

Student Chapter

# Research Master in the Sociology of Culture, Media and the Arts



## Student Experiences



Mariana Fried – 1st year SCMA (abridged)

- *Why did you choose to start with this research master programme?*

My decision to start with this programme was, to a large extent, an outcome of my previous good experience in the Master Media, Culture and Society at this school. I was motivated to do the Research Master by knowing what the Erasmus University and, specifically, ESHCC environment is like to study. Not only the intercultural environment at this university, but also the good arrangement of the study programmes at ESHCC, the interesting in-class environment with many debates and group discussions, and the openness, friendly treatment and encouragement from lecturers, convinced me that it would be a good idea to study here one more year.

- *What makes this research master programme different from other programmes in the field, in your opinion?*

I believe that a great richness of this programme is in the diverse -academic- origins of the students, and lecturers. By combining sociological approaches to culture, media, and the arts, the programme succeeds in attracting students with similar ways of interpreting reality, but with different interests, prior knowledge, and areas of expertise. This further enriches the classes and their debates.

- *Do you observe any differences in the teaching and learning environment with your previous programme? Is the programme educationally feasible and challenging?*

The content to be studied is much more theoretical and extensive than in my previous Master. For that reason, lecturers' explanations in class, and the space for questions are fundamental. I believe that for a student who pays attention in all classes, participates and devotes approximately 40 hours per week to the Master, it is possible to obtain good results.

- *Are the teaching and support staff accessible?*

I have always been able and had many opportunities to approach both teaching and support staff for any kind of questions, doubts, need for suggestions, etcetera. I always found in ESHCC someone with open doors to help me.

- *What do you think about the quality of the teaching staff?*

So far, the teaching staff of the Research Master has been excellent. In general, I have had lecturers with a lot of research experience and teaching skills. A very positive point is that several lecturers not only teach the content of the subject, but have also given us advice and information on interesting events, tips on ways to publish scientific articles, how to engage in academia, etcetera.

- *Are the tests (assignments, final papers, etc.) that you get appropriate to the education in terms of substance and form?*

In terms of substance and form, I do believe that most assignments are relevant and, above all, useful for solidifying theoretical knowledge and strengthening our skills of writing quality texts with speed. Sometimes, as students, we have wondered if the short time we have between one assignment and the other doesn't limit our ability to write something of better quality, and that has frustrated us a bit, especially at the beginning of the programme. Now, after a few months of getting used to this intense rhythm of work, I also see its positive side. If I have to write a proposal, or paper for some other academic purpose, now I know that I can balance my time better.

Erasmus

## Student Experiences: The Traineeship

Roxi Cui - 2nd year student

- *What was the topic of your traineeship and what is the most valuable thing you have learned personally as well as career wise?*

The topic of my traineeship was the sociology of beauty in the context of Hong Kong. I was under the supervision of Professor Giseline Kuipers, and worked in collaboration with a team of Hong Kong researchers. We investigated personal tastes and cultural conventions about beauty and how these beauty standards are actively used when we evaluate others. The most valuable thing that I've learnt from the project is that, while we cannot completely get rid of beauty biases that we acquired through socialization, it is nevertheless important not to judge a book by its cover. Professionally, I am glad that this traineeship got me in touch with one of the most amazing mentors. I not only furthered my own research skills, but was also able to explore research and career possibilities because of this experience.

## Student Experiences: The International Conference Participation

Victoria Balan – Alumnus 2018/2019



- *Where did you go for the conference?*

Day of Sociology 2019 (organised by NSV and hosted by UvA), on 27th of June 2019 in Amsterdam.

- *What is the most valuable thing you have learned personally as well as career wise?*

The most valuable thing I learnt at the Day of Sociology 2019 was the importance of speaking up, and not being intimidated to approach more senior academics / experts in their field for feedback or other questions. The rather small scale of the conference contributed to a friendly and open atmosphere and created a favourable environment for a young researcher to network and inquire about the research of others, both during the sessions and in the more informal parts.

The feedback I received in discussion with others prompted me to consider novel ideas about my topic of inquiry and the ways in which I can enhance my work. In addition, I received valuable insights and tips for a successful academic life (e.g. what to consider when applying for PhD grants; how to maintain a healthy work-life balance; information about upcoming conferences and events). Overall, the participation in this conference was a very beneficial and constructive component of the Research Master and I look forward to further editions of this event.

# Student Experiences



Guilherme Giolo - 1st year student

- *Why did you choose to start with this research master programme? Do you observe any differences in the teaching and learning environment with your previous programme?*

After my Bachelor's degree, I felt the necessity of gaining analytical tools to explore the cultural content of the media, and learning how I could draw socially relevant insight from cultural objects. I believe the difference between this programme and other perspectives on media studies lies in its heavily sociological approach. It is also highly practical and aimed at generating empirical knowledge, which is not common in more humanities-dominated fields.

