

MBLS Honours Programme

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The MBLS Honours Programme is a two-year programme intended for students who wish to accomplish personal or academic development goals that surpass the objectives of their regular bachelor programme. Within the programme, students can **expand** their knowledge beyond the boundaries of their discipline and can further **deepen** their knowledge within their discipline. Key to a rewarding honours experience is **personal initiative**. Many of the activities within the programme are driven by the curiosity and goals of the student. This poses a challenge and opportunity to develop your leadership and organisational skills and gives you the freedom to choose activities that best fit your goals. At the end of the Honours Programme, you receive an honours certificate during a ceremony in the Academy Building.

1.2 TARGET GROUP

The MBLS Honours Programme is intended for motivated students who can handle the extra workload. Honours students are creative, show personal initiative, and are intrinsically motivated. They are actively seeking personal or professional development beyond that offered by the regular bachelor's programme and can handle the freedom of choice and self-reliance that the Honours Programme demands.

1.3 WHAT DOES THE MBLS HONOURS PROGRAMME OFFER

The MBLS Honours Programme consists of three components. **i)** The Science Honours Academy (SHA). Here, you work together with all honours students of the Faculty of Science on a wide range of activities that emphasize interdisciplinarity, which can potentially be expanded even further by working together with other faculties. **ii)** The MBLS honours course, which consists of monthly meetings with your fellow MBLS honours students, and an extracurricular activity of your choosing. The topic and nature of the meetings are largely chosen by the honours students, and the meetings are organized by the students. **iii)** Honours courses or honours assignments within the MBLS curriculum. The goals of the MBLS Honours Programme are the broadening or deepening of your knowledge, and personal and professional development.

Deepening knowledge

The MBLS Honours Programme offers you several opportunities to deepen your disciplinary knowledge. In the MBLS honours course, you can organize meetings on a scientific topic of your choosing with the goal of deepening your knowledge, and that of your fellow students. For example, you could organize a journal club, invite an expert speaker, or design a board game involving topic-based questions. The extracurricular activity is another opportunity where you can choose to focus on deepening disciplinary knowledge. Besides the activities in the MBLS honours course, you will write an honours thesis by expanding your regular thesis / research project with the writing, presenting, and defending of a research proposal. Finally, you can complete curricular courses at a more challenging level by performing extra tasks or assignments.

Broadening knowledge

The broadening of knowledge refers to the acquiring of knowledge or skills beyond the boundaries of your own discipline. The interdisciplinary project and the international study trip that you can partake in as part of the SHA are a perfect example of activities that broaden your knowledge. But also, within the MBLs components of the Honours Programme you will have ample opportunity to broaden your knowledge. For example, you can fulfil part of the curricular honours requirement by enrolling in honours courses like those offered by the Descartes College, which emphasize broad interdisciplinary topics. You can also choose to focus the MBLs honours meetings you organize on the broadening of knowledge.

Personal development

The MBLs Honours Programme stimulates personal development by putting you in charge of your own education. You formulate your own learning objectives, design and organize your own educational activities, and reflect on your development throughout the programme. Within the SHA, you will be asked to chair one or more organizational committees, and if you are looking for an additional challenge you can become a member of the SHA student board. Within the MBLs honours course, you will work with a small group of students to develop and organize at least three meetings each year. All of these activities will require you to assert your personal leadership skills. They are challenging and take you out of your comfort zone, but are also highly rewarding.

1.4 PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

The total study load of the Honours Programme is 45 credits. These are divided into 15 extracurricular ECs that you will earn on top of the 180 EC of your MBLs programme, and 30 honours credits earned by completing curricular courses at honours level. The table below summarizes the distribution of activities that you need to complete to earn the full 45 honours credits.

