

BLUEPRINT

MASTER OF CULTURAL STUDIES
FACULTY OF ARTS



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PROFILE AND VISION

1.1. VISION AND SPEARHEADS

The master of Cultural Studies examines the relation between art, society, and the whole of media and technologies that today shape art as well as society. The program concentrates on contemporary as well as historical cultural phenomena and studies them from a practical point of view.

The master of Cultural Studies in Leuven has a double scope:

- On the one hand, the term ‘cultural studies’ refers to the study of cultural policy at all levels of policy-making and management in the public sector (local, regional, national, international). Cultural policies are anchored in legal texts and best practices, and the program has a strong practice-based approach to these policies.
- ‘Cultural studies’ at the same time indicates a specific type of analysis and interpretation of culture, starting from a very broad definition of culture. Culture is not limited to ‘high’ culture such as art, literature and philosophy or to culture exclusively produced by specific social or cultural groups (e.g. men, natives or the social elite). This view is based on a clear societal engagement which demonstrates that apparent neutral academic research is based on all sorts of social and political assumptions.

This double scope is crystalized in five spearheads:

- *Both hands-on and theoretically oriented:* In the program of Cultural Studies a theoretical component is combined with practice-oriented elements such as an internship and the development of a creative project.
- *Broad definition of culture:* the program does not focus exclusively on ‘high’ art and culture, but also addresses middlebrow and popular culture. Attention is given to popular genres and widespread cultural practices such as concerts and events.
- *Attention to social embedding and public interest:* the program is strongly anchored in the cultural field, not only on a local level, but also on a regional, national and international level. This connection is reflected in both teaching and research by staff and students. A wide range of topics and phenomena from gentrification, gender and inclusion, to affect, activism and autotheory,... are addressed in the curriculum.

- *Emphasis on contemporary culture*: Cultural studies concerns the present. The program aims at mapping contemporary cultural practices, taking into account an understanding of the historical development of these practices and with attention on emerging trends.
- *Interdisciplinarity*: the program takes pride in combining methodologies from different domains within the humanities. Systematic attention is paid to the philosophical backgrounds of the topics that are dealt with, and methods from the literary sciences, social sciences, history and art history are included in the program. The main focus is on the interpretative level and quantitative methods are only incorporated in a *mixed method* context. This interdisciplinary aspect of the program allows students from a broad range of prior educational backgrounds to valorize their specific educational training in the themes of cultural studies.

1.2. PROFILE

The master of Cultural Studies is geared towards students who are looking for a both practice-oriented and theoretical training in the field of cultural sciences in general and cultural policy in particular. A year in Cultural Studies can be undertaken as a personal project, in order to strengthen a previous degree or to add a new perspective to existing knowledge.

The specific admission requirements for the program are published [here](#).

1.3. MISSION STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVES

What is the profile of a graduate of Cultural Studies?

In the first place, a master's degree of Cultural Studies is an academic degree. The denominator 'academic' entails a set of competencies, like problem solving, the ability to synthesize, scientific attitude, an entrepreneurial spirit, vision and creativity, which will allow the students to judge in an autonomous fashion and will stimulate the passion for lifelong learning. An academic degree is not an endpoint, but a beginning, which allows the students to explore and acquire new skills where they are needed, when they are needed. After completing this versatile master, the spectrum of potential jobs is very broad, as it prepares students for a high level of independence and carries an open horizon, which is important in a climate where flexibility and versatility are valued highly and where the job descriptions of tomorrow have not been invented yet.

The master's thesis is a personal investment that challenges the students' intellectual and organizational competences and gives them the opportunity to showcase their skills and interests. The dissertation demonstrates the academic knowledge and know-how of the student as well as the student's capacity of elaborating a personal, critical, and original scientific demonstration on a freely chosen subject. In Cultural Studies we consider the master's thesis not just as an individual assignment with the support of a supervisor. It also

encompasses a seminar that provides students with the theoretical and practical tools that are needed to finish the dissertation successfully. Master's dissertations need to be accessible in all senses of the word: they are made publicly available, but they also have to be insightful without being hermetic. They are academic, but nevertheless useful for the cultural field as well.

