

Note

## Utrecht Law College (ULC): Preparing Students for the Future

Otto Spijkers<sup>1\*</sup>, Alexander Collot d'Escury<sup>2</sup>, Katrien Zetsma<sup>3</sup>

1. Lecturer and tutor of Utrecht Law College; o.spijkers@uu.nl
2. Former president, student board Utrecht Law College; a.descury@outlook.com
3. Former secretary, student board Utrecht Law College; katrienzetsma@gmail.com

\*Corresponding author: [o.spijkers@uu.nl](mailto:o.spijkers@uu.nl)

Received: 1 February 2017; Accepted: 20 April 2017; Published: 4 May 2017

Keywords: law school; learning community; personal development

### 1. Introduction

This short contribution will introduce the reader to the three pillars of the Utrecht Law College's teaching philosophy. These pillars are:

1. Community building,
2. Commitment,
3. Preparing students for future employment.

These honours-specific ambitions complement the general ambition of the law school, *i.e.* to teach the students a thorough knowledge of the law.

### 2. What is the Utrecht Law College?

Besides the regular Bachelors in Law, Utrecht University in the Netherlands also offers, since September 2005, the Utrecht Law College (ULC) programme. The ULC is the honours programme of the Law Faculty, and is ideally suited for the student who wants to prepare for tomorrow's legal practice in a more intensive way and in smaller groups. Utrecht Law College consists of two different colleges, Sirius (since 2005) and Tilia (since 2012). Each year, approximately 75 new students are selected for each college. Each college has its own study association. Students participate in all kinds of activities and organize such activities themselves. One can think of excursions, trips abroad, study groups, symposia and lectures on current themes. The students are provided with the enthusiastic support of the teachers who are affiliated with the Utrecht Law College. The study associations also organize the modules that make the ULC so unique; these are a series of activities where students learn more about a particular topic related to their studies. The ULC is a three year Bachelor programme, and after successful completion students are awarded the LLB (Bachelor of Laws).

### 3. Essence of the Utrecht Law College teaching method

*The most distinguishing feature* of ULC is the strong sense of community. Both teachers and students actively contribute to this. The two colleges of ULC – with the names Sirius and Tilia – constitute distinct communities. The study associations, responsible for organizing both academic lectures and various social activities, play a crucial role in this. The students are selected especially on their talent, motivation, and their demonstrated capacity to contribute to community building.

A *second* characteristic of the ULC is commitment. The ULC students must be committed to their studies, and the ULC staff must be committed to teaching. At the same time, it is important that an ULC student develops and employs his or her talents outside the classroom: in sports, music, or by joining the student organization's board. This combination of commitment to studies and personal development is one of the strengths of the ULC. The ULC aims to educate socially active, committed and highly versatile law students. To achieve this, the ULC encourages students to come up with ideas themselves to develop their general skills and competences. For example, in the past, students have developed a module on Personal Leadership. The staff, in turn, provides enthusiastic lecturers and tutors, whose task is to guide the students throughout their studies. Through the commitment of both students and teachers, a safe learning community is created to stimulate participants to improve themselves and each other continuously.

And *finally*, the ULC programme prepares the students for law practice. This could be at a law firm, but also with an NGO or in academia. Guest lectures and clinics provided by professionals are organized regularly, and the ULC students visit law firms, courts, governmental and other legal institutions. The term "law practice" must be understood in a broad sense: the ULC aspires not to limit itself to preparing students for the big commercial law firms.

It is important that students know themselves well. For this purpose, tutor meetings are organized devoted to professional and broad personal development. The latter is about self-understanding of one's own personal and academic growth and development. The focus in the meetings on personal development is on time management, employment orientation, employability skills, one's role in a team, etc. The purpose of these meetings is for the students to obtain practical skills, essential in future employment, in addition to the academic knowledge the study provides.

### 4. Discussion

The particular nature of the ULC teaching method raises various questions, many of which are still open for discussion. We discussed the following propositions at the Utrecht Honours Conference:

- Proposition 1: Is it the task of the university to train students to become good planners, manage their time well, know how to sell themselves on the job market, etc.? Or should the university focus on academic skills, competences and expertise?
- Proposition 2: Do honours students have to obtain above-average results for normal tests, or do they need to obtain normal results for above-average tests?

- Proposition 3: Do honours students thrive better under intensive and small-scale teaching, and if so, what can we expect from students in return?
- Proposition 4: Is someone who leaves university with a thorough knowledge of the law going to become a good lawyer? Or should we teach other issues as well, such as ethics, how to deal with clients, management skills, time planning, etc.?

## **5. Conclusions**

In essence, the ULC constitutes a small academic community, comprised of both excellent students and teachers. A good ULC student has made a conscious and well-informed decision to join the law school and, more particularly, the Utrecht Law College. She or he has an ambition and demonstrated ability to achieve good results, a motivation and demonstrated ability to study in the honours program, and academic curiosity. Since the students are co-responsible for the success of the ULC, the students must also have a willingness and demonstrated interest in organizing and attending extra (study) activities.

## **References**

More information about ULC (in Dutch) can be found on the website:

<https://www.uu.nl/bachelors/rechtsgeleerdheid-utrecht-law-college>