- *Are the teaching and support staff accessible? What do you think about the quality of the teaching staff?*

Teaching and support staff are very accessible and flexible with the students' requirements when necessary. There is a good degree of theoretical common ground among members of the teaching staff, and we are always able to bring knowledge and ideas generated during one course to the other. All members of the teaching staff are highly competent and have published in important journals in different areas of knowledge. I found particularly useful how sometimes they brought conference call for papers to our attention or talked about getting papers published. Overall, I would say I'm well informed about education and assessment. Instructions about the course and contextualization to the Dutch educational system were made clear since the first day of classes.

- *Is the programme educationally feasible and challenging?*

The environment in which this programme is situated is highly motivating mostly due to the interdisciplinary teaching, which means we are constantly being taught by researchers from different fields of study. During my previous degree I had mostly lectures with little intellectual engagement exchange between teachers and students, which is totally not the case in this programme. The programme is absolutely feasible if students have good motivation and have already at least reflected upon what their interests are. The workload can be very challenging sometimes, and this requires motivation to push forward with the studies, but at the same time doing high amounts of readings and preparing for classes is useless if a student doesn't have his own ideas that he would like to bring to the discussions. Assignments are mostly research-oriented, meaning that creativity is highly demanded.

- *Are the tests (assignments, final papers, etc.) that you get appropriate to the education in terms of substance and form?*

Assignments are definitely adequate for the objectives of this programme and for the purposes of graduate education in general. I would say some forms of assignments are relevant not only for learning purposes but also for professional reasons, such as preparing and delivering presentations or elevator pitches. These skills can be used also outside of academia. Feedback from teachers has been enough and often rewarding. They point out areas of improvement, so that the next assignments can be of higher quality.

- *What do you think of the culture within the Research Master programme?*

The atmosphere in the programme is great. I believe one of the strongest points of this programme is its small size. We receive a lot of attention from lectures, who get to know us and our individual interests. For the same reason we are also able to have meaningful discussions in which everyone participates and that really shape the learning experience of the course. There is also a good amount of group cohesion, students know each other's interests (and share many of them) and academic backgrounds. These factors enhance the learning experience. We also get to know each other on a personal level, which is usually a hard thing to happen in larger groups, but that means a lot when all of us are internationals.

## Student Experiences

Chenchen Zhu - 1st year student

"I decided to choose the research programme because I was attracted by its curriculum which combines theories and academic practices; and the opportunity of studying abroad. In my opinion, the research programme offers more in-depth knowledge than other Master programmes I know in this study field. Besides, the two-year academic training is designed as cross-disciplined, which allows me to learn things from different perspectives, such as art, media, and culture. I think for students who want to develop in academia, this is a good opportunity to fully explore our research interests.

This year I just obtained my bachelor's degree in China, and the biggest difference I found about the research Master programme from my previous study is its small scale. When I was doing my bachelor's study, we often had classes with 30 students together. In this Master there are 6 students and therefore we can get more attention from lecturers. During classes, students are able to fully express ideas and raise questions. In this way, I am motivated to learn more and think a lot. Although doing the Research Master does pose many challenges, because to become a qualified researcher means we have to reach higher academic standards of thinking and writing, I still enjoy the programme a lot. Especially when I notice my continuous development as the outcomes of theoretical and methodological training.

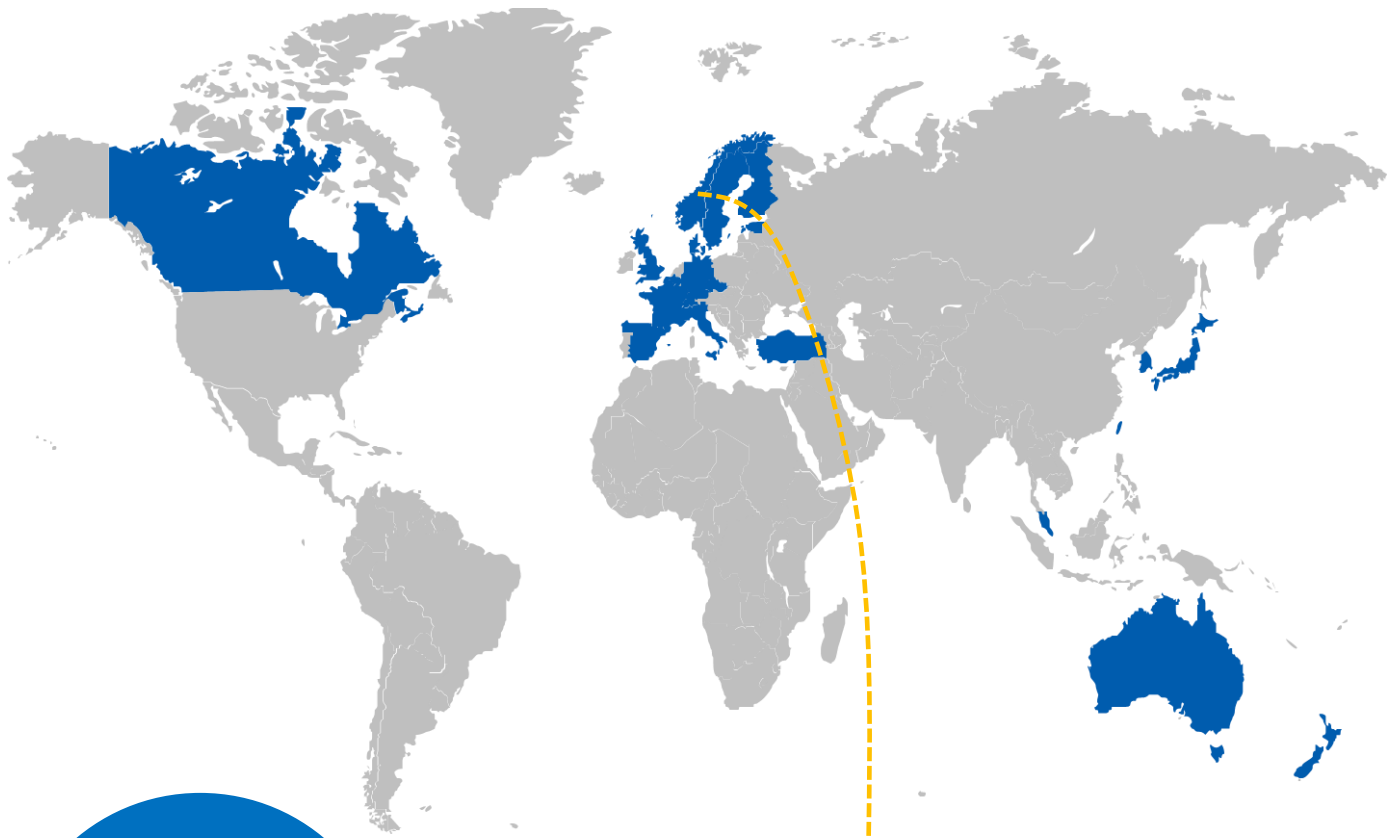
I can feel that the teaching and support staff here are not only trying to maintain a good academic atmosphere, but also to build up a caring and supportive community. They are all willing to help when I have questions. Professors involved in this Research Master programme have different research focuses and unique styles of teaching. I really like having classes with them because I can always get inspired by the class contents. Also, I am well informed about the requirements and expectations of each class because of well-explained course guides and I always get clear and detailed feedback on my assignments.

The atmosphere of our programme is highly international since all six of us are from different countries with very different cultural backgrounds. I really like being in the cross-cultural study programme because it means I have opportunities to explore different cultures and become a more open-minded person. It is always interesting for me to communicate with my fellow students and have new ideas about social facts. Now I am quite enjoying our small but cosy and supportive group!"

*Last but not least, I think students' opinions matter here because there are many opportunities for us to express our opinions, from course surveys to different kinds of students' activities.*



## International exchange, year 2



~34  
Partner  
universities

“Exploring a different academic climate was a very useful experience, and made me more certain of my choice of pursuing a PhD abroad. Being abroad also made it easier for me to build a more international network.”

## Student Experiences

Anouk Mols & Julian Schaap - Alumni



- *Why did you decide to study SCMA at Erasmus University Rotterdam?*

**Anouk:** "After my Master Media & Journalistiek (also at ESHCC), I realised that doing research was what I enjoyed most during my studies. Therefore, I decided that I wanted to pursue a PhD position, and doing a Research Master seemed a good step in that direction. SCMA specifically attracted me in its combination of media studies and sociology and the broad scope it offered. Moreover, the small-scale design of the programme in combination with the high level of research experience of the lecturers and the informal set-up were aspects that made me decide to sign up for this Master."

**Julian:** "It was the only programme in the Netherlands that I knew (and still know) that offers a highly contemporary and transdisciplinary approach of cultural sociology and media studies. While many Masters tend to have a distinct, 'deepening' disciplinary focus (e.g. 'cultural analysis', 'media and business'), this programme has a wide thematic focus (arts, culture and media) and an even wider disciplinary focus. What this boils down to is that the research question or topic of interest comes first, after which the appropriate disciplinary approaches and methodologies are explored. Moreover, while doing my Bachelor degree I became aware of the high quality staff present in the programme's curriculum – some of whom I had spoken with or heard (about) in lectures before. Finally, near the end of my bachelor I was convinced that I wanted to do a PhD, so a Research Master was the most obvious choice."

