Humanism and Humanity in the 21st century
revised research programme 2010 - 2014
University of Humanistic Studies

1 Introduction

This research programme is a direct extension and development of the Humanism and Humanity in the 21st century (2005-2010) research programme. Many valuable elements of that programme have been retained, including the objective of developing humanistics into a science at the interface of social sciences and humanities. This objective will demand drawing together humanistics' constituent disciplines [1] more tightly, with problems and opportunities related to meanings of life and humanization in mind. The earlier research programme's objective of clarifying and refining the concepts of meanings of life and humanization, and their interrelationship, continues to be an important element in the present research programme, albeit that there has been significant progress on this point (Kunneman, 2009(3); Dohmen, 2007; Alma & Smaling, 2010). Another objective that has been retained is to clarify how humanistics is able to deliver building blocks through theoretical and practical research for a. improving professional practices, and b. reformulating humanist principles. We are working along this path towards defining the contours of a humanism for the twenty-first century, starting from the dynamism and diverse worldviews of the multicultural society.

There is also a need to revise the programme. Drafting the self-assessment for the December 2008 research visitation, and the recommendations of the visitation committee, helped define the scope of the revision. This revised research programme concentrates more than its predecessor on a limited number of well-defined social problem areas and practices, thereby strengthening and highlighting the social and academic significance of the research. The research focus is in the four projects described in Section 4, which also outlines how the projects interrelate with the domains that are the pillars of humanistics and the basis for the departmental organization structure of academic staff.

Another element that has been strengthened in this new research programme is the methodological development of humanistics. Alongside philosophical and historical research methods, the social science empirical research arm has also been reinforced and extended. The importance of hermeneutic approaches and qualitative research methods are undiminished, but they have been augmented by appropriate quantitative approaches. Furthermore, the life sciences perspective and research tradition are being given a place in humanistics.

Valorization of scientific research has always been at the centre of humanistics. The recent emphasis on valorization from government and subsidy providers has given new impetus to our own interpretation of, and approach to, the complex processes of valorization and social embedding.

Details of the key research programme elements mentioned in this introduction are given in the following sections.
2 Mission and central concepts

2.1 Mission
The mission of the University of Humanistic Studies is to contribute to a humane society and a meaningful life for everyone, through academic research and teaching from a humanist perspective. The key concepts of this research programme are therefore humanism, meanings of life and humanization. Continuing a long humanist tradition in philosophy, literature and the humanities, the starting points of humanistics are the capacities and vulnerabilities of embodied persons in shaping their own lives through feeling, thinking and acting. These capacities and vulnerabilities determine society’s opportunities and the need for humanization. Humanism, meanings of life and humanization – their interrelationships and associated conflicts – are the basis of all research and its valorization at the University of Humanistic Studies.

2.2 Key concepts

2.2.1 Humanism
Based on a humanist inspiration, humanistics supports developments that lead towards a more meaningful and dignified life. The university is founded on humanism as a worldview. Humanism can be described as an open worldview characterized by dialogue, and as a critical and stimulating movement that acknowledges the autonomous and responsible role of humans in shaping their lives. The values that humanism stands for include freedom and self-determination, fairness, justice and solidarity, sustainability, tolerance, appreciation for diversity, and respect for human dignity.

The university’s teaching and research provide theoretical and practical substance to the humanist pursuit set out above. However, humanistics is not the same as humanism. Humanistics is the academic study of humans, organizations and society, oriented to meanings of life and humanization and from a humanist worldview perspective. Humanistics contributes to reflecting on and developing humanism as a worldview. This worldview resides alongside, and sometimes in contention with, other worldviews, while simultaneously manifesting itself as an undogmatic variant of other, possibly religious, worldviews. The university studies humanism in this broad, ‘inclusive’ sense.

