



Frequently Asked Questions

History and Philosophy of Science (HPS)

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Eligibility/Admission

Am I eligible with my degree?

All students with an academic bachelor's degree (NL: university as opposed to hbo) are eligible, regardless of the discipline. Please note that your curriculum, grades, motivation letter and writing sample are also taken into account.

I don't have 10 EC of HPS courses. Can I still apply?

You can apply, but you have to provide other specific evidence of your motivation. You have to show that you are *actively* interested in the field, and convince us that your choice is based on realistic expectations of what the HPS programme entails. Academic courses are the easiest way to demonstrate this. You can use your motivation letter to explain.

My grades are not very impressive. Do I have a chance?

You can use your motivation letter to explain your grades. We always look at the combination of grades, experience, motivation and writing sample.

I obtained my degree a long time ago and did other things since then. Can I apply?

Yes, we have had older students before.

What is expected of the writing sample?

You have to write a lot of papers in the programme. In our experience, writing skills are an important determinant of success in the master. Of course we prefer an academic paper, in English, on an HPS-related topic (for example a paper that you wrote for a course). You can also use other things that you wrote, or translate a few pages into English. It does not need to be long, but it should demonstrate your writing skills as well as your reflective and/or analytic abilities.

Will I be able to do all courses if I do not have a background in science?

Yes, all primary elective courses should be doable for all students who have been admitted to the programme. The only exception is the philosophy of physics seminar (but taking the philosophy of physics electives should be enough preparation). And some courses may require extra work if your background is very different.

I am a physicist (or chemist, biologist, etc); can I still do physics in this master?

Yes, history or philosophy of physics can be as 'physical' as you like, and the same goes for other sciences. HPS in Utrecht is especially strong in foundations of physics: one level more fundamental than theoretical physics.

My topic of interest is not mentioned in the course list. What can I do?

The field of HPS is much broader than we can cover in our courses. The programme is sufficiently flexible to pursue other topics, however, for example by including tutorials, by attending courses at other universities (esp. abroad), and by finding a specialist as supervisor for your thesis research. The [membership list of the Descartes Centre](#) gives an impression of the available expertise in Utrecht. Your thesis project can also be co-supervised by an expert from outside Utrecht if needed. Please also note that some courses are taught once every two years (esp. philosophy courses).

Preparation**Can you recommend specific bachelor courses as preparation?**

All courses that are part of one of the two HPS minors of Utrecht University. See:

- [Wetenschapsgeschiedenis](#)
- [Geschiedenis en filosofie van de natuurwetenschappen](#)

My application has been accepted, I will start the programme next year. Can you recommend some reading for preparation?

Useful things to read are, for example:

- a history of science handbook, for example by Rienk Vermij, Patricia Fara, Frederick Gregory, Floris Cohen.
- the philosophy of science topics in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy <https://plato.stanford.edu/>.
- John Norton's "Einstein for Everyone", http://www.pitt.edu/~jdnorton/teaching/HPS_0410/chapters/
- Jan Golinski, *Making Natural Knowledge: Constructivism and the History of Science* (Chicago 1998 or later edition).

Other questions**Can I study part-time?**

No, HPS is a full-time programme.

Can I start in February?

No, you can only start in September. It is important to start with the required courses.

Can I combine HPS with another Master's programme?

You are welcome to try, but you have to realize that HPS is a full-time programme: you are expected

to devote 40 hours per week to study. Especially the required courses in the first semester are intense. It is generally recommended to do one Master's programme for at least a year before starting the second one. Also, you have to make sure to finish the HPS programme within three years at most. It will require a lot of planning.

There are special provisions for combinations of programmes within the Graduate School of Natural Sciences. In that case, you can request to write a combined master's thesis. See the [Education and Examinations Regulations \(OER\)](#) for the specific rules.

Do you have a PhD programme?

No, sorry. In the Dutch system, PhD positions are treated more as junior staff positions than as senior student programmes. You can apply for specific PhD research projects which are advertised as academic jobs, or you can try to get external funding for your own project.

Are there scholarships or teaching assistant positions available?

There are some scholarships, but they are highly competitive; see '[Grants and scholarships](#)'. HPS students can occasionally work as teaching assistant for specific courses. We cannot promise anything before you start though: candidates are selected from current students, based on their teaching skills and their performance in the courses.