

The student chapter

What do you need to know?

If you are reading this, you have probably been approached by your study program or institution with the question whether you want to be involved in compiling the student chapter. This document is meant to help you with that. It briefly explains what the student chapter is, what role it plays in the accreditation process and what things you should keep in mind.

Accreditation in short

Programs at Dutch higher education institutions are assessed every six years for quality by the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization (NVAO). If the program meets the requirements, it will be accredited. This means, for example, that the study program is paid for by the ministry.

The accreditation process consists of three steps. The first step is the self-evaluation, written by the program itself. The student chapter is part of this self-evaluation. The second step is the visit of a panel of independent experts approved by the NVAO. Students are also interviewed during the visit. This panel then writes a visitation report with their assessment. The third step is the final decision of the NVAO, based on the visitation report.

The role of the student chapter

The student chapter is a permanent part of the self-evaluation and therefore a permanent part of the accreditation process. The aim of the student chapter is to ensure that the perspective of students is given sufficient space. Ideally, the student chapter paints a representative picture. This can be quite a challenge for the responsible students and often takes some time.

It is important to know that you are completely free to determine how you design the student chapter. The chapter doesn't even have to be written text. Often the students in the study program committee are asked to take responsibility for the student chapter, but this is not a requirement: every student in the study program can contribute. The most important thing is that the panel gets a good idea of the quality of the study program or institution. What is going well, what can be improved and how is this being worked on. Do not be afraid to mention what is not going well. Only then the quality can be improved!

What do I have to take into account?

To paint a fair picture, the student chapter must be independent and representative. This means that you have a lot of freedom as a creator of the student chapter. You can submit a written text, but you can also record a video. What you do have to do is paint a picture of the program that is as representative as possible. Preferably, you collect input from your fellow students for this. It is nice if you can write the student chapter together with other students.

Common pitfalls

You have a lot of freedom, but there are also a number of things that you have to watch out for.

- The study program (or the Executive Board, in the case of an institutional review/ITK) sometimes finds it difficult to hand over the responsibility for the student chapter. There are cases known in which the Executive Board or the quality assurance staff acted very steering and sometimes even gave feedback on a first draft. Of course, this is usually well-intended, but keep in mind that the study program or the Executive Board in principle has no say whatsoever about what you include in the student chapter.
- Don't be afraid to write down your opinion about the quality of your study program / institution in your own words. Write about the things that you find important in evaluating and monitoring this quality. A pitfall is leaving what you want to say to an external supervisor or writer, which makes the student chapter less inspiring for the panel.
- Realize that compiling the student chapter takes time and energy. It is important that the panel gets a good idea of the quality of your education / institution. You may not immediately feel the effect, but the students after you will. What helps here is to think in advance how many hours you want to spend on it. Also work together, share the responsibility for the chapter with others and make a good planning in advance. This prevents that it will take more time than you would like.

Possible options

- Website
- Mood board
- Video
- Qualitative interviews
- Podcast

But please note: the content is most important, the form must support this. Not the other way around!

Good luck!

To many students, accreditation may seem like an abstract and far-flung event. That's okay: know that there are always people available who can help. In principle, your study program or institution will get you started. If not, ask for help from your central council. Questions or comments about this document? Send an email to iso@iso.nl.