Peter Derkx (2010) has distilled two principles that are core attributes of all variants of humanism. The first is that every worldview position is a context-bound human product. This principle is concerned with acknowledging human fallibility, a sense of doubt and a critical attitude, with the openness of the humanist worldview and tolerance and appreciation for diversity. The second principle is that all people should view and treat each other as equals, and that everyone is entitled to human dignity. At the most fundamental level, the principle of equality is the basis of individual freedom, self-determination and individual responsibility. Derkx draws on Todorov for possible additional minimum attributes of humanism: the ‘autonomy of the I’ and the ‘finality of the you’. Both are concerned with respect for unique and irreplaceable people as an essential element of humanism.

2.2.2 Meanings of Life and Humanization
Meanings of life is concerned with placing something in a broader context of meanings that affect human life. The definition of existential meanings of life can be refined as being a personal stance towards the world that sets an individual life in a broader context of interrelated meanings, in which goal orientation, fullness of values, solidarity and transcendence are experienced, along with
competency and acknowledgment, thereby also creating a sense of motivation and well-being (cf. Smaling & Alma, 2010).

Meanings of life not only have constitutive significance for personal identity, but are also a basis of social processes of culture formation, consisting of more or less fully formed or specialized worldviews. Conversely, a worldview can bring goal orientation, a certain consistency and integration into the multiple aspects of life. A worldview can also provide a framework of values and foster a sense of security and mental well-being. Otherwise, a worldview can also constrain, or even threaten, personal meanings of life. Dogmatism and institutionalization can turn a worldview into a force with the potential to oppose individual freedom.

Humanistics investigates the influence of worldview diversity on the way worldviews function as meanings-of-life frameworks, the meaning-giving power of various worldview traditions, especially humanism, and humanism’s potential contribution to interworldview dialogue. This investigation pays heed to various past and present humanist movements and views. In other words, existential meanings of life are always also studied as worldview meanings of life, with particular regard for humanist viewpoints.

There is an inextricable link between meanings of life and humanization. Humanization can be defined in a general sense as cultivating the right conditions for personal meanings of life, within equitable institutions and in a sustainable world society (Nussbaum 2006). The research below is not restricted to theoretical reflection and clarification, but also aspires to making a practical contribution to fostering specific humanization processes in diverse practical contexts. Given the humanization orientation based on humanist inspiration, this research uses the actor perspective as a starting point, which means that the research devotes explicit attention to personal experience, opportunities, and sources of inspiration.

Key questions in University of Humanistic Studies research are concerned with the relationship between meanings of life and humanization, and their reciprocal contributions. Meanings of life and humanization run in parallel on both conceptual and practical levels, and refer constantly to each other. The orientation to humanization issues leads among other things to research into the social, economic and political conditions that may enable people to shape what they deem to be a meaningful life. The research is also oriented to the practical support of attempts to improve the implementation of these conditions in specific institutional contexts, such industry and the care sector. It must be noted that, in the process of giving meaning to life, people develop perspectives on humanization. An important element of the University of Humanistic Studies research programme is identifying and augmenting all sources of meanings of life and education that may provide existential inspiration and courage to live, and foster engagement with humanity. This element is linked with questions of parenting, engaged citizenship, normative professionalization and corporate social responsibility, both locally and globally. The specific interpretation of a justness and sustainability perspective is always linked with specific historical circumstances. The definition of what is deemed a good life invariably depends on the historical dynamics of meanings of life and pedagogical processes, and constantly shifting articulations of a good life.

It will be clear from this conceptual and thematic exploration of how the meanings-of-life and humanization concepts interrelate, that the complex central research questions in humanistics demand a normatively inspired multidisciplinary, or interdisciplinary, approach. Questions surrounding meanings of life and humanization operate on the interface between body, person, group, culture and community. The theory of science and methodological questions that are
associated with this normative interdisciplinary approach therefore have an important place in the new research programme.