Code	Short description	Contents (examples)	EC	Type
MBLS-HON21	MBLS honours meetings & One extracurricular activity. See examples to the right &	10 per year, active participation, and organization of meetings - Shadowing a master student (10 half days + report) - Short internship (min. 2 weeks + report) - Helping design or teach a U-talent module - Podcast - Your own proposal	7,5	Extra-curricular

	Popular science book essay (2x)	An individual essay on a popular science book that ties into the topic of the meetings and is also presented at a meeting.		
BETA-B2HRI	Interdisciplinary activities within the Science Honours Academy	Two-year programme with e.g., international trip, interdisciplinary assignment, organization of symposia	7,5	Extra-curricular
Various	Honours courses or extra assignments within MBLS courses (2 total)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Honours course 'One Health' - One of the 'Descartes' courses - Assignment within MBLS course (max. 1) 	15	Curricular
MBLS-399	Honours thesis	Research proposal in addition to the thesis	15	Curricular
		Total	45	

2 ADMISSION, RE-ENROLMENT, COMPLETION

2.1 ADMISSION

Admission to the MBLS Honours Programme is selective and takes place in year 1. Following the completion of the first semester, students that have completed all courses with a passing grade and have an average grade of at least 7.5, will be invited to apply for the Honours Programme. Students that do not meet these criteria can still apply but will not be invited automatically. Applications are sent by mail to the Honours Coordinator and consist of a letter of motivation and a curriculum vitae including grades of courses followed thus far. Participants are selected in the second semester of the first year by a selection committee on the basis of average grade, the letter of motivation, the curriculum vitae, and possibly an interview with the MBLS Honours Coordinator. On average, 10% of the year group will be admitted to the programme.

2.2 RE-ENROLMENT

Each year, the selection committee of the MBLS Honours Programme will decide whether participation in the programme will be extended. Continuation in the programme is contingent on active participation in the Honours Programme, and satisfactory study progress. There are no strict rules for what constitutes satisfactory study progress. As a guideline: the curricular study activities should not suffer, either in grades or speed of progression, from participation in the Honours Programme. With approval by the coordinator, study delays are allowed if they benefit the development of the student and are not due to failure to complete courses. If a delay is foreseen or planned, the student will contact the coordinator with a motivation for the delay.

To assist the selection committee in making the decision, all students are required to hand in a progress report at the end of each academic year. This report will consist of a summary of the honours activities undertaken during the year, and a self-reflection on progress in the programme. The honours coordinators will hold a yearly meeting with the students to discuss and evaluate their plans and progress.

2.3 COMPLETION

Students obtain the bachelor's degree and the honours certificate when they have met the examination requirements of both the regular bachelor's programme and the Honours Programme, as can be found in the Education and Examination Regulation (OER). Most honours components are not graded with a numerical grade. Instead, the assessment entails reflection on the achievement of the (personal) learning goals of the student. In Osiris, this is registered as “pass” (goals accomplished) or “fail” (goals not accomplished). Honours students must finalize their portfolio, including proof of completion of the SHA requirements. The portfolio is assessed by the Honours Coordinator.

3 THE HONOURS PORTFOLIO

The portfolio serves to track your progress in the honours portfolio. At the start of the programme, you will write a short overview of your personal goals for being an honours student: what personal or professional goals do you want to achieve, what would you like to accomplish in the Honours Programme? At the end of each honours year, you will write a brief reflection on your progress. The portfolio and the reflections also form the starting point for your yearly meeting with the coordinator.

3.1 CONTENTS OF THE PORTFOLIO

The portfolio is not intended to be a major task, and most of its contents are simply copies of assignments you have completed during the year. You are responsible for making your own portfolio as a series of documents in a logical folder structure. For example, start each folder with a number so that they are in chronological order. The first folder should contain the letter of motivation and CV you submitted at application. The second folder should contain the overview of your personal goals. As you go through the Honours Programme, you simply add new folders for each accomplishment. You do not need to write a separate long description of the accomplishment; you can use any form of output that you have generated. For example, if you completed a course at honours level, this will usually be accompanied by a report, or a product like a video or e-learning module. Place that into the folder. If the documents are self-explanatory, that is all that is required. If not, add a document with a few sentences that explain the type of accomplishment.

