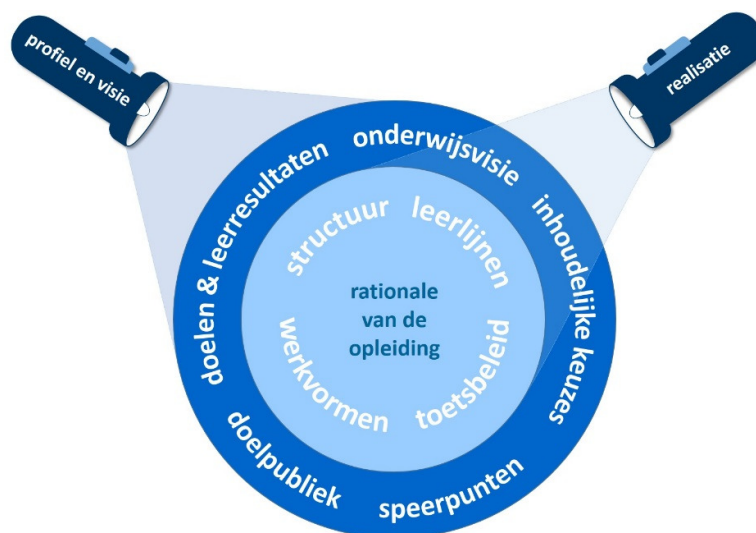


BLUEPRINT

MASTER OF BIOETHICS

FACULTEIT GENEESKUNDE



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1 Vision and profile of the programme

1.1 Objectives and learning outcomes

The main objective of the Master of Science in Bioethics (MBIO) is to train highly qualified students for research work or professional activities in the domain of bioethics, an interdisciplinary field that studies **value questions** that arise in health care, public health and biomedical research.

This specialized training focuses on the most important traditions and contemporary movements in bioethics, with **special attention to European traditions** in bioethics. It focuses on the development of research skills and the deepening of knowledge in various concepts, methods and thematic areas in the field of bioethics. The programme empowers graduates to critically reflect upon ethical issues in various clinical and research settings. Specifically, graduates of the program can identify complex ethical questions in clinical care and at the level of health care regulations. They are able to analyse and compare various theoretical approaches to these questions, understand their underlying concepts, and develop a personal and coherent line of argumentation.

The program also aims to deliver professionals who are qualified to independently perform **research in various subfields of bioethics**. Thanks to the research focus orientation, graduates can retrieve, analyse and interpret theoretical and empirical bioethics literature. They also master the academic and communicative skills to independently design and execute research on new questions that arise in bioethics and report their findings in the format of a scientific article or an oral presentation.

In addition to these academic competencies, students also acquire a strong practical expertise in dealing with ethical issues that emerge in healthcare practice. To this end, graduates are prepared to effectively participate in ethical debates within a **multidisciplinary and cross-cultural environment**, for instance by taking up functions as members of clinical or research ethics committees. Specifically, they are capable of clarifying and justifying their own position towards an ethical issue and cooperate in a respectful and open-minded way with others in order to formulate consensus-driven recommendations on how to deal with them.

1.2 Vision on education

The MBIO is focused on the personal and professional formation of bioethicists, who can offer a careful, sustainable and critical contribution to the current and future society from their own discipline, in dialogue with others having different disciplinary backgrounds. In order to prepare students for this responsibility, the MBIO intends to create a learning environment, which persistently addresses and challenges students' **disciplinary future self**, how they envision themselves as a future bioethicist. .

The learning environment is characterized by a small student population, which is composed of an **international and interdisciplinary group** of individuals who have already finished a master programme. This fosters a continuous exchange of experiences and cultural perspectives through which students, indirectly, act as teachers for their fellow students. By challenging each other's disciplinary perspectives on bioethics, students are encouraged to develop openness towards other positions, respect for cultural diversity in bioethics, as well as the ability for teamwork in a multidisciplinary context.