2.3 Valorization
The University of Humanistic Studies mission implies a key place for valorization in the research programme. Science and a practical orientation go hand in hand in humanistics. Valorization means more than translating academic research output into applications in practical situations. Professional fields are preferably involved from the outset in formulating research questions and research design, and they participate in the execution of research. The application of more fundamental research on the one hand, and the full cooperation of scientists, professionals and the public in research design and execution on the other, can be considered to be opposite poles in a valorization continuum. The entire continuum is manifest in the University of Humanistic Studies research programmes, with a leaning towards research nearer the second pole. The same continuum is covered in the graduate school, where PhD students perform more fundamental research, and professionals study for doctorates on questions that are relevant in their own professional practice. Furthermore, the Meanings of Life & Profession practical centre offers ample opportunities for extensive forms of partnership between the academic and professional worlds, in particular in the field of normative professionalization (see 4.1.4). Valorization is also shaped through a systematic interplay between research and the master’s education, so ensuring optimum cross-fertilization.

The choice of social problem areas and practices on which to focus research is connected with the priority themes defined by the members of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands and the organizations in the humanist movement. [3]

Important valorization channels for the University of Humanistic Studies include:
- the Humanistics University Press, for academic humanist publications, professional publications and dissertations;
- the Tijdschrift voor Humanistieken journal, with information for professionals about humanistics research output;
- E-journal ‘Partage: Journal for Humanistic Scholars’, with texts by humanistics students.
3 The research organization

The vice chancellor has ultimate responsibility for all research at the University of Humanistic Studies, and works closely with the member of the Board of Governors who holds the teaching portfolio. The teaching portfolio holder leads the four deputy heads of the departments concerned with teaching and research at the University of Humanistic Studies. The Board of Governors is advised by the research consultative group, which includes deputy heads of department, project leaders, the director of the graduate school and the director of the Meanings of life & Profession practical centre.

All staff report to one of the research groups, and each research group is responsible for developing the content of one or more humanistics domains through teaching, research and valorization:

1) Humanist Counselling;
2) Education;
3) Critical Organization and Intervention Studies;
4) Worldviews, Research Methodology, Ethics and Practical Skills.

The content of the research and valorization domains is mostly defined by projects oriented to social problem areas and practice, which the various research groups link together. Humanistics domains and the academic disciplines that feed them are thereby becoming increasingly interwoven. The projects are temporary, for a three-year period with the possibility of extension. Two projects, ‘Ageing Well: Well-being, Meaning and Human Dignity’ and ‘Citizenship in an Intercultural Society’ started in 2008. Two other research projects, ‘Resilience & Humanism’ and ‘Normative Professionalization’ started on 1 January and 1 April 2010, respectively.

There is also limited scope within the research groups for research that is sufficiently domain-specific that it does not fit in any of the projects. The research programme comprises both research covered by the research groups in the four joint projects and domain-specific research performed by the research group staff.

Deputy heads of department and project leaders each have their own responsibility in the execution of the University of Humanistic Studies research programme. The aim on research group level is optimum coordination of research into:

- trends in the various domains and academic disciplines that interact and join to form humanistics;
- trends in the professional fields that are the targets of training;
- the bachelor’s-master’s system.

Deputy heads of department supervise the researchers and monitor research progress and quality within their research groups.

Project leaders monitor the progress and quality of the research within their project, with a view to achieving the associated objectives, as formulated in the project proposal approved by the Board of Governors.

Research performed by PhD students is conducted within the projects. They are educated and supervised in the graduate school.
3.1 Institutes
Alongside the primary research process in research groups and projects, the University of Humanistic Studies also has several specialized institutes whose purpose is to conduct contract research. These institutes report directly to the Board of Governors (vice chancellor), and each has a director.

3.1.1 Kosmopolis
The Kosmopolis Institute was founded in 2004 together with Hivos, Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries. The institute conducts research on the interface between humanistic studies, globalization and Development Studies. In this context, Kosmopolis leads the Pluralism Knowledge Programme (PKP), an international partnership involving the University of Humanistic Studies, Hivos, academic institutes in Yogyakarta (Indonesia) and Bangalore (India), and a civil society organization in Kampala (Uganda). In 2010, the Kosmopolis Institute acquired affiliate status with the US based Harvard Program on Pluralism. The institute has editorial responsibility for the Pluralism Working Paper Series, an international, English language collection of academic work, observations from development practice, and interviews. The PhD candidates of the knowledge programme are enrolled in the University of Humanistic Studies graduate school.