3.2 CONTACT WITH THE COORDINATOR

As an honours student, you are expected to show a great deal of independence. However, if you run into any problem, you are always welcome to contact the coordinator. You will meet with the coordinator for an individual progress discussion once a year. Prior to this meeting, you will write a short (half page) reflection of your progress so far. What went well? What problems do you run into? What accomplishments are you proud of? You will submit this reflection together with your current portfolio at least 7 days before your meeting, so that the coordinator has a chance to prepare. At the end

of your second year, you share your complete portfolio which the coordinator will use to judge if you have indeed completed the MBLS Honours Programme.

4 THE MBLS HONOURS PROGRAMME IN DETAIL

The four components that make up the 45 honours credits that you need to obtain to complete the programme are:

1. The Science Honours Academy (7.5 EC)
2. The MBLS Honours Course (7.5 EC)
3. Honours activities within your curriculum (15 EC)
4. The honours thesis (15 EC)

Each of these components is described in detail below.

4.1 SCIENCE HONOURS ACADEMY BETA-B2HRI (7.5 EC)

The students from all the Science Faculty Honours Programmes participate together in the Interdisciplinary Module (Osiris BETA-B2HRI). This module consists of a set of extra-curricular activities aiming at providing added value skills and experiences besides their disciplinary Honours Programme. In this interdisciplinary community, you have the opportunity to organize in cooperation with your colleagues from other departments a broad spectrum of events ranging from symposia, an international trip, group projects, and skills workshops.

The number of credits that you are required to complete in the Interdisciplinary Module is 7.5 ECTS. These credits are part of the 15 ECTS points that you are required to acquire in addition to the 180 ECTS in your regular bachelor's programme. Most of the activities take place during the second and third year of the Honours Programme.

For details, visit the [SHA website](#).

4.2 THE MBLS HONOURS COURSE (MBLS-HONMT) (7.5 EC)

The MBLS Honours course consists of three components: the joint meetings, the writing of an essay on a popular science book, and an extracurricular choice activity.

MBLS honours meetings

In both years of the honours programme, you will attend 11 meetings, together with your fellow MBLS students and the coordinator. Each meeting is planned and organized by a subgroup of the honours students. The content should be related to the overall theme chosen at the start of the year during the first meeting. There will be 3 series of 3 meetings that focus on different aspects:

- One meeting with a social character (examples of the past include an MBLS-themed trivial pursuit and a journal club in the form of a pub-quiz).
- A meeting focused on deepening or broadening knowledge.
- A meeting with external participation. Examples are a mini symposium, or an external visit to a company or research group working on a related topic.

The 3x3 meetings will be followed by a final closing meeting.

Popular science book essay

In both Honours Programme years, you will read a popular science book on which you will write an essay and give a presentation. The books chosen tie into the topics of the meetings. For each set of three meetings, a book is chosen to be read by the group responsible for those meetings. Each student writes an individual essay about this book (also see the separate essay instructions). You will also provide peer feedback on the essay of one of your fellow students.

In addition to the individual essay, you present the book as a group to all students during one of the three meetings (e.g., the social meeting). Be creative in your presenting: incorporate interactive elements like a pub quiz, a molecular machine design game, etc.

Extracurricular choice activity

The extracurricular choice activities offer you the possibility to contribute your own interests to the honours programme. A number of possibilities are indicated below, but you are encouraged to be creative and propose your own activity to the coordinator.

Shadowing of a master student

To gain experience with research and writing reports, you will shadow a master student currently doing an internship. You will accompany the student for 10 half days, discussing the research topic and observing or participating in the experiments. At the end, you will write a short report detailing the goal of the research, and the experiments that were done in the shadowing period. Finding a research group and master student is your responsibility.

A short internship

One way of gaining insight into future career types is to do a short internship (minimally 2 weeks). You can organize this anytime during your studies, but likely the summer will prove to be an opportune moment. Finding a group, institute, organization, or company to host you is again your responsibility. At the end of your internship, you will write a short report detailing your activities.

Developing or teaching a U-talent module (or similar educational activity)

U-talent is a programme for talent development in exact sciences, that is organized by high schools, Utrecht University, and the HU university of applied science. Talented high school students follow 2 modules of 2 days every month during the final 2 years of their programme. Some of these modules are taught by groups of our university. If you are interested in teaching, participating in the design or teaching of a U-talent module is an excellent way to gain experience. Other similar educational activities are also allowed in the MBLS honours programme.

