution in the United States, as well as in future international employment contexts.
- 5 d. have the ability to successfully undertake specialized third cycle degree programmes requiring MA-level domain-specific knowledge and understanding as well as independent research skills, in particular in American Studies and related fields, as well as Research Master programmes, both in Europe and North America



Appendix 2: Schematic overview of time periods intended for assessment

YEAR 1 semester 1						Block 1		Resits	Block 2		Resits
Module	Code	ECTS	M/O	Teaching method	Hours p/w	week 1-7	week 8/9 assessment	week 19-20	week 10-16	week 17/18 assessment	week 20-21
								resits block 1			resits block 2
						Modes of assessment					
Research Seminar I	LAX039M10	10	M	Seminar	3	Class Participation (5%)	Paper (20%)		Paper (30%) Class Participation (5%)	Paper (40%)	Paper(s)
Research Seminar II	LAX036M10	10	M	Seminar	3	Class participation (12,5%) Paper (15%)	Paper (20%)		Class participation (12,5%)	Paper (40%)	Paper(s)
Research Seminar III	LAX040M10	10	M	Seminar	3	Assignment 1 (15%)	Midterm Essay 30%	Midterm Essay	Assignment 2 (15%)	Final Essay (40%)	Final Essay



Total ECTS tested		30									
YEAR 1 semester 2						Block 3		Resits	Block 4		Resits
Module		ECTS	v/k	Teaching method	Hours p/w	week 1-7	week 8/9 assessment	week 19-20	week 10-16	week 17/18 assessment	week 20-21
								resits block 3			resits block 4
						Modes of assessment					
Research Seminar IV (Practicum)	LAX041M10	10	M	Seminar	3	Short Assignments (20%) Participation (10%)	Portfolio 20%	Portfolio	Short Assignments (20%) Participation (10%)	Portfolio 20%	Portfolio
MA Dissertation	LAX999M20	20	M	Individual tutoring	n.a.					MA Dissertation (100%)	MA Dissertation
MA Internship	LAX000M10	10	O	Individual tutoring	n.a.					Internship report (100%)	
Study Abroad		30	O	Seminars	8- 10						
Total ECTS tested		30	O								



Appendix 3: Overview of the intended learning outcomes of the course units

Year 1, semester 1			
Code	Course unit	Intended learning outcomes	Mode of assessment
LAXo41M10	Research Seminar I (Politics & Culture 21st Century US)	<p>Students will earn a passing grade in this course if they can:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. demonstrate command of the historical details pertaining to two or more of the following recent "crises" in the 21st century U.S: 9/11 and the war on terror; the global financial crisis; the crises of poverty, depopulation and drug abuse afflicting different regions in the U.S.; the constitutional crisis of the Trump presidency. 2. demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of recent scholarly and theoretical work on the concept of crisis, including (but not limited to) relevant work by Reinhart Koselleck, Giorgio Agamben, and Janet Roitman. 3. identify and analyze ways in which different forms of narrative culture (including but not limited to novels, films and TV series) have represented various "crises" of the 21st century U.S. 4. present cogent and informed analyses of primary and secondary source material, orally and in writing. 5. constructively contribute to scholarly discussions. 6. write well-argued essays that reflect interdisciplinary perspectives and approaches to the course topic. 	<p>class participation, paper(s), research essay (Assessment based on: Class Participation 10%, In-Class Test 10%, Midterm Essay 30%, Research Essay 50%)</p>
LAXo43M10	Research Seminar II (Reading Public Protest)	<p>Upon successful completion of the course, students are able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. describe the public sphere as a democratic institution. 2. explain its structural ties to reading and literature and its significance for democratic participation and social change. 3. apply their theoretical knowledge of the public sphere to analyze and evaluate a range of different primary material (including novels, slave narratives, manifestoes, essays, photographs, television debates, documentary film) with regard to its capacity to mobilize public opinion and invoke social change. 	<p>assignments, essay, modular exam(s) (Midterm Essay, Final Essay, Discussion Statements, Expert Work)</p>