The second tranche of the knowledge programme runs from 2011 to the end of 2013. Research in this period will be conducted on issues of identity and citizenship in a global perspective, and on the relationship between human and sustainable development.

The contribution of University of Humanistic Studies staff to the knowledge programme consists of research that is integrated into the work of the ‘Citizenship in an Intercultural Society’ research project (see 4.1.1).

3.1.2 J.P. van Praag Institute for Research into the History of Humanism
The institute was founded on 1 January 2009 by the University of Humanistic Studies, together with the Humanist Archive. The director is advised on technical matters by an academic advisory council.

The institute performs research into the history of organized humanism in the Netherlands in the 1856–2006 period. Much of the research is carried out by three PhD students, who started on 1 September 2009. These doctoral research projects are part of the ‘Resilience & Humanism’ (see 4.1.3) and ‘Citizenship in an Intercultural Society’ (see 4.1.1) research projects.

3.1.3 Meanings of Life & Profession
Meanings of Life & Profession is the university’s practical centre and home for activities funded through contract research. The centre’s mission is to contribute to expanding the scope for meanings of life and humanization in professional practice and organizations. The centre works towards the same goal through advanced training, refresher courses, training courses, coaching, contract research, management consultancy, and workshops and symposiums about meanings of life and humanization issues. The main focus of the centre’s activities is professionals and their organizations in the care, welfare, education and public service sectors.

Research contracts are accepted only if they are technically compatible with the projects in this research programme. The practical centre forms a link between the project teams and the professionals and organizations ‘in the field’, and thus contributes significantly to the valorization of University of Humanistic Studies research. The director is advised on technical matters by an academic advisory council.
4 Description of the research

4.1 Research projects
An important feature of this revised research programme is that the research is concentrated more than before on a limited number of well-defined social problem areas and practices. The four projects in which this is carried out are described below.

4.1.1 Citizenship in an Intercultural Society
In the early 21st century, the debate about citizenship and identity has become strongly polarized in the Netherlands, across Europe and globally. A fear of cultural differences often dominates in public and theoretical debates and is also reflected in political policy. This complex, intercultural situation into which societies have progressively moved, is part of the background of this polarization and is closely linked to global social, political and economic processes.

Migration flows have intensified in the past fifty years. More than ever before, people migrate from one country to another and from rural areas to urban environments, thereby dramatically changing their everyday living conditions. Citizens in the 21st century are expected to be capable of functioning in socio-political environments that are characterized by substantial cultural and religious diversity. Living in such social contexts requires of citizens the capability to articulate their own views in debates about values and also consider and integrate new insights and skills. These issues have been researched broadly in recent decades, in socio-political theory and philosophy, and in the fields of education and the historical sciences. The Scientific Council for Government Policy also contributes to this research in the Netherlands.

The ‘Citizenship in an Intercultural Society’ research project investigates the challenges that confront citizens in both local and global contexts. The research addresses citizenship in intercultural fields of tension, where old, pillarized forms of citizenship, based on a social partition of cultural (e.g. religious) identities, is no longer adequate in today’s society. The primary research focus is on what happens in Western societies, but, through the involvement of the Kosmopolis Institute, is also oriented towards global, comparative perspectives. Western and non-Western issues and perspectives are studied, with an explicit focus on the relationship between modern Western secular thought and practices, and those that are rooted in religious traditions, which often dominate in non-Western contexts. However, in the Western world too, intercultural issues have become an important part of interreligious and inter-worldview issues. ‘Citizenship in an Intercultural Society’ aims to contribute through critical reflection on these matters, thereby rethinking the meaning of the secular.

The work of the ‘Citizenship in an Intercultural Society’ project and Kosmopolis aims to shed new light on the complex processes that take place in intercultural societies, where new forms of engagement determine how identities are articulated in diverse communities and societies. This research objective is in line with current debate and reflection in various Dutch humanist organizations and movements and addresses the tensions between concepts and practices of autonomy and community, secularism and religion, and about the evolving identity of humanism in the 21st century.
4.1.2 Ageing Well: Well-being, Meaning and Human Dignity

The objective of the ‘Ageing Well’ project is to research a theme that is becoming more important for individuals and societies from the (practically oriented) viewpoints of humanism, meanings of life and humanization.