In order to prepare students to adopt a critical and scientific attitude towards ethical questions, education is as much as possible **research-driven**. Specifically, the content of the courses is attuned to the research interests and expertise of the academic teaching staff. Through its strong focus on research, the MBIO also supports its students in critically analysing the scientific literature, writing scientific articles and submitting papers to conferences and journals. Consequently, graduates are prepared to pursue a PhD training, as well as to integrate research and scientific writing into their professional activities, which promotes an attitude of life-long learning.

1.3 Spearheads of the programme

The learning outcomes and vision on education have inspired the following spearheads:

1. **Focus on bioethics instead of applied ethics:** in order maximally challenge the *disciplinary future self* the programme has a specific focus on bioethics. This focus distinguishes it from broader studies in applied ethics, which are also concerned with topics in the fields of social, environmental, sexual or global ethics.
2. **Third cycle programme:** in order to facilitate intercultural and interdisciplinary exchange of ideas, the programme is specifically directed towards students who have already obtained a master's (or equivalent) degree.
3. **Focus on the development of research skills:** the programme strongly focuses on the development of academic skills that prepare students for a future academic career in the field of bioethics.
4. **Attention for continental European perspectives on bioethics:** the MBIO offers a broad range of theoretical and practical perspectives on bioethics, with particular attention for developments in European bioethics. These include the connection between social science and bioethics, ethics and law, care ethics, as well as values and principles that are central to European culture (e.g. respect for life, human dignity, solidarity, vulnerability).
5. **Thematic focus:** thanks to the programme's thematic focus, students acquire expertise in dealing with ethical issues that emerge in various healthcare settings, such as end-of life care, medical research and public health.

1.4 Target audience

Participation in the MBIO is of interest to any scholar who wishes to deepen his or her understanding of moral questions and dilemmas in current health care and research practice and policy development. In order to address these questions from a variety of cultural and professional perspectives, the program is accessible for **European and non-European students** with backgrounds in a variety of relevant fields, such as medicine, nursing, dentistry, biomedical sciences, philosophy and theology, law, psychology, health economics, politics and health care administration.

The MBIO is a **third cycle program**, which implies that the applicant should already have obtained a master's degree or an equivalent. Admission depends upon an assessment by the International Admissions and Mobility Unit of the KU Leuven and the program selection committee, taking into account applicants' prior academic performance and professional experience, proficiency in English and personal motivation.

1.5 Career perspectives

After graduation, students are prepared to take up a diverse spectrum of professional responsibilities. Specifically, graduates may undertake a PhD training or collaborate in research projects at **universities or independent research institutions**. Several others have been appointed in **healthcare facilities**, serving as ethics consultants, hospital chaplains or members of clinical ethics committees or institutional review boards. Some have found positions at pharmaceutical companies, government agencies, regulatory bodies, medical associations or non-governmental organizations. Many graduates have also taken up **teaching responsibilities** in an Institute for Higher Education.

2 Realization of vision and profile

2.1 Organisational context

The MBIO is coordinated by the **Faculty of Medicine** of the KU Leuven, which offers a broad range of educational programs in more than forty medical and paramedical disciplines. The **Teaching Committee (POC)** is responsible for the operational management of the programme and the development, implementation and evaluation of the curriculum. The POC is chaired by the programme director and is composed of academic staff members, student representatives and faculty staff members.

The master program builds on the extensive research and teaching expertise of the **Centre for Biomedical Ethics and Law**. The academic staff members have received international recognition within the fields of medical ethics and medical law, thanks to their achievements as authors, reviewers and editorial board members of major bioethical and clinical journals, as well as their membership of various professional associations and expert networks. For expertise in related fields, the programme uses courses offered in the faculties of Theology and Religious Studies, Philosophy, Law, Nursing Science and Social Sciences. The language of instruction is English. Students in bioethics may receive financial support through the scholarships **Fund Roger Borghraef**, which are granted each year to applicants with excellent study results and a strong motivation.

