



Report

Date

4 March 2021

Subject

Development dialogue Research Master Arts & Culture

Intercultural sensitivity

The Cultural Analysis track would like to take up the issue raised by the report of the need to increase sensitivity to intercultural differences within the programme, to describe our efforts in the CA track to address these issues (in terms of content, research methodology and communication) and to find out what others are doing in this respect.

The programme, in particular the Cultural Analysis track, raises the question of intercultural sensitivity, which has been picked up as an especially important point of attention in this year of Black Lives Matter and corona. A complaint from a student about the programme being too white has stimulated a critical assessment of the course material, while steps are also being taken to avoid the presence of an uncritical whiteness in the programme, for instance by looking at the traditions and methods that are drawn upon in the curriculum. The panel members recognise the issues that are being raised, referencing the growing awareness of the existing problems at their own universities, which are not rarely pointed out by students. Many things are taken for granted in a way they should not be and communicating to students that the programme is aware of this is considered to be an important step in the right direction. It also helps to make everyone feel more welcome. In the experience of the panel members, students commonly do not find the programme disrespectful or the faculty lacking in sensitivity, but they at times have a problem with the language that is used to address the problems that are identified. It may be a good idea to create an informal platform that allows students and teachers to come together and, on a voluntary basis, discuss issues that students want to raise in a way they do feel comfortable with. At least, this has worked rather well at the university of one of the panel members.

The programme welcomes this idea and emphasizes that having an open discussion is crucial for students to be able to claim their own place in important debates in academia and society, which is of course of special relevance in the context of a research master. A clear effort is made by the programme to incorporate different theories, approaches and topics, for instance from the Global South. Students are actively encouraged to suggest texts for discussion in various classes, to provide them with a voice in the curriculum and stimulate the diversity of the material that is being used. Alongside this increased attention for what is being taught, a clear need is felt to consider the epistemologies and ethics that are used in taking on the challenges of diversity and decolonization. The programme sees it as crucial to keep the

dialogue about these issues going and an integral part of this is reflecting on which languages are used to speak to each other and to deal with the problems and questions that staff and students are confronted with. For example, the programme is encouraging a critical assessment of the context of the objects that are being studied to uncover the underlying assumptions and privileges. Foregrounding this is of great importance to the lecturers, while the point is also made that the teaching staff should reflect the diversity that it would like to see in the students and the curriculum.

Art & Performance Studies (Artistic Research / Art Studies)

The staff would like to discuss how to relate the unique character of the Artistic Research track/specialization in relation to Art Studies - which the committee recommends on p. 10 - to the recommendation of the committee to integrate methods and approaches from Artistic Research into the other tracks.

The programme, especially the Artistic Research track, is actively reflecting on the ways in which the presence of artists within the context of the university helps to raise important questions about the nature of academic research and the production of knowledge and art. The panel members emphasize this is a relatively new development, which enables artists to function as a critical platform for the university. To be an artistic researcher is a performative act with a clear ethical component, which can be of great value in the dealing with the issues of intercultural sensitivity that have been discussed earlier, to only mention one example. More broadly speaking, introducing the perspective of the artistic researcher stimulates all participants to the programme to take responsibility for what they are doing as researchers. In this way, change from within can be accomplished. While the staff acknowledges that academic standards will have to be met by artistic researchers, the experiences have been very positive. Having artists within the university clearly helps to change the nature of research, while at the same time creating new possibilities for these artists, introducing them to new languages to look at objects.

The panel agrees that the programme is very well-placed to take advantage of the interaction between artists and researchers, with attention for research-based art, art-based research and everything in between. As the staff indicates, the presence of artists has led all students to actively engage with the question of what it means to produce knowledge and to reflect on their own way of doing research. Importantly, students indicate that they chose their master because it merges two fields of expertise. They value the opportunity for artists and researchers to talk to each other, which is a rather unique formula. While there may at times also be tensions, these are commonly some of the most interesting and productive moments for students. The staff highlights the encouraging results of allowing students to move beyond the traditional boundaries of what has been considered to be acceptable knowledge, leading for instance to inspiring exhibitions and excellent theses. The exchange of perspectives within the programme has thus already proven to be very fruitful.