The term ‘ageing well’ refers to the ways in which people labelled ‘elderly’ by society, because of their age, can continue to organize and lead their lives. This is not prescribed by nature, but may be viewed as an existential, socially located process that can be the subject of discussion and reflection, with a view to a meaningful and dignified life course. Sources that may be tapped include humanist traditions, which through their use may also be enriched with new themes and perspectives. The demand for ageing ‘well’ is of particular interest because of the very rapid recent increase in life expectancy in ‘Western’ countries, with many people living relatively long lives as ‘elderly people’, while little thought has been given to optimum forms of this life. Nonetheless, there is now widespread discourse about the foreseeable budgetary consequences of these trends (e.g. pensions and healthcare), in which a link is made between ‘elderly people’ and other age-defined population groups. Substantial research is also being performed into the biological and pathological processes concerned with senescence. The discourses about ‘elderly people’ and ‘senescence’ touch on important conditions for ageing well. Conversely, considerations concerned with ‘ageing well’ should also have an impact on ideas about ‘senescence’ and the social structure of the life course. A conspicuous aspect of the demand for ‘ageing well’ is that it arises immediately and inevitably when people are confronted with the question of how to live or go on living. The challenge is to demonstrate that methodological reflection and research that is performed with proper scientific distance can be relevant to the prescientific ‘life world’, and then to demonstrate that answers to the question of ageing well should direct the discourses about elderly people, senescence and care for the elderly.

The stated discourses are relevant on various levels: micro (individuals and their primary relationships); meso (organizations and institutions); and macro (organization of the life course and the related political and public debate). Questions of substantial practical importance are concerned with the dominance of medicalizing forms of the ageing discourse in the organization of institutions for care for the elderly, and about how to develop alternatives that do greater justice to the ‘life world’ aspect of these institutions, so that they too can meet the demand for ageing well satisfactorily.

Various aspects of ageing well therefore require research. This is a field in which humanistics touches on life sciences in addition to social sciences and the humanities. The University of Humanistic Studies’ expertise in the fields of meanings of life (existential questions) and humanization (critical gerontology) puts it in an excellent position to make ‘ageing well’ a unique research priority.

4.1.3 Resilience & Humanism

The ‘Resilience & Humanism’ research project aims to repossess and update the project that was set in motion by Jaap van Praag, the founding father of contemporary Dutch humanism, and which he considered to be his ‘great mission’. Convinced of the importance of worldviews as a factor in individual resilience, he aimed to develop humanism and promote human mental resilience. Van Praag was profoundly influenced in this pursuit by witnessing the emergence of rampant fascism in the 1930s and 1940s. According to Van Praag, the orientation and inspiration that issues from a consciously lived worldview such as humanism have the power to make people resilient to the forces and temptations of mass movements of this kind.
However, the context that makes resilience urgent today differs markedly from that in the time of Van Praag. Whereas, in the manifestly pillarized postwar Netherlands, he was able to develop a humanist worldview alongside the established churches and associations, the world we live in today is one of increasing globalization, migration, multiculturalism, North-South inequality, and individualization, also in an ideological sense – to mention but a few of the commonly applied labels. But in these times too, people are exposed to an assortment of mass phenomena, from consumerism, cultural levelling, pressure to perform, a normative lifestyle and opinion pressure, to media hype, Islamophobia and wholesale xenophobia. People need resilience to avoid becoming a plaything of these kinds of movements and trends. The need stems from the threat posed by these movements and trends to vital human values, such as freedom, responsibility, solidarity, and even human dignity.

This research project draws together humanism and resilience in a contemporary context. An aim is to promote an interworldview humanism, with the expectation that this will foster the resilience that is needed today. This humanism is based on dialogue and humanist fundamental principles, and differs from monadic worldviews by virtue of openness and debate. It aspires to a joint quest rather than predetermined answers, and accordingly demands the wise handling of finiteness, uncertainty, and differences. As a dialogic worldview, humanism manifests itself as a critical, inquisitive and innovative cultural movement – therefore with its own tradition, but not exclusive. As an inquisitive worldview oriented to academic and general debate, humanism expressly seeks to forge links with ‘humanist’-like elements and movements in other religious and worldview traditions.