Graduates with a master's degree of Cultural Studies are, above all, well-read individuals, continuously prepared to broaden their knowledge and skills. Literature, theater and performance, film, music, games, events: masters of Cultural Studies are on top of their history, their contemporary context, their meaning and they can eloquently contribute to the cultural debate they have intensely been working on. The Cultural Studies degree is not a training in management in the strict sense, but prepares students for the cultural professional world. They learn how to manage their timing and deadlines within a busy schedule.

The program also targets the students' organizational and creative skills: the course Cultural Policy asks students to develop a project in groups, which requires them, among other things, to come up with a relevant concept, assess the cultural context, motive stakeholders, etc. During the internship moreover, Cultural Studies students are encouraged to work in a cultural professional sector and to engage (pro)actively with their working environment. In short, we train students to become 'cultural professionals'.

The best way however, to become fully acquainted with the cultural sector and to keep up with the latest trends is to participate in it by attending as many events, performances and conferences as possible. We value that attendance very highly and it's an inseparable part of the students' training as a 'cultural professional'.

The internship allows students of Cultural Studies to gain work experience and to become thoroughly engaged in the cultural sector or activity of their interest - heritage, media, event organization, cultural education or cultural production. Non-Flemish students can look for internships in Brussels, where several international organizations offer internships in different languages (mostly English or French).

Moreover, the Master of Cultural Studies offers the opportunity to choose several courses on the practical aspects of media and ICT, such as Online Publishing, Photography or Digital Cultural Heritage. The Institute of Cultural Studies' center of expertise on digital culture provides a set of scientific projects and activities around the 'Digital Humanities' pillar within the program.

Finally, a master student of Cultural Studies has strong communicational and editorial skills. They are able to provide creative content (text and promotional copy) and to use media to transfer this content (traditional media, contemporary media and social media). Graduates of Cultural Studies in particular and of the Faculty of Arts in Leuven in general should be fluent in several languages and not be afraid to tackle the more difficult and more hermetic literature within the field. Students also learn how to do a presentation. They are encouraged to actively engage in class and to train their presentation skills. A number of core courses (and also elective courses) are taught in English, so that local students join the international group and an intercultural exchange can occur. This 'internationalization at home' makes sure that all students, both local and international, develop a more global perspective on culture.

The mission statement and objectives of the master's program of Cultural Studies are translated in a series of specific [learning outcomes](#).

REALISATION

2.1. STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAM

The master in Cultural Studies is a one-year program containing 60 credits. The curriculum consists of three major components:

- *Courses and seminars on cultural topics*

In the first semester students take three obligatory core courses: Capita Selecta of Cultural Studies, Methods of Cultural Studies and Cultural Policy. In these courses the theoretical and practical foundations for cultural studies are laid.

In the second semester students choose a number of optional courses within a specific track. The track 'Creative practices' focuses on contemporary art and culture creation, across the boundaries of genres and media, with a lot of attention for the creative industries. The track 'Cultural memory and identity' focuses on the impact of the cultural past today, and the relationship between culture and forms of identity.

- *An internship in a cultural institution*

The internship is a central part of the master in Cultural Studies. Culture means looking and listening, but also doing. The staff encourage students to look for an internship that is linked to the student's personal and professional interests. Communication and press, marketing and promotion, production and creation, styling, design, cataloguing, research, organization of events,... anything is possible.

- *A master's thesis connected to the chosen track*

The master's thesis is another important part of the master in Cultural Studies. Students will be supported in their research and writing process via a broad range of interesting seminars.

A detailed overview of the program can be consulted in the [program guide](#).

2.2. TEACHING METHODS

The program uses a mix of teaching methods in order to reach its goals and learning outcomes. The curriculum includes a firm theoretical foundation, but is also very practice-

oriented. Project- and groupwork are therefore important elements of the program next to the internship. Interaction with and between students during contact hours is highly stimulated and is especially interesting since the group is composed of student with various - but often complementary – educational backgrounds.

2.3. EVALUATION

The staff makes use of a broad range of assessment forms so as to guarantee a sufficient variety in the evaluation methods. This allows the specific talents of each individual student to come to the surface. Writing assignments form an essential part of the program, since good writing skills are one of the key competencies of an arts student. The writing process is always accompanied by intensive feedback sessions. Students also develop their oral presentation skill, as is customary in the cultural field. On the whole the evaluation of the students is strongly linked to the knowledge and competencies that are expected of them when entering the labor market.