



**sirius program**

excellence in higher education



**university of  
 groningen**



# Excellence at the University of Groningen

Founded in 1614, the University of Groningen is one of the oldest universities in the Netherlands. The University enjoys an international reputation as one of the leading research universities in Europe. It has a large international network and a good reputation for academic teaching with a modern, student-oriented approach.

## Profile of the University of Groningen

The University consists of nine faculties: Arts, Behavioral & Social Sciences, Economics & Business, Law, Mathematics & Natural Sciences, Medical Sciences, Philosophy, Spatial Sciences and Theology & Religious Studies. Together, these faculties offer programs at Bachelor's, Master's and PhD levels in virtually every field, many of them completely taught in English. Located in the north of the Netherlands, Groningen is a real student city (there are 26,500 Bachelor's and Master's students) with a flourishing student life and many social and cultural activities.

Mission Statement on Excellence: 'Investment in the highest quality by recognizing differences in talent and ambition'

The general mission statement of the University of Groningen is 'working at the frontiers of knowledge'. When applied to education, this means that we offer education tailored to the talents, ambitions and goals of individual students, thus optimizing their chances in society and the job market. The degree programs provide space for every student's personal ambitions and qualities. Talent is stimulated and special achievements are rewarded.

## Activities concerning excellence

Talented and ambitious students need extra challenges and incentives. These are provided through a range of activities, starting at the level of high-school students and carrying on through to our academic staff.

### Junior Academy

The Junior Academy offers competitions, lectures, web classes and master classes, especially for talented and ambitious high-school students.

### University of Groningen Honours College

The University of Groningen Honours College is the latest and most prominent activity to challenge students. The College organizes extra-curricular honours programs for ambitious and talented students with the aim of offering these students an environment where they can critically examine knowledge and are challenged to develop new insights and innovative ways of thinking (see below for more information).



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### Top and Research Masters

The University offers two-year exclusive Master's degree programs with a strong emphasis on research. The 'Top and Research Masters' are all associated with Graduate Schools, thereby easing the transition between the Master's and PhD level and delivering graduates with strong research skills to follow professional careers. The College offers a supportive environment where scholars excel in a specific field of expertise.

### Tenure track system and Rosalind Franklin Fellowships

The tenure track system is very common in the United States. However, in the Netherlands it is relatively new and the University of Groningen was the first to introduce it. The system enables us to attract and select the most talented staff worldwide by offering professorship possibilities.

In order to raise the presence of women at the highest levels of the institution, the University of Groningen has also initiated the prestigious Rosalind Franklin Fellowship Program. Female academics who aim for a career path towards full professorship at a top European research university are invited to apply for these fellowships.

### University of Groningen Honours College: Excelling at the frontiers of knowledge

#### Aim

The University of Groningen wants to offer talented and ambitious Bachelor's students extra challenges through Honours Programs. These programs are offered by the University of Groningen Honours College.

#### Design of the Honours program

The Honours Program is an extra-curricular program worth 45 ECTS credits. The student follows the program alongside the regular 180 ECTS Bachelor's program (the Honours Program therefore represents 25% extra study load). 'Excelling at the frontiers of knowledge' is the basis of the Honours Program, comprising elements that both deepen and broaden knowledge.

The in-depth parts (25 ECTS) relate to the degree program and are taught in the student's own faculty. The deepening part of the program concentrates on knowledge within the boundaries of the academic discipline. The student learns more about the core areas of the discipline and current research themes,

as well as to conduct research and coming into contact with prominent academics.

The broadening parts (20 ECTS) involve intensive contact with honours students from all other faculties. The aim of the broadening, interdisciplinary parts of the Honours Program is to get to know the frontiers of other disciplines. In an interdisciplinary setting, students learn to look beyond the frontiers of their own discipline and to contribute to scientific and social themes. Special attention is paid to personal development.

#### Selection

The Honours program starts after the first semester of the first year of study. At the end of the first semester the top 10% of the students in each degree program are invited to apply for admission to the Honours College.

### The Sirius Program: Excellence in Higher Education

The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) has created the Sirius Program to allow higher education institutions to experiment with a range of excellence programs between 2008 and 2013, involving their most talented and motivated students. By allowing research universities and universities of applied sciences to challenge their best students, the Ministry aims to gain an understanding of how excellence can best be achieved, and of the obstacles that currently exist. The largest portion of the budget has been earmarked for the Bachelor's program that was launched in 2008 (€ 48.8 million), for which 16 applications have been approved. Excellence is being promoted across the entire breadth of these university institutions, involving at least 5% of all students in each case. There is a lot of diversity, both in the chosen definitions of 'excellence' and 'excellent students' and in the activities being developed. Work is carried out based on performance agreements (high trust). Sirius organizes a learning program in which institutions learn from themselves and each other, and in which knowledge is also made available to the entire sector and the government. The Master's program, with a budget of € 12.2 million, will start in 2010.