The academic objective of this research project can be summarized concisely as the linking of humanism with resilience and its advancement. The questions linked with this overall objective are: how to develop and interpret a concept of open, interworldview humanism that contributes content and function to the resilience of individuals and groups in the sociocultural and historical context of the 21st century; and how to define resilience in a way that can respond credibly to all challenges, both opportunities and threats, that this sociocultural and historical context presents to the individuals and groups of today.

This question links several constituent issues, which are the subject of individual and joint investigation by the researchers on this project. This research project is being conducted cooperatively in three teams, each with a specific perspective: (1) historical: the history of humanism; (2) empirical and practical: with a focus on, but not restricted to, humanist counselling; and (3) philosophical: with a focus on, but not restricted to, the significance of exemplars.

The research in this interdisciplinary project is not restricted to the methods and approaches of traditional social sciences and humanities, such as philosophy, ethics, historical studies, religious studies and psychology. An aim is to link these approaches with life sciences, including both evolutionary and behavioural biology (De Waal, Hrdy), and aspects of brain research, including mirror neurons (Gallese, Iacoboni).

4.1.4 Normative Professionalization
The concept of normative professionalism arose in the 1990s in the University of Humanistic Studies and among professional counsellors and researchers from the social sector, as a way of counterbalancing the dominant technical and instrumental attitudes to professionalization. Since then, the issues brought to light through the normative professionalism concept have received general recognition, in particular in the care, education and social sectors.
This area presents important opportunities and challenges for humanistics, with its long history of both conceptual and practical attention to these issues. Against this background this research project has three central objectives:

1. to develop practical guidelines and methods for professionals to deal more satisfactorily with the normative aspects of their professional conduct, and all related questions and dilemmas;
2. to deliver up-to-date contributions to the academic and public debate about current issues surrounding normative professionalism and normative professionalization, both nationally and internationally;
3. to clarify the links between the humanist principles of meanings of life and humanization from the normative professionalization perspective and – as an extension – to help update the substance of humanism, both conceptually and in terms of humanist-inspired professional conduct.

The normative professionalism concept is treated as descriptive in the context of this project. As a critical way of augmenting the attitudes to professionalism that focus on professionals’ knowledge base and technical and methodological expertise, this concept is deployed to shed light on the normative content of professionals’ conduct. The theory creation and research of recent decades have identified three clusters of standards and values that help determine professionals’ conduct, in particular in human-oriented professions.

The first is concerned with the normative effect of legal and economic frameworks and with all sector-specific legislation and regulations in which they are enshrined, including the normative pressure arising from competition. Roughly speaking, this involves the normative effect of the state and the market, and the underlying political perspectives and ideologies.

The second is concerned with the standards, values, virtues and attitudes that are linked with the specific roles of professionals and with the social domains and organizations in which they are embedded, such as caring, teaching, supervising, administering justice, maintaining order, guarding, coaching and managing, including the cultural and worldview traditions involved in the specific interpretation of these professional roles and the changes that are occurring in them.

The third is concerned with the standards and values that are rooted in professionals’ own ‘life world’ and the associated implicit judgments and prejudices in dimensions such as ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic class and age, and the personal assimilation and focus in the context of professionals’ personal life stories.

Based on research in recent decades, these three normative clusters of professional conduct are taken as a starting point in this project for further development and in-depth study. Against this background the research in this project will proceed along four lines: (1) empirical research into normative professionalization processes; (2) methodological and organizational embedding; (3) philosophy of science and methodological questions; and (4) the relationship between humanistics, humanism and normative professionalization.

4.2 Research groups
The research in the above research projects is conducted within the research groups that are responsible for the academic development of the various humanistics domains. The researchers who work on the temporary projects are based in the research groups. The research group domains are
described briefly below, focusing on research questions and the relationship with the research projects.

