

# Growing Pains of the Academic Skills Curriculum

University College Utrecht  
(UCU)

Prof.dr. Orlanda S.H. Lie (head humanities  
department)

[o.s.h.lie@uu.nl](mailto:o.s.h.lie@uu.nl)

# University College Utrecht 1997

- International undergraduate honors Liberal Arts and Sciences college of Utrecht University (UU)
- Residential
- 650 students
- 60% Dutch nationality (international background)
- 40% International students from more than 50 countries

# Utrecht University (1636)

- Largest university of the Netherlands
- 23,000 students
- Population city of Utrecht: 300,000

# UCU and UU

- The majority of UCU teachers are UU faculty members, who have their appointments and their research environments at the UU faculties and departments
- UCU is embedded in the UU; it offers an academic undergraduate program that is closely connected to current research

# Liberal Arts & Sciences educational philosophy

- Keywords: critical and creative thinking, world citizens, social awareness, respect and understanding (civic engagement)
- Academic skills (compulsory courses)
  - Foreign language requirement
  - Field major in Humanities, Social Science, or Science

# Curriculum

- Bachelor program of 3 years of two semesters
- 4 courses per semester (total 24 courses)
- Tutorial system (about 30 tutors)
- Small classes (max. 25)
- Exchange and study abroad program (1 semester)

# Skills curriculum

- Longitudinal; skills repertoire built up over a period of three years
- First year: general academic skills
- Second year: specialized skills for major students
- Third year: capstone experience (research projects, internships, honors theses)

# Introduction to Academia

- Compulsory course for first year students
- General skills on a basic level:
  - academic thinking
  - methodology/approaches
  - heuristics
  - critical reflection (analysis)
  - communication

# Jared Diamond: Guns, Germs, and Steel

- Integrative approach;
- How to formulate a research question
- How to find relevant information
- How to evaluate the information
- What methodologies are used in research?
- How to analyze the material
- How to present the findings orally and in writing at a public event

# Second year

- HUM: Approaches to the Humanities
- SSC: Methods and Statistics
- SCI: Laboratory science and Mathematics

# Third year

- Capstone experience
- Research project in academic environment
- Internship outside academia (but with an academic research component)
- Examples

# World Citizenship

- Foreign language requirement:  
Pass the 200-level (intermediate) course of a language offered at UCU other than English or the student's native language (Dutch, German, Spanish, French, Italian, Chinese)
- Semester abroad
- Internship abroad

# Civic engagement

- Local: hospital, health care, tutoring in poor neighborhoods (voluntary)
- Curriculum-bound:
- Internships (national)
- Global: Future Leaders Programme (Africa, South America, India)
- UCU in Africa (12 week summer program in Kenya)
- UCU in China (1 semester at Xiamen University)