		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. analyze and evaluate in historical perspective the impact of institutional and media networks on a writer's capacity to mobilize public opinion and invoke social change. 5. write well-argued essays on the course material or related material of their own choice that display a keen understanding of its historical, theoretical and practical relevance for American democratic culture. 6. make informed and insightful contributions to scholarly discussions on the public sphere, its relation to reading and protest and its historical, theoretical and practical significance for American democratic culture. 	
LAXO46M10	Research Seminar III (Domestic Cultures of U.S. Imperialism)	<p>Students will earn a passing grade in this course if they can:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the U.S. security state and its relationship to race, class, sexuality, and gender. 2. Demonstrate a familiarity with the historical and ongoing relationship between femininity and U.S. imperialism. 3. Identify the ways that various visual and narrative arts have represented feminized labor and derive critiques based on these representations. 4. Actively contribute to the scholarly discussion in class by citing specific details from the readings. 5. Engage substantively and respectfully with the comments made by other students in the course. 6. Identify primary and secondary sources and use methods of analyzing them appropriate to the text at hand. 7. Construct carefully researched and well-argued essays that make an intervention in one or more of the scholarly conversations discussed in the course. 	class participation, essay, weekly assignments

Year 1, semester 2			
Code	Course unit	Intended learning outcomes	Mode of assessment
LAXO47M10	Research Seminar IV (Practicum)	<p>Upon successful completion of the course unit, students are able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Articulate the value of your education and research to a broad audience 2. Apply your knowledge and research to current affairs locally, nationally, and/or globally 3. Constructively contribute to scholarly and non-scholarly discussions 	class participation, essay, weekly assignments



		4. Write well-argued essays and give well developed presentations for broad audiences that reflect interdisciplinary perspectives and approaches	
LAX999M20	Master's Thesis American Studies	At the end of the dissertation-writing process, students will be able to: 1. Conduct independent research on an American Studies topic 2. Produce an extended essay at an appropriate level, abiding by scholarly conventions and standards 3. Draw on theoretical frameworks appropriate to American Studies 4. Demonstrate a thorough and detailed understanding of the complexities inherent in a specific aspect of American culture in its respective historical, socio-political, or other relevant contexts	thesis
LAX000M10	Master's Internship American Studies	See placement syllabus (students develop their own learning outcomes)	Internship report
	Study Abroad		



Appendix 4: Additional regulations for the graduation dossier

Assessment procedure (see also MA thesis manual):

Step 1

At the beginning of the dissertation trajectory, students write a 5-page proposal with a preliminary bibliography. Based on the proposed topics, the first supervisor is appointed based on expertise, availability, and, if possible, student preference. The MA thesis coordinator appoints a second reader, based on expertise and availability, taking care that combinations vary. All lecturers receive the overview.

Step 2

After completion of the final version of the dissertation by the student, supervisor and reader assess the dissertation and fill in this form separately.

Step 3

Consultation of supervisor and reader over the dissertation assessment. After consultation, both sign the form, indicating their agreement on the assessment. The printed and signed version of the form is archived by the Secretariat.

Step 3

The student receives a copy of the form.

In case that the supervisor and second reader cannot agree, they present the case to the EC and hand in this form & the dissertation. The EC asks a third opinion.



Thesis Assessment Form Master North American Studies

Learning Outcomes

At the end of the dissertation-writing process, students will be able to:

- a. Conduct independent research on an American Studies topic
- b. Produce an extended essay at an appropriate level, abiding by scholarly conventions and standards
- c. Draw on theoretical frameworks appropriate to American Studies
- d. Demonstrate a thorough and detailed understanding of the complexities inherent in a specific aspect of American culture in its respective historical, socio-political, or other relevant contexts

Grading Guidelines

In determining the grade, assess the level, quality, and effectiveness of the student's **critical thinking skills** (selection, use, and assessment of primary and secondary sources), **research skills** (knowledge and application of methodology, theories and/or scholarship in the field and proper documentation of sources), and **writing skills** (focused thesis/statement of problem or issue, support of thesis/statement through argumentation, analysis, interpretation; correct grammar, spelling, and formal presentation).

9-10

- original, creative argument
- sophisticated use of research methods/theories
- independent use of secondary material
- extremely high level of technical accuracy

8

- insightful argument
- familiarity with and competent use of research methods
- productive use of secondary material (i.e. enhances the quality of the analysis and advances the essay's argument)
- high level of technical accuracy

7

- convincing argument
- competent use of appropriate research methods
- accurate use of secondary material
- competent level of technical accuracy

6

- adequate argument
- sufficient use of appropriate research methods
- adequate use of secondary material
- acceptable level of technical accuracy

Dissertations that do not meet the requirements of a 6 will receive a failing grade.



M.A. Dissertation Advisor/Reader Report

Student Name/Number:

MA Dissertation Title:

Dissertation Adviser:/Second Reader: [delete one]

Grade:

Date:

Comments:



M.A. Dissertation Final Report

Student Name/Number:

MA Dissertation Title:

Dissertation Adviser:

Second Reader:

Grade:

Date:

Please indicate how the final grade was reached: