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Marca V.C. Wolfensberger

Utrecht University, M.Wolfensberger@geog.uu.nl

Pierre J. van Eijl

Utrecht University

Albert Pilot

Utrecht University

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Honours Programmes as Laboratories of Innovation: A Perspective from the Netherlands

MARCA V.C. WOLFENSBERGER

FACULTY OF GEOSCIENCES, UTRECHT UNIVERSITY, THE NETHERLANDS

PIERRE J. VAN EIJL AND ALBERT PILOT

IVLOS, INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION, UTRECHT UNIVERSITY, THE NETHERLANDS

SUMMARY

Honours programmes are a recent and fast growing development in Dutch universities. The first such programmes started in 1993. Ten years later 25 programmes have been launched at ten universities. Significant are the diversity in the type of programmes, their length, and their positioning in the curriculum. In this study we describe the types of programmes, the certificates involved, the procedures for selection of the students, and the factors that influence their functioning as experiments for educational innovations. We also present a typology of honours programmes in The Netherlands and describe their spin-off effects in the regular programmes. At least 16 of the 25 programmes did indeed have the function of a living laboratory for educational innovations in the regular programmes. We indicate key issues in understanding spin-off effects. Our main question whether honours programmes have innovative capacities for the normal curriculum is answered positively. After proven success, many innovations of the honours programmes are indeed implemented in the regular curriculum.

THEORY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

An increasing number of Dutch universities have developed honours programmes for students wanting more and being able to do more than the regular curriculum offers them (Van Eijl et al., 2003). Within this recent trend in the Dutch context, gifted and motivated students have many new opportunities. Only a portion of the really good students with a high GPA join honours programmes, and particularly good students often have other priorities. Van den Berg (2001, p. 10) states that 9.6% of the full-time university students actively follow a double bachelor's degree. "Those double-degree students are, generally speaking, the best students, who study at high speed with good results" (p. 71). We are interested in honours programmes because they can offer another alternative and a different kind of challenge to evoke excellence.

HONOURS PROGRAMMES AS LABORATORIES OF INNOVATION

We define honours programmes as programmes specifically developed to offer educational opportunities that are more challenging and demanding than the regular programmes. They are meant for the more motivated and gifted students who want more and have the capacity to do more than the regular curriculum requires from them.

Selection and admission procedures are one component in the definition of honours programmes. Especially because official selection is a rather new phenomenon at Dutch universities, admission procedures attract some criticism. In US literature, we have found discussions about the elitist character of honours programmes, which is reinforced by the selection of students. Also, in Dutch society, a focus on talent and selection is an issue for discussion (Keesen, 1998). An emphasis on grades can lead to competition among students, which is a new phenomenon in the Netherlands. Selection, admission procedures, competition and differentiation in tuition are often said to be strange elements in the Dutch educational system, which has an emphasis on broad educational participation without selection (Hofstede, 1991; Wolfensberger et al., 2003a). However, Wilbrink (2003, p. 52) challenges this common point of view, arguing that “the Dutch educational system does have its selection methods.” Selection takes place at the start and after three years of secondary education, when students need to make a choice between different types of secondary education with different levels. For this selection, among others, pupils take a test at the age of 11. Only ‘atheneum en gymnasium’—the type of secondary school with the highest-level—allows students to start a study at a Dutch university. Wilbrink’s view is supported by Passow (1988), who states that European secondary education is selective in nature, with specific schools aiming to serve the needs of intellectually able youths. Once a student has obtained this kind of diploma, he/she can enter any university. This is the opposite of the American situation, where high schools are rather inclusive and the selection of students is carried out by admissions offices of colleges and universities based on standardised tests. We decided to explore selection and admission procedures as possible characteristics of honours programmes: can anyone gain access who wants a challenge to perform at the highest level of excellence?

There have always been debates about what creates excellent educational outcomes in terms of students results: motivation, giftedness or social context. Intelligence is not the exclusive nor always reliable predictor for success (Terman, 1967; Oden, 1968). Personality characteristics such as perseverance, creative thinking and problem-solving ability (Reis & Renzulli, 1984) as well as the talent to organise and the power to employ intelligence and wisdom (Sternberg, 1986, 2003) are of great importance. Mönks (1988) demonstrated the significance of the contexts like family, school and friends. From the perspective of honours work, one could also argue that it would be more appropriate to decide who is gifted after participation. In this article we do not attempt to solve this issue. Our definition, however, focuses on motivation and giftedness (or talent) because the programmes are specially developed for the target group who *want* to do more (motivation) and who are *able* to do more (giftedness) than the regular programme.

We focus on honours programmes in the Netherlands because the implementation of the bachelor-master structure is in an advanced phase. All over Europe, the

realisation of the 'European Higher Education Area' is now the single most important issue on the agenda of universities and other institutes of higher education. The main issue is to implement the structure of bachelor and master programmes that will make student mobility and the comparison of grades easier. Implementation started in 1999 when the Ministers responsible for higher education from 29 European countries signed the Bologna Declaration. They agreed on important joint objectives for the development of a single and cohesive European Higher Education Area by 2010. In September 2003, the Ministers from 33 European countries met in Berlin in order to review the progress achieved and to set priorities and new objectives for the coming years, with a view to speeding up the realisation of the European Higher Education Area (Conference of Ministers, 2003). The Netherlands seems to be way ahead of many of the 33 countries because, in nearly all Dutch institutions in 2002, the bachelor-master programmes were introduced for all new students along with many of the reforms associated with the Bologna process. Further details can be found in the reports of all countries to the Berlin Conference (<http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/>).

Analysis of the European documents on bachelor-master reveals that they contain almost no references to honours programmes. One study on Master Degrees and Joint Degrees (Tauch and Rauhvargers, 2002) refers to honours programmes because they might become important in the selection for master programmes. In general, however, little if any reference is made to European honours programmes. This may change in the near future, however. In the Netherlands, 10 out of 13 research universities at present have honours programmes. Why is this so? Firstly, because with the bachelor-master implementation, many undergraduate programmes have been broadened, thus creating new opportunities for honours programmes that allow for enrichment. Secondly, because it is becoming more important for students to distinguish themselves in order, for instance, to be admitted to (selective) master programmes in the Netherlands or abroad. Honours programmes should thus be designed in such a way that students are distinguished by the results of their efforts while enrolled. Also, an honours certificate/diploma after successful completion of the honours programme is important. Thirdly, recent political discussions on the knowledge economy and the need to strengthen the Dutch and European innovative capacity have led to a renewed emphasis on the need to cherish talent and research. Excellence in teaching and research is now on the political agenda of the government (Balkenende, 2003), and honours programmes fit in well. Traditionally, the emphasis has always been placed on equality, equity and access in the Netherlands (Hofstede, 1991), and this new focus on excellence seems to support the rapid development of honours programmes at Dutch universities. Maybe in the end the Dutch culture will be able to add excellence to the list without displacing the other traditional emphases. Fourthly and finally, the growth of honours programmes at Dutch Universities may be explained by the fact that the Anglo-Saxon Higher Education system served as a model for the European bachelor-master implementation. Honours programmes are a widespread phenomenon in this system. Considering the forward position of the Netherlands in the introduction of the bachelor-master system and in the implementation of honours, it can be expected that honours programmes will also spread to

other European countries as they adopt the system. Therefore, the remainder of this article will focus on developments in Dutch honours education.

Honours Programmes demonstrate a great variety in pedagogical design and organisation. Their main goal is to provide academic opportunities that challenge students to perform at their highest level of excellence. Additional goals range from the stimulation of talent and the attraction of new teachers and students of outstanding academic ability to creation of a 'living laboratory' for educational experiments that can be adopted by the regular programme (Wolfensberger et al., 2003 a & b; Van Eijl et al., 1999; Van Dam & De Klerk, 1998). The latter is also cited as an important goal of honours programmes in the United States: "educational innovation and honours have often been allied. The development of honors courses and curricula is necessarily an exercise in innovation" (Austin, 1991, p. 16). It is also one of the basic characteristics of a fully-developed honors program as considered by the NCHC Evaluation Committee: "The honors program, in distinguishing itself from the rest of the institution, serves as a kind of laboratory within which faculty can try things they have always wanted to try but for which they could find no suitable outlet. When such efforts are demonstrated to be successful, they may then become institutionalized, thereby raising the general level of education within the college or university for all students. In this connection, the honors curriculum should serve as a prototype for educational practices that can work campus-wide in the future" (NCHC Evaluation Committee, 1999, p. 18).

Considering the (explicit or implicit) goal of innovation, we should explore to what extent innovative honours programmes are able to generate spin-off effects on the regular programmes. Additionally, a thorough analysis of the factors stimulating these spin-off effects is important, as the diffusion of educational innovations is often difficult—even when it has obvious advantages. A demonstration that honours programmes are a source of innovation will strengthen the position of and appreciation for these programmes. It may also help to refute the point of view that they are exclusively for 'a happy few,' the participating students. In this study, we analyse programmes and their characteristics, such as selection and credits. We have excluded other possible common features such as their educational goals (e.g. teaching critical thinking and promoting an attitude of self-reflection or leadership) or the typical characteristics of honours faculty members. The experiences in the United States show that such an inventory can be usefully made: "the Teaching and Learning Committee of the National Collegiate Honors Council has found significant agreement on the goals of honors education and some important similarities among faculty members teaching in honors" (West, 2002). In addition, the different ways in which content is modified in the honours programmes—acceleration, enrichment, sophistication, or novelty (Gallagher, 2000, p. 689)—are not included in our inventory because we considered them to be outside the scope of this study.

As mentioned before, our motivation for the research questions is twofold: to test whether honours programmes reach the goal of being a living laboratory for the benefit of regular programmes and to investigate whether honours programmes benefit all students or only a happy few. After all, various educational strategies and special courses recommended for talented and motivated students in honours

programmes might be profitably used for all students. The pedagogical innovations of honours programmes include many approaches such as critical thinking, creative writing, problem solving, free choices, inquiry, and discovery. All students profit from the challenge of learning to do their own thinking and making their own choices. We do realise, however, that not all practices in honours programmes should be transferred to regular programmes: some are not beneficial to students in regular programme since—naturally—honours students differ from non-honours students (Gerrity et al., 1993). “For gifted students, the content level involved in the discovery and problem solving could be at a higher level of abstraction than possible for the average student.... Also, Shore and Delcourt note that ability grouping, acceleration, and differential programming are particularly useful for gifted students” (Gallagher, 2000, p. 688). Our focus was, therefore, on innovations that were *realised* in regular programmes and had *their origin* in honours programmes, whether or not this was planned at the outset.

The following, therefore, are the main research questions of this article.

- To what extent do Dutch honours programmes function as an educational laboratory for regular programmes?
- What kind of innovations and changes in regular programmes do honours programmes generate?
- What characteristics of honours programmes are related to the strength of the spin-off effect?

After a short explanation of our research methods, the paper continues with three empirical sections: first, a description of the main characteristics of Dutch honours programmes such as the number of credit hours, their duration, and selection procedures; second, a typology of Dutch honours programmes; and finally, a description of their spin-off effects. These empirical sections are followed by a paragraph on the key factors for success in terms of spin-off effects. The paper ends with a conclusion and discussion.

RESEARCH METHODS

We selected honours programmes defined as programmes specifically developed to offer educational opportunities that are more challenging and demanding than the regular programmes. The programmes are meant for the more motivated and gifted students who want more and have the capacity to do more. A first inventory of all honours programmes at Dutch research-based universities was made in January 2003. These were all programmes that their organisers viewed as honours programmes and that more or less satisfied our definition. The inventory is reasonably complete; some programmes that were currently being developed have also been included, as well as information received till April 2003. It remains possible, though, that we missed an honours program or two because some are known under a different name. Because of the introduction in the Netherlands of the bachelor-master system, we expect great changes in the near future.

HONOURS PROGRAMMES AS LABORATORIES OF INNOVATION

Our prime focus of analysis was programmes and their characteristics. We recorded: target group, educational methods and subject of the programme, selection and admission procedures, duration, assessment, recognition, awards and laboratory function. We thus limited our research to programmes that usually consist of a series of courses or modules. Individual ‘honours’ assignments within courses are not included in this inventory except when they are part of a more extensive honours programme.

We looked for innovations that were realised in the regular programmes and had their origin in the honours programmes. We categorized those innovations according to their field of outcome. We did not make an inventory of those innovations nor of all factors that possibly stimulated those innovations. Of course, features other than the characteristics of the honours programmes (like institutional policy and human resource management) might have played a role in the innovation process as well. In this study, we have not included these factors. We also did not ask for intentional plans to move or share the innovations of the honours programme spin-offs, and we did not analyse whether any such plans were successful.

For this research, we have used the nationwide ‘Plusnetwork,’ a platform for academic honours programmes, and available documents and websites. Additional information came from interviews with some teachers, co-ordinators, and directors of honours programmes. For the analysis (quantitative and qualitative) of the data, the method of grounded theory was used (Savenye & Robinson, 2001). Two researchers independently coded the data and compared the characteristics of the programmes. Our inventory included the effects of the programmes on the regular curricula. This part of the inventory was based only on interviews with the coordinators and teachers. Although most co-ordinators and teachers work in both the honours and regular programmes, and even though most spin-off innovations were not planned for at the outset, the answers could be self-serving and of questionable reliability. Therefore, we also interviewed several directors of studies and did an in-depth study of several cases. The influence of government policy making on universities, e.g., changes in the secondary education system and financial support of students, was not included in this analysis. Examples of honours programme spin-offs are derived from an in-depth study of individual cases so we could gather characteristics and control the overall picture regarding educational innovation (Van Eijl et al., 2003, Wolfensberger et al., 2003a). Those cases are typical for each different type of honours: disciplinary, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary.

INVENTORY ANALYSIS: CHARACTERISTICS OF HONOURS PROGRAMMES AT DUTCH UNIVERSITIES

The inventory resulted in 25 honours programmes at ten (of the thirteen) different research-based Dutch universities and at one inter-university foundation. All honours programmes are relatively young: the first started in 1993, and the last ten programmes were started after 1999. Some universities intend to start an honours

programme in the near future, or their honours are still 'under construction.' As mentioned above, this recent growth in programmes is probably related to the introduction of the bachelor-master system, as can be seen in university plans and policies. Consider the Erasmus University of Rotterdam, for example: "In the competition, the quality of the educational programmes will be of decisive importance.... Development of an 'Honours Program' for the gifted students is considered necessary" (chairman of the Committee for Educational Innovation, Van der Graaf, 2002). And at the Technical University Eindhoven, it has been understood that "...if the university wants to have the best students, it should have an honours program.... With such a program students are motivated to use and develop their talents fully and the university shows that it values the good students" (Groep Eén, 2003). Also, students are discovering that it is becoming more important to distinguish oneself in the competition for (international) master studies.

CHARACTERISTICS OF HONOURS PROGRAMMES

The key characteristic of honours programmes we included in our study is that these programmes are developed for a specific purpose, heavier and more challenging, meant for motivated and talented students. This purpose is reflected in their selection procedures, in their more demanding study tasks and in their forms of assessment and certification. In such a way, students are offered an extra possibility to develop intellectually and academically. The programme variations are wide. They differ in duration and structure, types of students involved, years of study in which they are scheduled, number of credits required, total credit hours, educational methods, and assessment (Van Eijl et al., 2003). Despite all these differences in design and content, there are also a number of common characteristics, as shown in Table 1. Many of these are not unique to the Netherlands but are also found in the United States (Austin, 1986; Groot Zevert et al., 1997). We explain these characteristics here in items a through j:

- a. Honours programmes use mainly small-scale educational methods varying from individual education to groups of 20 students. This can enhance the interaction between the participants and between students and teacher, and it provides more opportunities to follow the individual interests of students.
- b. Active participation is evident in, for instance discussion and feedback, presentations of research design, and excursions. Peer-interaction is also an important characteristic of an honours programme.
- c. Many context-specific and pedagogical innovations as well as updated content are found in honours programmes. Special attention is paid to academic skills, interdisciplinary pedagogy, a reflective student portfolio, strong student participation, challenging course content, new ways of assessment, (peer) feedback and discussion among peers.
- d. Honours programmes are completed with a testimonial, a certificate, an additional text on the diploma, or a special diploma such as Master in Veterinary Research. The graduation is sometimes an official academic event, for instance at Leiden University or Nijmegen, where the vice-chancellor personally presents the honours diploma to the students.

HONOURS PROGRAMMES AS LABORATORIES OF INNOVATION

- e. The programme is more demanding. In 18 honours cases, students receive ‘honours credits,’ which have no legal status, but the time spent on the honours programme is shown in a testimonial. We expect that more programmes will give official credits on top of the regular programme soon as the financing is changing. In five of the honours programmes, students receive credit points because they have participated in these programmes instead of in the regular programme. The programme is more demanding through content only, not through quantity.
- f. Honours programmes use different types of entry selection for admission, including GPA and level of motivation, the latter of which can be ascertained from candidates’ letters of application. Letters of recommendation from mentors also play a role. We did not find any programme which uses *only* average number of credits or average GPA.
- g. In sixteen cases, the Honours programme is considered a laboratory for innovation in content and pedagogy for the regular programmes. Most honours programmes do not provide a clear mission statement or vision, as is often seen in the United States. The laboratory function is usually not stated as an objective of an honours programme, but this is certainly one of its side effects.
- h. Most honours programmes are meant for non-freshman students. Two programmes are for freshman students only, five are meant for all students, and thirteen are explicitly for seniors. (This is in the old situation where bachelor and master are included in one programme with one diploma). This pattern is in contrast with the situation in the United States, where the honours programmes are organised only for bachelor-level students.
- i. In a number of programmes, special attention is being paid to research and design skills. Nine programmes offer honours students possibilities to do research at an earlier stage and at a more advanced level than in regular programmes. In upper years, the connection is made with a Ph.D. dissertation. The honours programme can be seen as a nursery for research talent.
- j. In three quarters of the programmes, a co-ordinator or director is present to run and develop the programme. Sometimes, he or she is also a teacher or a coach in the programme. In the United States, coaching is seen as a point of prime importance (Groot Zevert et al., 1997, p. 16). A coach can encourage the student to work on his academic achievement and to start on a new challenge. There were no explicit questions about the role of the coach or counsellor in our inventory.

TABLE 1

CHARACTERISTICS IN PEDAGOGICAL DESIGN, ORGANISATION, AND CONTENT OF HONOURS PROGRAMMES IN DUTCH RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES (N=25)

Characteristic	Present	Not present	Unknown
a. Small scale education	25	0	0
b. Active participation of students	25	0	0
c. Pedagogical innovations	23	2	0
d. Testimonial or diploma for honours certification	22	2	1
e. 'Honorary' credit points	18	6	1
f. Selection procedures	21	2	2
g. Laboratory function	16	6	3
h. Only non-freshman	18	7	0
i. Special attention to research and design skills	9	14	2
j 1. Coordinator	17	0	8
j 2. Coach/mentor/tutor	8	0	17

DISTRIBUTION OF HONOURS PROGRAMMES AMONG DISCIPLINES

There is a rather uniform distribution of honours programmes in the disciplines of the (13) Dutch universities. The medical disciplines appear to be an exception (the rapid growth at the end of 2003 is not included in this research). We included one programme in medicine: the Track of Excellence in Veterinary Science at Utrecht University. This is the oldest honours programme offering a small group of selected students the possibility to qualify themselves thoroughly in Veterinary Research (Table 2). About 5% of the student population is joining this one-year programme. Students primarily do research but also take some courses. Students get a small salary. This honours programme is particularly meant as a breeding ground: a challenge for good students and a way to stimulate students to stay at the university as Ph.D. students.