2.2 Programme structure and curriculum

The MBIO is a one-year programme of 60 study points (SP), which includes three learning trajectories: a *truncus communis* of core bioethics courses (22 SP), a research component (23 SP) and a series of elective specializing courses (15 SP). The **truncus communis** courses support students to develop a critical attitude towards ethical questions that emerge in the fields of clinical decision-making, biomedical research, end-of-life care, human genetics and genomics, public health and health law. Students learn to analyse these questions from a theoretical and practical perspective, in view of formulating concrete advice on a particular case.

The **research component** consists of a Seminar on Interdisciplinary Research and a master's thesis project. This learning trajectory empowers students to understand and compare the major approaches to ethics, such as deontology, utilitarianism, principlism and the Louvain tradition on personalism. These sessions also devote time to develop the methodological competencies that are necessary to independently elaborate a master's thesis under the supervision of a promotor. Specifically, students learn to define an appropriate research question, use online databases and e-sources to identify relevant literature, create references in an appropriate style and deliver a formal oral presentation. Students are also supported to develop an individual research plan, which includes a research background and hypothesis, an outline of the research methodology and a detailed planning guide.

In consultation with the program director, the students can also choose from a **wide selection of electives** in the fields of medicine, theology, philosophy, anthropology, psychology and social sciences. These personal trajectories allow students to combine study and work, as well as to broaden their knowledge and skills in function of their disciplinary future selves. For instance, students with a limited philosophical background can follow an introductory course into fundamental ethics and students with little knowledge of empirical methods can take courses in survey methodology or statistics. Alternatively, students may choose for specialized courses, which deepen their competencies in a particular field with close affinity to bioethics, such as a course on world religions' approach to ethical issues.

More detailed information is available in the online programme guide, which can be accessed through: https://onderwijsaanbod.kuleuven.be/opleidingen/e/SC_53597631.htm

2.3 Educational methods

The applied educational methods aim at activating students as much as possible in order to stimulate an in-depth learning process. Specifically, the core bioethics courses consist of a series of **interactive lectures**, during which students are frequently asked to share their pre-existing knowledge and cultural perspectives towards the subject matter. Students' active involvement is also strongly encouraged during **scientific seminars**, in which concrete individual and group exercises are used to develop the academic competencies that are required to elaborate a publishable scientific paper.

The master program also intends to promote **cooperative learning**, which empowers students to develop an open-minded attitude to alternative cultural and professional perspectives and cooperate within a team environment. During the Seminar on Interdisciplinary Research, for instance, students are invited to present their thesis work plan to an international and multidisciplinary audience of student colleagues and learn to critically assess and formulate constructive feedback to the work of peers.

Furthermore, the MBIO promotes a real-life learning environment, which assists students in developing a realistic view of their future professional life. At frequent occasions, students are challenged to **analyse authentic ethical cases**, which enables students to relate theoretical background knowledge to concrete dilemmas that they might encounter in clinical practice or in a research context. The invitation of researchers and clinicians as **guest lecturers** serves a similar aim and ensures that the latest developments in the field are dealt with in the program. Finally, the development of a **master's dissertation** in the format of a publishable paper under the close guidance of an academic staff member makes students familiar with a multinational and multidisciplinary research environment of a research institute.

2.4 Evaluation

Evaluations primarily aim to provide students and teachers insight into students' progression in the learning process (formative evaluation), as well as to assess the results of this learning process (summative evaluation). The MBIO endorses the **evaluation policy** of the Faculty of Medicine, which contains a formal set of initiatives to safeguard and improve the quality of evaluations. In order to support students to have a clear focus for organizing their study, they are clearly informed about the examination requirements, format and grading criteria, orally (at the beginning of each course) and in writing (in the ECTS course descriptions). The fairness and reliability of grading is also enhanced by using answer models for correcting examination questions and standardized scoring sheets for assessing presentations and assignments.