Making a podcast

Alone or in a small group or pair, record a podcast on a Life Sciences topic to place on the student website. Educate-IT can provide you with technical support.

4.3 CHOICE OF CURRICULAR HONOURS ACTIVITIES (15 EC)

You will complete two curricular honours activities that you can choose from the options below, or propose yourself:

- Descartes course
- Course 'One Health'
- Course Sustainability Game at the faculty of geosciences

- Extra assignments within MBLS courses (maximum 1)
- Other honours courses not listed here

These activities can be curricular, meaning that you will earn ECs that count both in your regular MBLS programme and towards the 45 honours credits. Courses like those offered by Descartes College therefore count towards the completion of your 180 EC curriculum.

A course at the Descartes college (7.5 EC)

The [Descartes College](#) offers interdisciplinary honours courses for Bachelor's students in Dutch. These courses differ from other honours courses due to their broad nature, covering various fields. The Descartes courses enable you to see how your own discipline relates to others. You will discuss topics with fellow students and teachers from other specialisations. Each course reflects upon the academic disciplines from a different perspective. You can take the honours courses in your second and third year of your Bachelor's degree. The language of the courses is Dutch.

IMPORTANT! You are supposed to be able to sign up through Osiris, but in practice you will likely get an error message stating that you are not a member of the Descartes honours college. If this happens, send an email including your student number, code of the course you want to follow, and the name of your honours programme (MBLS) to descartescollege@uu.nl. The error message does not indicate any problem with your registration as an MBLS honours student.

Honours Course 'One Health' (7.5 EC)

The novel course "One Health" ([BMW33214](#), level 3, period 4, timeslot AD) has been developed to appeal to multidisciplinary honours students from: veterinary, (bio-) medical, and pharmaceutical sciences. In addition, students from management sciences, law or economics are encouraged to participate if they have particular interest in this topic. All students must apply by sending a motivation letter and a CV to the coordinator dr. Frank Coenjaerts: f.e.j.coenjaerts@umcutrecht.nl.

Course 'Sustainability Game' at the faculty of geosciences (7,5 EC)

The aim of this course ([GEO2-2425](#), level 3, period 3, timeslot C) is the development of a number of sustainability games that allow first year students of Utrecht University to engage with the topic of sustainability. In this course, honours students from Utrecht University's BSc Honours Programmes collaborate with Games and Interaction BSc students from the HKU Academy of the Arts. The course is kick-started in a game-jam: a week-long process that brings together teams of people with complementary skills in a competition to build game prototypes. The multidisciplinary teams will design and start to create serious games focusing on communicating the fundamentals of sustainability. The best results will be developed further by professional applied game design bureaus, possibly in collaboration with the students, with the end goal of the games being played by first year students at Utrecht University.

Honours assignment within a regular MBLS course (7,5 EC)

The honours assignment should offer additional depth or broaden the scope of an existing course and can in principle be a part of any course. Assignments can be individual or performed in a small group. The nature of the assignment is up to you and the course coordinator. An assignment should take up around 16 hours of time during the course.

Procedure

- (a) Contact the coordinator of a course before the start of the course, and discuss if performing an honours assignment is possible.
- (b) You are encouraged to send an email to your honours coordinator with a very brief description of your intended assignment.
- (c) The final grade of the course is not influenced by the honours assignment.
- (d) If completed successfully, either the course coordinator or the student (with the course coordinator in CC) email the honours coordinator, who will inform the study point to mark the course as 'completed at honours level'.

Examples of possible assignments

- Writing an essay
- Developing educational materials that can be used in future years, such as a Xerte module, or an instructional video.
- A podcast on the topic of the course

4.4 HONOURS THESIS (15 EC, IN YEAR 3)

In the final year of your studies, you will write a bachelor thesis in combination with a research project. As part of the honours programme, you will write this thesis at an honours level by also writing a research proposal, which you will present and defend during a meeting with your fellow honours students.