- *Looking back at your master programme, what really stood out for you?*

**Anouk:** "For me, the personal approach of the lecturers made the Research Master a unique experience. The lecturers knew us by name and were interested in and supportive of our research activities and future plans. This transcended the class room and the course material, as they were open to answering a great diversity of questions and providing advice about a research career. Not only did I learn a lot about the course materials, ranging from cultural sociology to technology-related topics, and from advanced qualitative to quantitative research methods, I also gained much knowledge about working in academia."

**Julian:** "To me, the Research Master felt like a high-quality pressure cooker that – against expectations – had a distinctly informal character. I have never learned as much in such a short amount of time as I did in this Research Master. I especially appreciated the fact that you're not really a student anymore in the traditional sense – I felt like I was working with lecturers rather than for them. Of course there are still deadlines, mandatory readings and grades, but because many of the research problems addressed in the course were 'ongoing', students are often invited to work together with lecturers (also more formally, through the traineeship or Master thesis project), which in some cases results in actual co-authored publications. This combination – cutting-edge yet informal – gave me a head start in my PhD, as I already had experience in conference presentations, publishing and other essential academic skills."

- *How did your master programme prepare you for your (academic) career? Do you feel that the program prepares you sufficiently for the labour market?*

**Anouk:** "I definitely believe that the programme prepared me sufficiently for the academic labour market. The combination of advanced research skills and practical tips and tricks about publishing, presenting, networking, and finding research positions gave me the tools to pursue a career in academia. The programme also provided a realistic view of the academic labour market, which I believe is really important, because PhD positions are scarce. However, to my knowledge almost all my classmates were able to obtain a PhD position within two years after graduation."

**Julian:** "I cannot imagine a better preparation for a PhD in cultural sociology or adjacent fields. Of course I am not sure what the programme offers in terms of labour market preparation beyond research positions, as I do not have experience in this. But basically, the programme 'does what's on the box' – prepare you for a PhD, and it does so very well."

# Student Experiences

Bartosz Zerebecki & Iris Segers- Alumni

- *Why did you decide to study SCMA at Erasmus University Rotterdam?*

**Bartosz:** "I was looking for a prestigious, internationally-oriented programme, which would help me develop my methodological skills. While doing the research, I came across 'Keuzegids Masters 2017,' which finally convinced me that I should move to the Netherlands to study at the Erasmus University Rotterdam."

**Iris:** "At the end of my Bachelor's programme, I was very unsure of what I wanted to do afterwards, and even contemplated to pursue a career in journalism instead of a Master's programme. This changed when I started to work on my Bachelor's thesis, and realized that I really enjoyed to set up a research design and conduct my own study. After this realization, I started to look into various Research Master programmes, and found that the multidisciplinary, as well as the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches of this Master appealed to me the most. "

- *Looking back at your master programme, what really stood out for you?*

**Bartosz:** "One of the things, which stood out for me during my studies was the balance between breadth and depth in the program. On one hand, the programme is an in-depth exploration of social science methods. It focuses on relevant professional skills, needed by the contemporary researcher. On the other hand it is broad enough to accommodate various interests of the students. I was able to take charge of my education, select the areas of focus, and then delve into them with help of world-class researchers who teach in the programme."

**Iris:** "In retrospect I realize that the Master's programme encompassed a broad range of disciplines and theoretical traditions, which taught me to be pragmatic and somewhat eclectic in developing research ideas. As I currently work across disciplines, this has been particularly useful to me."

- *How did your master programme prepare you for your (academic) career? Do you feel that the program prepares you sufficiently for the labour market?*

**Bartosz:** "The programme poses really high expectations of students. Even small-scale research projects are evaluated and advised upon as though they were fully funded grants. Thanks to this approach this programme is an excellent preparation for future academic positions. While the ample feedback, generously given on all the work, could be initially daunting, its specific and constructive content helps develop better skills in analytical thinking and clear writing. Moreover, the relative flexibility offered to students assures that graduates of the programme are independent thinkers, ready to work in research related positions. ."

**Iris:** "As I am currently finishing my PhD, I can confirm that this Master has been quite useful for this purpose. Throughout the Master programme I had to practice a lot with writing research proposals, which helped me apply for PhD positions. The Master programme also made me comfortable with using a rather broad range of quantitative and qualitative methods, which is a skill that relatively few academics have, at least in my experience."







**Erasmus School of  
History, Culture and  
Communication**