In order to be presented with a broad range of information about students' level of performance, the programme has adopted a **well-balanced combination of various examination formats**, including oral and written exams, written assignments and oral presentations. The evaluation of the core bioethics courses is predominantly based on oral exams, which allow for an integrated and applied assessment of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Specifically, students are expected to demonstrate their ability to clarify and critically evaluate an ethical statement, as well as to construct and justify a coherent personal position. This format also gives teachers the opportunity to ask for clarifications and formulate some critical remarks, which encourages students to deepen or adjust their argumentation. Several of these courses also make use of written essays to evaluate students' ability to reflect upon their own ethical attitudes towards an authentic case, weigh the pros and cons of potential solutions and propose a desirable course of action.

The **master's thesis** is an integrated project in which students can demonstrate their scientific competencies by performing original and independent research work in a specific area of bioethics under the supervision of a promotor. This project assess their ability to collect and evaluate information, critically analyse theories in the chose area of inquiry, construct and defend a coherent argument and present their research results concisely and in a scholarly form. The evaluation of the master's thesis includes formative as well as summative elements. As regards the formative assessments, students are invited to submit their research plan one month before the deadline, after which a peer feedback session is organized. The summative evaluation by the (co-)promotors and two independent reviewers focuses on students' ability to perform original research based on a sound methodology and report their findings in writing and during an oral presentation.

Annex 1: Programme-specific learning outcomes

KNOWLEDGE AND INSIGHT: *The graduate has knowledge and insight into*

- PLO 1 The most important traditions (e.g. deontology, utilitarianism and teleology, care ethics and Louvain personalism) and concepts (e.g. personhood, dignity, integrity, informed consent) in the field of bioethics internationally
- PLO 2 The most important ethical issues that are related to various practical healthcare settings (e.g. clinical decision-making, biomedical research, end-of-life care, genetics and genomics, public health and health law) and patient populations (e.g. persons with dementia, psychiatric patients, paediatric patients)
- PLO 3 Different types of methodological designs in empirical and normative research in bioethics
- PLO 4 Ethical challenges that authors may encounter when publishing bioethics research in international journal, such as multiple authorship, salami slicing publishing, conflict of interests, confidentiality and anonymity

SKILLS: *The graduate has developed the following skills*

INFORMATION AND RESEARCH SKILLS

- PLO 5 Performing a focused search for bioethics literature by using online databases and e-sources
- PLO 6 Evaluating the content and methodological quality of theoretical and empirical bioethics literature
- PLO 7 Critically analyzing complex bioethics topics by means of empirical and literature-based research designs
- PLO 8 Independently elaborating a research project under the supervision of a promotor with the intention to have the results published in a peer-reviewed academic journal, which involves formulating a research hypothesis, choosing a research methodology, developing a research plan, collecting and analyzing data, as well as deducing appropriate conclusions

CLINICAL ETHICS SKILLS

- PLO 9 Applying different ethical theories into clinical ethics case studies
- PLO 10 Developing and justifying a personal position in relation to an ethical question or dilemma
- PLO 11 Being able to participate in and moderate a multidisciplinary ethical case deliberation as potential members of a healthcare or research ethical committee

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- PLO 12 Reporting scientific findings in a formal style and format by writing scientific papers and delivering oral presentations
- PLO 13 Providing constructive feedback to research proposals and oral presentations from peers
- PLO 14 Collaborating with other health care professionals in a cross-cultural and multidisciplinary context in view of developing consensus-based recommendation on how to deal with a particular problem in bioethics

ATTITUDES: *The graduate demonstrates*

- PLO 15 Moral sensitivity to ethical problems and dilemmas that occur in clinical practice and at the level of healthcare regulations
- PLO 16 Openness and respect towards different professional and cultural perspectives in bioethics
- PLO 17 A critical attitude towards bioethics theories and concrete cases related to topics in bioethics
- PLO 18 A positive attitude towards life-long learning and continuous training