The Science and Technology domain is well represented with five programmes. Four of the five honours programmes in the field of Science and Technology are multidisciplinary within this field, consisting of a combination of two disciplines. Four programmes are completely interdisciplinary with special interdisciplinary courses, and two programmes are liberal arts colleges which we categorise as multidisciplinary. The "network society" asks for both specialisation and the interdisciplinary capacity to integrate knowledge. A new element in the discussion is the idea to create leadership courses within honours programmes (Wijffels & Wolfensberger, 2004). Most Dutch teachers consider this type of courses risky as well as challenging.

TABLE 2

HONOURS PROGRAMMES (N=25) IN DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES

Disciplines	Number
Arts and Humanities	5
Science and Technology	5
Social Sciences	8
Medical	1
Interdisciplinary	4
Multidisciplinary	2

(Four of the Science and Technology programmes are interdisciplinary within this field. The Interdisciplinary programmes involve an integrative combination of disciplines + special courses. The Multidisciplinary courses are offered at University College Utrecht and University College Maastricht.)

ETHNICITY AND GENDER IN THE STUDENT POPULATION

Although we have no specific data on gender and ethnicity in the population of honours students in the Netherlands, it is our impression (based on visits and interviews) that the male/female ratio equals roughly 50% and that only a few ethnic students participate in honours programmes. Research to get a better understanding of the differences between honours and non-honours students in the Netherlands is lacking.

Ethnic students form an interesting group. The statistical data show that the percentage of ethnic students coming from secondary schools and going on to higher education (professional universities) is rapidly rising in the Netherlands: it doubled in the last four years as a percentage of the whole group of new students (Onderwijsinspectie, 2003; HBO-raad, 2003).

In Dutch universities, the number and percentage of female students has been steadily rising. The percentage of female students entering the university is higher than that of male students (52% were female in 2002/2003). The percentage of female students among graduating students is also rising rapidly: in 1989/1990, 41% of the graduates were females while in 2001/2002 this percentage rose to 52%. Females graduate faster: 58 months versus 64 months for their 'doctorandus' degree (equivalent to a master's degree) in 2001/2002.

Both groups are interesting when we look at honours programmes, raising questions about the distribution of such students, their access to honours programmes, and any barriers they might have to overcome.

FINANCING HONOURS PROGRAMMES

We see a lot of diversity in the way honours programmes are funded. Some are financed by means of grants for educational innovation, some directly by the central administration of a university, and some by a department. Until now, there has been no differentiation in the costs for students for bachelor or master programmes: students pay a fixed annual amount determined by the government. Also, none of the honours programmes require students to pay an extra amount for participation. We assume that the rapid growth of the number of honours programmes will lead to new debates on the financing of honours programmes.

A BREEDING GROUND FOR RESEARCHERS

Many Dutch honours programmes are intended for students with at least two years of academic experience. In these programmes, special attention is paid to research and design competencies, sometimes by way of a temporary term at a research institute. Thus, the honours programme gives students the opportunity to discover whether they are really interested and competent in research. For the university, it has the function of a breeding ground for highly talented students. After a positive evaluation of their activities by the student and university, many of them enter a Ph.D. programme. This function of honours programmes will be an issue for further development and evaluation because of the restructuring of academic programmes into the bachelor-master system.

ANALYSING THE INVENTORY: A TYPOLOGY OF HONOURS PROGRAMMES AT DUTCH UNIVERSITIES

Based on analysis of the data in the inventory, we have drawn up a typology of honours programmes. From a disciplinary perspective, we can distinguish three types of honours programmes: (mono) disciplinary (14), interdisciplinary (6) and multidisciplinary (5). We expected different spin-off effects from these three groups of programmes because of their differences in character and organisation.

- a. In the 14 disciplinary honours programmes, deepening the understanding of subjects in a discipline is the main goal. The department finances this kind of honours programmes, and participating teachers and students originate from the department. The Disciplinary programmes are organised as an extra opportunity for deepening a student's understanding of the contents of the subject, academic education, methodology and research. Students usually take these courses as an extra to the regular programme.
- b. In the 6 interdisciplinary honours programmes, the focus is on subjects and themes that cover and go beyond different disciplines and also on interdisciplinary methodologies. These programmes are an 'extra' for students wanting to broaden their academic education beyond the scope of their main subject. This type of honours programme is organised and financed at the level of the university as a whole. In most of them, all (selected) students can join and teachers are drawn from all over the university.

HONOURS PROGRAMMES AS LABORATORIES OF INNOVATION

- c. The 5 multidisciplinary programmes are made up of different disciplines. In these programmes, relations between the disciplines are not an explicit issue for discussion. These programmes are a complete substitute for the regular programmes. An example is the kind of so-called TWIN Programmes that lead to a double (doctorandus \approx master's) degree (for example in chemistry and physics) or to a full bachelor degree at honours level. The departments involved finance the programme.

Of course, in practice, combinations of programmes exist, e.g. a disciplinary honours programme with an interdisciplinary component. In this study, we classified these mixed forms according to their main characteristic.

Otherwise, there are some differing opinions on whether the third type (multidisciplinary) should be labelled an honours programme. According to our definition, they are programmes specifically developed to offer educational opportunities that are more challenging and demanding than the regular programmes. The programmes are meant for the more motivated and gifted students. It is relevant to give a short comment on this.

Three of the five multidisciplinary honours programmes are programmes in the fields of science and technology called 'TWIN-programmes.' Students are offered an opportunity to study a combined programme of two interrelated degree programmes instead of one. We include these programmes even though they consist largely of existing regular courses because the TWIN-programmes are specifically designed for more gifted students. This does not mean that any student who chooses to pursue two bachelor's degrees can be called an honours student; such a student must participate in a specifically designed honours programme. An honours programme not only requires extra effort but also confronts students with more complex content and challenges students to excel.

The other two multidisciplinary honours programmes are liberal arts and sciences colleges offering a kind of honours bachelor degree. Selection is strict, and once the student has entered one of these international programmes, a high GPA must be maintained. These complete degree programmes—somewhat analogous to Honors Colleges in the US—are distinct from the other honours programmes we have discussed that are parallel to a regular programme.

RESULTS: SPIN-OFF EFFECTS – CHANGES IN THE REGULAR PROGRAMME

Our main research questions are: To what extent do Dutch honours programmes function as an educational laboratory for the regular programmes? What kind of innovations and changes in the regular programmes do honours programmes generate? What characteristics of the honours programmes are related to the strengths of the spin-off effects? To answer these questions, we concentrate on those outcomes of honours programmes that can be seen as visible effects of the laboratory function. The analysis is confined to the 24 university honours programmes. The inter-university programme is left out of consideration.

The outcomes can be categorised into four main fields of innovation: course content, pedagogy, educational instruments, and programme structure. By spin-off of 'course content,' we mean the development of a new course or a change in the content of a course in the regular programme that is directly induced by the honours programme. By spin-off in pedagogy, we mean changes in the outline of courses in the regular programme or in the way the teachers are now teaching these courses. By spin-off in 'educational instruments,' we mean instructional systems intended as a template for students, such as portfolios or a learning contracts. And finally, spin-off in the field of programme structure leads to changes in the overall structure, sequence, and outline of the programme. As mentioned above (section on Research Methods), other external factors, like the influence of government policy on universities, were not included in this analysis. Table 3 shows the distribution of the spin-off effects of the three types of honours programmes in the four fields of outcomes. We will elaborate on the process of innovation per type of honours programme and will give an example of each.

TABLE 3
THREE TYPES OF HONOURS PROGRAMMES (N=24) AND THEIR
SPIN-OFF EFFECTS IN FOUR FIELDS OF OUTCOMES

	Course content/ new course	Pedagogy	Educational instruments	Structure of the programme
Disciplinary (14)	7	12	No data	No data
Interdisciplinary (5)	4	4	2	No data
Multidisciplinary (5)	No data	2	2	5

SPIN-OFF EFFECTS OF DISCIPLINARY HONOURS PROGRAMMES

The fourteen disciplinary honours programmes largely appeared to have spin-off effects in the field of 'Course content' (7 out of 14, or 50%) and 'Pedagogy' (12 out of 14, or 85%). It is evident that there is a strong content relationship between the disciplinary honours programme and the regular programme. The innovative and experimental content of honours programmes is in most cases closely connected to the regular programme and can be easily integrated into it after proven success.

In our research, we found examples of new courses developed for the regular programme as an effect of spin-off (sometimes as a duplicate of an honours programme course). In disciplinary honours programmes, teachers acquire a 'new' understanding and skills in the domain of instructional methods. And it appears that they use these skills rather easily in the standard programme, which in most cases they also teach. Spin-off is also stimulated by the flow of information between students involved in an honours programme and students not involved. This information flows naturally because most honours students follow both paths. The students function as agents of innovation. The spin-off effects of the disciplinary honours programmes were visible in a relatively short time, and we see that departments as a whole do indeed profit from the educational innovations.

HONOURS PROGRAMMES AS LABORATORIES OF INNOVATION

Example. A study in more depth of some programmes gives more details of the spin-off from the honours programmes (Van Eijl et al., 2003). One interesting and illustrative example of the effect of a disciplinary honours programme on the content of the regular programme was found in the Track of Excellence of the Utrecht University Faculty of Geosciences. A group of students did their course of research activities within this Track of Excellence from January to June 1999 at universities in Bergen (Norway) and Barcelona (Spain). They discovered that abroad considerably more attention was paid to qualitative methods of research than was the case at Utrecht University. The students were of the opinion that they did not have enough freedom at their home institution to choose their research problem and research methods. Back in Utrecht, this lack of freedom was their motive to start a discussion with their teachers of research methods, in turn leading to a discussion in the Faculty newsletter. The first result was that the next group of students in the Track of Excellence were offered special lectures on qualitative methods of research. The course was evaluated using a questionnaire, which showed positive opinions, and the opinions of the faculty were also positive. Within a year, these special lectures were made available to all 150 students. The spin-off of this Track of Excellence can be recognised in changes in the regular curriculum, such as changes in content, and also in changes in the pedagogy and in a growing understanding among teachers to focus more on the interests and input of students and to work with more interactive instructional strategies. In October 2000, the dean wrote that the Track of Excellence should be seen not only as a challenge for students and staff members, but also as a breeding ground for the new undergraduate programme, because this programme “will ask for a more active attitude on the part of the students. More so than in the past, they will influence the game. This will also require a different role of the teachers. Next to instruction, the analysis of strong and weak aspects of the work of students and feedback on the enhancement of competencies will be a more important task” (Hooimeijer, 2000). Based on those insights, and recognising the considerable initiative the institute showed in this programme, the Minister of Education gave in 2000 the ISO-prize for Educational Quality to this Track of excellence.

SPIN-OFF EFFECTS OF INTERDISCIPLINARY HONOURS PROGRAMMES

The interdisciplinary honours programmes aim at large groups of students and are mostly organised and financed at the central organisation level of the university. These honours programmes appeared to be an excellent place for experiments with educational instruments (e.g. portfolio). Experiences and evaluations of success factors were used for the implementation of these instruments in the university as a whole.

The interdisciplinary honours programmes also develop new courses on interdisciplinary subjects. Those courses aim at a deeper understanding of interdisciplinary relations between subjects and are specifically meant for students in the honours programme. These courses are rather new and (until now) not available for students in the regular programme. It was difficult to get reliable data about the spin-off

effects on the pedagogy. However, it appears that the teachers in such an honours programme become more conscious of their responsibility and feel more involved in trying to raise the educational quality within their own regular programme. The teachers and students of these interdisciplinary programmes come from various departments but join together in the programme. These teachers take their new understanding and skills in the field of pedagogy back to their regular programme. Because the setting in their department is different and their students have virtually no communication with those of the honours programme, it will be more difficult for them to apply their new skills (and for us to get reliable data on the effects). However, we found some clear instances of those effects.

Example. The University of Amsterdam uses its interdisciplinary honours programme for motivated first-year students as a breeding ground for a digital portfolio. Thanks to this honours programme and through the dissemination within this university of information about this instrument, an important step in the development of the reflective digital portfolio for students was taken. Many regular programmes at the University of Amsterdam have now taken the initiative to implement the portfolio system, and the experiences within the honours programme with assignments on reflection and coaching have contributed substantially to the increased understanding of this instrument within these regular programmes. In this case, we also discovered that the outcomes of the honours programme and its spin-off effects have also influenced the honours programme itself. The programme started with first-year students (freshmen) of six large departments. The results of the programme have had a great influence on the educational policy of the University of Amsterdam, and in 2003, the honours programme was implemented for all students of the university and involved almost all departments.

SPIN-OFF EFFECTS OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY HONOURS PROGRAMMES

The two liberal arts and sciences colleges included as multidisciplinary honours programmes differ from the other multidisciplinary honours programmes in the sense that the former offer complete degree programmes. Consequently, participating students work together only with other honours students and do not interact with students at the 'mother universities' of these honours colleges. Hence, these students cannot function as agents of innovative change in the regular programme. Faculty often have a position both at the honours college and the 'mother university,' which means that they, at least, can function as liaisons.

The other three multidisciplinary honours programmes are the TWIN-programmes, in which students follow two related bachelor's programmes. Here, the spin-off effects flow more naturally since faculty are engaged in both the honours programme and the regular programme. Typically, the TWIN-programmes offer a rare opportunity for faculty members of two scientific fields to co-operate and co-create an educational programme. TWIN-programmes require a re-thinking of the disciplinary kernels and often an adaptation of the schedules.

HONOURS PROGRAMMES AS LABORATORIES OF INNOVATION

Example. The University College Utrecht (UCU) of Utrecht University is a multidisciplinary honours programme that has influenced many other university programmes. Initially, there was within Utrecht University a great deal of resistance to the UCU programme. The innovation, however, found a solid base when the UCU concept proved to be a success: the learning results were outstanding; the students made great progress and were very motivated; the faculty were amazed about the results and the concept of this kind of learning and teaching. The students, the University Board, and many professors involved in UCU (selected from the university faculty because they were known as outstanding teachers) began showing their commitment to this innovative programme in the discussions about curriculum reform that was needed for introduction of the bachelor-master system. After this green light, UCU was largely used as a breeding ground. UCU had attracted a group of teachers that had authority among their peers and showed enthusiasm for trying out new educational concepts. Another factor was (as participants revealed in the evaluation data) the diversity of the student population (international, brought up in different educational systems), which forced College teachers and staff into experiments with instructional content and form. The fact that teachers from different academic disciplines meet each other here has to a certain extent also been a source of inspiration for spin-off. The selection system, which does not exist in regular programmes elsewhere in the Netherlands, brought a capable, motivated and also diverse group of students together, making it easier to experiment with content and instructional methods. Teachers thus gained experiences that were later on to be disseminated in the regular programme.

With this international bachelor programme at an honours level, Utrecht University obtained a wide-ranging expertise in liberal arts and sciences learning, a new educational concept in Dutch universities. When in 2002 Utrecht University introduced the bachelor-master structure in the whole university, the UCU programme had the function of a visionary model for the new programmes: specifically, the design of a more liberal arts and sciences learning curriculum with an emphasis on a broad spectrum of academic education and skills, more freedom of choice in the requirements of the programme, more coaching of the students, more tests and feedback within the courses, and a marked reduction of the number of re-sits of a test (or re-examinations). These elements have been more or less adopted and adapted in the university-wide framework for the implementation of the bachelor-master structure (Vermeulen & Van Kammen, 2002a, 2002b).

KEY ISSUES IN UNDERSTANDING THE SPIN-OFF EFFECTS

In this study, we saw that all three types of honours programmes have spin-off effects in four different fields (Table 3). The question now is whether we can get a better understanding of the spin-off effects by looking at the characteristics of the honours programmes (Table 1). At least four of the characteristics appear to be important for the dissemination of innovations from honours programmes to regular programmes.

a) *Innovation as a goal*

In most honours programmes (16), the administration has implicitly or explicitly opted for the laboratory function. In some, innovation has been explicitly mentioned in the mission right from the start, while in others this function proved to be effective in practice. The new interdisciplinary honours programmes, established at the start of the bachelor-master structure, mention their laboratory function explicitly (Table 4). Five programmes mention that they do not have a laboratory function because they were established with a different goal and do not aim at educational innovation. Some of these programmes state that they have an extraordinary character and that spin-off effects would diminish this character.

However, even three out of five programmes that mention not having an explicit laboratory function indicate that they do see spin-off effects in the regular programme. For example, the double degree programmes of the faculties of Physics and Mathematics at Utrecht University have led teachers of these faculties, who previously did not communicate very much, to more interaction about subject matter and pedagogy.

TABLE 4

LABORATORY FUNCTION OF THE THREE TYPES OF HONOURS PROGRAMMES (N=24)

Type of honours programme	Laboratory function	<i>Innovations realised</i>	No laboratory function	<i>Innovations realised</i>	No data	<i>Innovations realised</i>
Disciplinary (14)	10	10	2	0	2	No data
Interdisciplinary (5)	4	4	0	0	1	No data
Multidisciplinary (5)	2	2	3	3	0	No data
Total	16	16	5	3	3	No data

It appears that some teachers (and/or the director) involved in honours often are innovators. They are eager to experiment with new ideas and play a liaison role in the flow of new ideas into a social system. Aspects of personality are related to the goal and realisation of innovation and spin-off effects. Some of the other teachers (or the director) have the characteristics of 'early adopters and persons with authority.' Their role is "to decrease uncertainty about a new idea by adopting it and conveying a subjective evaluation of the innovation to near-peers by means of interpersonal networks" (Rogers, 1971, p. 240). It is quite possible that one of the reasons why the diffusion of innovations from honours programmes to regular programmes proceeds at a relatively quick pace is that those early adopters work in the honours programmes as well as in the regular programmes, thus making communication about innovations easier. We also saw teachers learning about innovation-decision processes. These processes start with knowing and understanding an innovation and forming an

HONOURS PROGRAMMES AS LABORATORIES OF INNOVATION

opinion on it before deciding on implementing it. It was much easier for a teacher to implement an innovation in the regular programme after it proved successful in the 'safe' environment of an honours programme with a small group of enthusiastic students. Poucke (2004) similarly indicates that, for an innovation to be successful, it needs to go through the full process of development, crystallisation, and realisation.

The conclusion can be drawn that honours programmes that have innovation as a goal are successful with this mission. They do have spin-off effects in the regular programme. We found that nearly all honours programmes do function as a laboratory for educational innovations, whether they have the explicit function to do so or not.

b) Educational innovations: honours programmes as breeding-place

In the inventory we found that twenty-three honours programmes report using pedagogical innovations (Table 1), an important factor in spin-off. Teachers report being stimulated to use their creativity by working in honours and experiencing freedom as well as responsibility to create new courses serving the needs of the students. Teachers also report doing all kinds of experiments with content and pedagogy, such as discussions, small groups, student intervention, peer feedback, and peer assessment. Pedagogical innovations and interdisciplinary courses are risky for teachers. Students report challenge and stimulation. The honours programmes, many of which are evaluated on a regular basis, often change because of the innovation-flow that teachers and students together create.

Where many innovations are used in such breeding-places, spin-off effects can easily be realised. Often spin-off effects that result from an honours programme transform a regular programme while the honours programme is evolving even further. Some honours programmes, like that of the Geosciences in Utrecht University, even mention this spin-off effect in their mission statement: "It has to be seen as a platform for innovation in the regular program" (Harms & Hogestijn, 2001, p. 8).

Educational innovations that are found in honours programmes include subject matter and educational instruments as well as pedagogy. Examples include the reflective digital portfolio, a personal tutor (coach), feedback and discussion with peers, seminars, student participation, motivation stemming from freedom and responsibility, talent coaching, research projects, peer feedback, peer teaching, peer assessment, and the reduction of resits for a test. We see that innovations from the honours programmes are transferred to regular programmes by faculty without any official policy.

The conclusion is that honours programmes stimulate innovations and that spin-off of successful innovations is realised. Thus honours programmes can be a bottom-up innovation strategy.

c) Credits or no credits – influence on the capacity for innovation

The question is whether innovations are more easily accepted by and implemented in regular programmes when no credits are given to the students. The idea behind this relation is that the intrinsic motivation of students is higher when no credits are given. More research on the motivation of students to join or not to join a programme and the effects on their learning would be interesting. Also we do not know whether students would appreciate getting credits or being graded.

Honours programmes vary in assignment of credits and/or grades. As most programmes are an extra activity, honours evaluations or credits have no influence on students' grades in the regular programme. In addition, the ways the programmes are completed differ (Table 5). For most honours programmes (fifteen), the study load is extra—so the students do the honours programme and the regular programme simultaneously; students get no credits for the honours programme, or else they receive so-called honorary credits. These are not official credits, but they do indicate the workload of the course. Some programmes give 'extra credits'; these are official credits, but students can use them not as credits for compulsory courses but only for elective credits. The five multidisciplinary programmes offer a complete curriculum instead of the regular programme, so of course those programmes give official credits and provide an official bachelor diploma.

As students mostly do not receive any official credits for their study efforts in the honours programme, their intrinsic motivation must be high. Honours programmes are something extra, a surplus, and students follow them because of the challenge, the joy of learning, and the honour. Teachers join the program because of the challenge. Those honours programmes have a strong appeal, and the fact that people join them without getting something official in return makes the programmes strong persuaders. So, the innovations of the programmes should be more easily accepted by and implemented in the regular programmes.

TABLE 5
AWARDING CREDITS IN HONOURS PROGRAMMES (N=24)

	No credits or honorary credits	Extra credits	Official and extra credits	Credits	Unknown
Disciplinary (14)	6	4	2	1	1
Interdisciplinary (5)	3	2	0	0	0
Multidisciplinary (5)	0	0	0	5	0
Total	9	6	2	6	1

d) Selection and motivation enhance spin-off effects.

The question is whether (self) selection and admission procedures contribute to a sufficient and safe learning environment, favour experimentation and stimulate spin-off effects of innovation. Most honours programmes (21) have selection and admission procedures (Table 1). These procedures result in a strong self-selection before the official procedure even starts. A student has to enrol, show some intellectual achievement, write a letter of motivation, *et cetera*. Average credits are important in the admission procedures of nineteen programmes (Table 6). This indicator provides information about intellectual performance but not about academic potential, creativity, and the personal performance of the students. In the admission

HONOURS PROGRAMMES AS LABORATORIES OF INNOVATION

procedure, one therefore mainly looks beyond average study marks, and motivation plays an important role (Table 6). We found that for admission to honours programmes motivation is considered as important as average GPA. Students selected in this way are primarily seeking a challenge to perform at their highest level of excellence and appreciate working with other strongly motivated students, as is shown for example in the evaluations of the honours programmes of the Faculty of Geosciences at Utrecht University (Wolfensberger, 1998). These students are really committed to each other and to their subject contents, and so teachers are able to experiment. The professors also mention the useful feedback from the students on their teaching. This is important when faculty implement innovations and want to test them. Birdwell-Pheasant (1997) recognises the value of honours students' participation and feedback to professors: "the single most important distinction between honours and non-honours courses are the honours students: dedicated, motivated, fascinated students with solid foundations in prior work and with new creative insights. They spark each other (and the Professor), and learning takes on a whole new dimension...The essence of honours programmes, I believe, is putting gifted people in touch with one another." The resulting high level of authority which is an important factor in the process of educational innovation (Havelock & Huberman, 1977; Ruijter, 2002).

TABLE 6

ADMISSION PROCEDURES BY TYPE OF HONOURS PROGRAMME (N=24)

	Average credits	Motivation	Progress	Other	None	Unknown
Disciplinary (14)	13	8	5	4	0	1
Interdisciplinary (5)	3	4	1	2	0	0
Multidisciplinary (5)	3	Unknown	0		2	0
Total	19	12	6	6	2	1

Honours students also can be facilitators of innovation as liaisons between programmes, especially in situations where they also participate in designing the course. Students can function as trend watchers. They perceive new needs and translate those needs into their own educational system.

The selection and admission procedures might create a context in which educational innovations are more easily developed and tested. Faculty feel free to use the honours programme as a laboratory, and these students are hard working and clever people, so the chances of study-delay are minimal, even when an innovation is not successful. Moreover, self-reflection and peer interaction/feedback are important elements within honours. Mistakes are allowed and then are used to improve the results (a safe 'learning' process). Furthermore, as the courses are often extra, the consequences of failure are low.

The available evaluations of honours programmes are good (Van Eijl et al, 1999; Wolfensberger, 1998): the programmes motivate the students, who are positive about the ways they are being challenged. The atmosphere and the challenges are very attractive to them. Students do prepare themselves. They learn a lot about their discipline, and they learn academically. One gets the impression that honours programmes put a strong emphasis on challenge and academic education, stimulating students and teachers to take new initiatives. The focus on talent empowers the success of those innovations. Formulated in a context of innovative infrastructure, success breeds success (Havelock & Huberman, 1977).

The conclusion is that there are strong arguments for a positive answer to the question: do selection and motivation enhance spin-off effects? Yes, the selection process brings together a group of strong students and teachers who stimulate spin-off effects of innovations from the honours programmes into the regular programmes.

CONCLUSION

The inventory of the honours programmes in research-based Dutch universities showed us 25 honours programmes at 10 different universities and one inter-university honours programme. Honours programmes are a recent, fast-growing development at Dutch universities. With the introduction of the bachelor-master system, the interest in honours programmes is growing. In the Netherlands we are way ahead of other European countries in implementation of honours programmes. A further increase of interest is expected. All of the honours programmes have the mission to provide more challenges to motivated and talented students. The diversity among the programmes is great, but all programmes emphasize small-scale education. Other distinguishing features include active participation, educational innovations, absence of official credits (most of the time), a special diploma, special procedures for selection and admission, innovations (which influence programmes outside of honours as well), focus on non-freshmen, and often a separate director of studies. The honours programmes can function as a breeding ground for research talent. The focus on talent is experienced as something positive by the interviewed teachers, students, and policy makers and is supposed to attract new talent. There is self-selection and central selection, and the admission procedures are diverse with a focus on GPA, motivation, and references. We found strong differences in duration, study load, organisational structure, award of credit, and financing. Looking at content, we found three types of honours: disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary.

Questions concerning the extent to which honours programmes function as a laboratory for the regular system can only be partially answered. Honours programmes do have strong spin-off effects; students in regular programmes do profit from honours programmes. However, we have only examined the actual results and have not done research into expected effects and the extent to which they are being realised. Also, the influence of national and university policies is not included in this analysis. Nevertheless, we think the relationship is important. Educational innovations seem connected with honours programmes, and, after proven success and obvious advantages, the participants in regular programmes easily adopt the new ideas.

