The Master Plan

How to choose a Master’s programme

www.career.uva.nl/choosingyourmasters
Contents

The Master Plan - How to choose a Master’s programme 4
Your current degree programme 5
Link between study and work 6
Choosing your Master’s 6

Colophon

Copyright © 2018 Student Careers Centre, University of Amsterdam
UvA Student Services
P.O. Box 15832
1001 NH Amsterdam
www.career.uva.nl

This information is intended for personal use. The user may photocopy, distribute and pass on the work under the following conditions:

Acknowledgement: The user must mention the name specified by the author or licensor in the work (but not in such a way that the impression is given that they endorse your work or your use of the work).

Non-commercial: The user may not use the work for commercial purposes.

No derivative works: The user may not edit the work.
In the case of commercial use, prior written approval from the Student Careers Centre is required before reproducing, saving or publishing the provided texts and visual material in any form or any way, be that electronic, mechanical, via recording or in any other way.
The Master Plan

How to choose a Master’s programme

You are thinking about doing a Master’s programme at the University of Amsterdam. Thank you for your interest in one of our Master’s. We want you to successfully complete your study at the UvA, and would therefore like to offer you this step-by-step plan. This plan gives you pointers for a structured approach to choosing a Master’s programme. The choice of your Master’s will shape your career. The step-by-step plan helps you to make a conscious choice and take control of the process of finding a Master’s, followed by a job that matches your motivation, ambitions, interests and qualities.

In this plan, we put a number of questions and suggestions to you for reflection, which will give you a clearer picture of yourself, your interests and capacities, and maybe also your wishes regarding future jobs. These are not everyday questions with quick and straightforward answers. Do not be put off if you are having some trouble at the start; these questions will no doubt help you to make a lot of progress. Should you find yourself with any questions after reading through this plan, we recommend you contact a career centre or study adviser at your own university. When you are studying at the University of Amsterdam, you may contact the UvA Student Careers Centre.

Steps involved in choosing a Master’s

When choosing a Master’s programme, you will find that different aspects are involved that mutually influence each other. These are further examined in the sections below, on the basis of a few questions.
Your current degree programme

Motivation & ambition

1. When you chose your current Bachelor’s programme, what induced you to do so? Did you have a specific goal?

2. What motivated you to choose specific electives, a minor or additional courses, or to change your course of study?

3. Looking back, would you make the same choices now, or would you rather concentrate on different subjects? If so, what subjects would you choose?

4. What are your study results? What are your favourite subjects and which are your stumbling blocks?

Specific interests

1. If you look at the courses you took during your Bachelor's programme, with which did you have the most affinity? Which aspects of them appeal to you? Which subjects/topics draw your attention? In which disciplines or specialisations can they be found?

2. About which topics would you like to learn more? What would you like to study in detail? Which disciplines and/or specialisations are relevant to this? Which Master's programme or programmes would cover this? On www.studyfinder.nl, you can find out if other relevant Master's programmes are offered elsewhere in the Netherlands.

3. Can you detect an overall theme in the areas and subjects that appeal to you? What have you already emphasised? Which research areas are relevant to this?

4. Are there any interdisciplinary Master’s programmes that offer a good combination of your areas of interest?

5. Do you want to keep a broad focus or study something in depth?

Qualities and skills

You will have acquired a number of generic academic skills by now. Some examples are analytical thinking, writing, quickly processing information, presenting, doing research, making a critical contribution to social debates, etc. You will also have acquired subject-specific skills, in particular in terms of research methods and practices.

1. Which skills are you good at? And which ones would you like to develop?

2. When you look at any work, committee or voluntary experience you have gained while studying, what appeals to you in particular? Consider, for example, working with people, organising, policy-making, a subject you were involved in or anything else that might be relevant. When you can look back on something with a smile and feel proud of your input, this often means you were good at it.

3. Which other skills have you developed? This could involve contacts with customers, dealing with stressful circumstances, leadership skills, doing research, teaching, giving advice, etc.

In summary

1. Does anything stand out in terms of motivation and interests? Which topics or subjects would you definitely want to work on/with during your Master’s?

2. What can you say about your capacities, qualities and skills? Which qualities and skills should definitely be required for your Master’s programme, and perhaps for your job after that? Which qualities and skills do you want to develop?

3. What does the above mean for your choice of a Master’s programme? What is your conclusion?
If you already have a general idea about the field of work and/or the type of work you would prefer after completing your current studies, the Master’s programme you are going to do can act as a stepping stone for entering the labour market. That way, you can work on putting together a convincing CV, which underpins your motivation and suitability. An example would be a final project that brings an organisation or company closer to a solution.

Conversely, you might not yet have a very clear picture of your future prospects; in fact, that is quite common. Your choice of a specific Master’s programme or dissertation topic can be a first step in that direction, but it does not have to be. These days, it is quite difficult to decide which direction to take, as the labour market changes rapidly and it is impossible to get a good idea of all the available options. You are probably the most stable factor in this whole process. Do not be afraid to base your choice on your own talent, interest and motivation and learn to cope with the uncertainty of what the future might hold. However, for some fields, very specific advice applies. If you want to do a PhD, for example, a research Master’s is increasingly often a requirement. Feel free to ask professionals in your discipline who are familiar with current trends and requirements in the field you are interested in to give you advice.

Your network will be useful for finding people who are involved in work that appeals to you. Make a list of occupations that appeal to you and about which you would like to have more information, and consider whether anyone in your network is involved in that kind of work. If this is not the case, ask people in your network if they know anyone. You could ask family and friends, as well as fellow students, lecturers, colleagues and former colleagues, people you know from a sports club, etc. LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) can also be an excellent tool for finding people who are willing to share information about their work and advice on how you could develop in that direction. This online social network focuses on professionals. It is a freely accessible online database with many CVs, which will give you a fair idea about how people have developed their career.

On the basis of the above insights, you can answer the following questions:

1. Do I really want to do a Master’s?
2. Do I want to do a regular Master’s or do I want to be considered for a selective Master’s? For example, consider whether you would want to do a research or dual Master’s programmes with limited intake.
3. Do I want to remain within my discipline, or do I want to do an interdisciplinary Master’s?
4. In which discipline do I want to do a Master’s? Will I continue in the same direction as my studies so far, or will I broaden my perspective?
5. Do I want to study at the UvA, or do I also want to consider other universities in the Netherlands and abroad?
6. Do I want to live in Amsterdam? To what extent will I allow my choice of a Master’s programme to be determined by my preference for a city?
7. Do I also want to do a work placement?

Bearing in mind your answers to the above questions, you can do a targeted search for Master’s programmes that meet your requirements. On www.uva.nl/en/masters, you will find a list of all the Master’s programmes offered at the UvA. You can search by programme type, faculty, starting date, etc. Here, you will also find information about the entry requirements. On www.studyfinder.nl, you will find a comprehensive list of all Master’s programmes in the Netherlands. You can search, for example, by sphere of interest or institution.
Gathering information

• You can find detailed practical information about the different Master’s programmes at the UvA on the general Master’s website.

• For more information on the content and structure of Master’s programmes at the UvA, go to the digital Course Catalogue. Here, you will also find a list of the textbooks you will need to study for each Master’s. Try to get hold of some of these books. Have a good look at the curriculum of any Master's programme you are interested in, and try to find out more about the programme’s courses, literature, lecturers and learning outcomes.

• You should also look at the research schools to which the lecturers are affiliated; what are they involved in? Are you interested in the same things; are you inspired by this?

• Attend information sessions, where you will get to speak to lecturers, students and alumni of the different Master's programmes. Prepare for these sessions and ask any questions that have not been covered by the information you found online.

Making a choice

After making your choice, you will probably feel inspired and energised, and will want to share your choice with others. You can tell them the following:

• What does the Master’s entail?

• Why am I so enthusiastic about it?

• Why does it suit me?

If you find it hard to answer these questions, you may not yet know enough about yourself or the different Master’s options. Go through the above questions again, or talk to a tutor or career counsellor at your university. Sometimes, deep down, you already know what you would like to do, but there are all kinds of sensible, rational reasons for not doing it. Perhaps the book Feel the fear and do it anyway by Susan Jeffers will inspire you to act on what your heart tells you to do.

Good luck!

UvA Student Careers Centre
www.career.uva.nl