HONOURS PROGRAMMES AS LABORATORIES OF INNOVATION

Sixteen of the 25 honours programmes function as a laboratory of educational innovations. The experiences with educational innovations have a strong spin-off effect on the regular programmes. The spin-off effects can be categorised into four fields: course content (changes in and new design of courses through disciplinary and interdisciplinary honours), pedagogy (especially through disciplinary honours), educational instruments (especially through interdisciplinary honours), and programme structure (multidisciplinary).

Honours programmes are a new and growing part of Dutch universities. The so-called ‘Hawthorne effect’ suggests that implementation of any innovation leads to temporary spin-off effects. Sustainable, long-term spin-off effects can be expected only through thoroughly embedded innovations. The spin-off effects of honours programmes that we found may thus be explained by their recent implementation. We assume that the recent implementation and some characteristics of the honours programmes *both* contribute to the innovative capacity of these programmes. It is therefore important to establish which programme characteristics are essential in creating sustained spin-off effects.

Knowing the key characteristics that lead to strong spin-off effects allows us to provide specific advice to management teams (Wolfensberger et al. 2003-a). We found four important features. First: innovation as a mission is important, enhancing the innovative capacity of the programme. Honours programmes that do not have an explicit function as a laboratory do, however, also have spin-off effects that are probably inherent to the nature of honours programmes. The second feature is the strong appeal of honours programmes to students, evidence for which lies in the fact that students enroll even though no credits or supplemental credits are given. With the exception of the multidisciplinary honours programmes, almost none give official credits. Teachers and students have a strong commitment, and participants join because of the quality of the programme and the passionate teachers. The diffusion of innovations is thus easier and positively driven; an innovation is implemented because it is inherently good, not because it is necessary to solve a problem.

The third feature is the (self)selection of the students and the admission process. A safe learning environment is important for experimentation and for learning. Honours programmes can function as a laboratory because they offer a safe learning environment with highly motivated students. Teachers are able and willing to experiment with new content and new teaching methods.

The fourth feature is the quality of educational innovations that are designed within the honours programmes. After their success is evaluated, innovations are often implemented in the regular courses. And the honours programmes continue to evolve with new innovations. Honours programmes are dynamic and ongoing.

Honours programmes are rapidly developing in Dutch universities as a way to evoke excellence in students. They are on-going programmes, and they seem to fulfil the function of a ‘laboratory’ for innovation in the regular programmes. Successful innovations indeed spread to the regular programmes.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We identified four key characteristics of honours programmes that we believe will lead to a sustained innovative capacity, but we do realise that our assertion is based on just an indication. We strongly recommend following up on this research in a few years' time to find out whether the relation between honours programmes and innovation will still be as strong as it currently is. It will be extremely interesting to compare our findings with the experience of US honours programmes, which have been offered across the country for many years. Do the US programmes still function as educational laboratories with strong spin-off effects on the regular programmes? In our explanation of the innovative capacity of honours programmes, we mainly focused on characteristics of the programmes themselves. However, we found evidence that the way an honours programme is integrated within a department can also explain its innovative capacity (Van Poucke, 2004). Research indicates (Wolfensberger et al., 2003-b) that the commitment of policy makers to the programme is a condition for large spin-off effects. Guest-teachers can play a key role by introducing new perspectives, new content, and new instructional activities. Honours programmes with teachers who do not teach in the regular curriculum probably have fewer spin-off effects. The formal and informal exchange of knowledge and experience among honours directors, teachers, students, and policy makers appears to be crucial. In this respect, it will be particularly interesting to obtain a better understanding of the process of innovation as well as the transfer of innovations from the honours programme to the regular curriculum. The concept of 'learning organisations' (Senge, 1990) and the application of Rogers' (1971) typology of persons involved in the innovation process (innovators, early adopters, etc) might provide a better understanding of this innovative process and capacity. More specifically, we consider the following concepts from the domain of educational innovation literature as very helpful for the understanding of the innovation process: consensus, authority, infrastructure, and three phases (Havelock and Huberman, 1977; Fullan, 1991; Senge, 1990; Ruijter, 2002): (1) initiation, reaching consensus on the problem, concrete scenario on the innovation, deciding on process factors; (2) implementation; and (3) consolidation .

We expect that, with the implementation of the bachelor-master structure, the interest in honours programmes will grow and will even make honours programmes necessary from the perspective of selection and allocation for the master's programmes. The fast pace of this evolution will also lead to new questions:

- Will honours programmes concentrate on bachelor students or on master students?
- How will the institutions finance those honours programmes: institutionally, at the departmental level, with outside funding? (It would be interesting to know how much the cost of education for an honours student differs from that of regular students and how one should decide whether the difference is 'worth it' for the institution as a whole: added value *versus* costs.)

HONOURS PROGRAMMES AS LABORATORIES OF INNOVATION

- Should students have to pay a higher tuition fee for honours programmes? (In general, most honours programmes in the Netherlands are an extra opportunity for students while in the US and Canada honours can replace the regular programme. The latter involves a different financing system. Which way should the Dutch honours financing go?)
- What is the added value of honours programmes?
- Can honours be a context to provide leadership courses?
- How can the organisation and the rules for giving credit best be regulated?
- How can the assessment of learning results be organised in a valid and reliable way?
- What are the forms of assessment and certification (as referred to in the section on “characteristics of honours programmes”)? Do they differ in important ways from those employed in the regular programs and courses, and, if they do, what implications does that have for transferability to regular programs?
- What kind of feedback or evaluation of their efforts do students receive, and do they get evaluation in the form of a grade? (Can this be seen as an obstacle to risk taking and even participation?)
- When all universities offer honours programmes, what will be the differences between the honours programmes and the certificates?
- How can quality assurance (with accreditation procedures and benchmarking now coming into practice in the Netherlands) be organised? (Content and context of extra educational activities for talented and motivated are permanently evolving—evoking excellence stimulates continual renewal—so what other procedures are advisable?)
- Will the role of the Dutch ‘Plusnetwerk’ evolve? (The Plusnetwerk now organises seminars and conferences on the topic of honours programmes and evoking excellence. Will a more scholarly mechanism of sharing experiences evolve that can accelerate this process of innovation?)

We formulated as our vision that honours programmes ask for a more active attitude on the part of the students. More and more they should influence the content and structure of the programme, and this will require a different role for the teachers. This insight, involving considerable risks, should be a new focus for research and development. Research about characteristics of honours students, their motivation to join or not to join honours programmes, the effects on their learning and their opinion about the added value is in our view very relevant to the future of honours programmes.

Dutch honours programmes claim to place a strong emphasis on a challenging and stimulating academic atmosphere. However, until now no comparable evaluations of the honours programmes have become available. It would be interesting to conduct evaluations of honours programmes based on a common evaluation method, as is provided by the NCHC (Austin, 1991).

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The authors can be contacted at:
M.Wolfensberger@geog.uu.nl