4.2.1 Humanist Counselling

This humanistics domain of Humanist Counselling is concerned with the counselling of issues related to meanings of life in relation to humanization. Specific research questions are oriented to the nature and methodology of humanist counselling, and the associated conditions, context and embedding.

Humanist counselling is most relevant in situations that breach people’s everyday meanings of life – the meanings that are constantly ascribed with little or no reflection: situations in which the quality of our existence, or the existence itself, is at stake. Humanist counselling is concerned with questions and problems surrounding this existential dimension of meanings of life, and the diversity of the related substance (various perceptions of meaninglessness and loss of meaning, ways of finding and giving meaning to life). Giving meaning to life is therefore treated as a relational process that occurs in historical, cultural and social contexts. This raises questions about the relationship between meanings of life and humanization, and the possible contribution of humanist counselling. The link with morality and ethics is explored. The complexity of humanist counselling demands proper attention to each of these aspects.

The Humanist Counselling research group is mainly concerned with the professional practice of humanist counsellors in the various fields of work: healthcare, care for the elderly, policing, the military, and independent counselling (counselling as primary track). Comparable counselling activities are also conceivable in educational institutions, companies, organizations, crisis relief etc. (existential counselling as secondary track). This raises research questions surrounding the definition of the worldview and existential aspects of the office or profession, and surrounding practical methodologies for the various fields of work.

A feature of humanist counselling is the profession’s worldview dimension. Humanistics explores aspects such as the meaning-giving power of humanism with its existential, ethical and aesthetic sources. Humanism is defined inclusively, with an emphasis on an interworldview perspective and on the question of how humanist values are interpreted in worldview movements. A feature of humanist values is that meanings of life are always placed in a context of aiming for a just society based on solidarity.

The humanist counsellor is able to help people access their own worldview sources, and from there to arrive at new meanings of life. In order to support other people in this process, humanist counsellors need an understanding of their own worldview development. This demands that humanist counsellors reflect on their own grasp of what humanist traditions may give them. An important point in the research is therefore the demand for developing the competencies needed for humanist counselling, which fall into personal, hermeneutic and communicative categories.

Personal competency is concerned with the essential, and ever-continuing, development of reflective capacity, with a view to self-knowledge and an understanding of personal worldview development. Hermeneutic competency is concerned with the capacity to investigate and interpret ‘texts’ (i.e. all the material that counterparties contribute and that is relevant to them as sources of meaning), and the support of counterparties in this process. Communicative competency is concerned with how the above two acquired qualities interrelate, primarily in dialogue situations (micro level), but also in peer-level consultation, pedagogical situations and policy and organizational duties (meso level), specific political and social circumstances and other cultural factors (macro level).
It will be clear that these competencies make the concept of normative professionalization relevant for the research group, certainly since the work has to be performed in a normative interplay of various players, language games and practical requirements. The specific research of the research group in relation to the above competencies can contribute significantly to the ‘Normative Professionalization’ research project (see 4.1.4). The same is true of the ‘Resilience & Humanism’ project (4.1.3). In view of the importance of the worldview dimension in humanist counselling, the focus of the research group’s research is on the ‘Resilience & Humanism’ project. All the department’s researchers participate in this project, and accordingly their joint effort strengthens empirical research in the humanist counselling field.

Humanist counselling is a practical skill that professionals usually employ within organizations, which demands an understanding of how organizations work, and of the scope and limitations of professional conduct in this context. This aspect of humanist counselling also touches on the ‘Normative Professionalization’ research project. Humanist counselling also relates to wider issues in society, such as those created by individualization and globalization. Is it possible in this context to develop new forms of humanist counselling oriented to a meaningful life for everyone in a human society? In this connection, humanist counselling touches on the ‘Citizenship in an Intercultural Society’ (see 4.1.1) and ‘Ageing Well’ (see 4.1.2) research projects. On the one hand the research within these projects is an important source of information for the continued development of humanist counselling, and on the other hand the research group, based on its research into the worldview dimension of this practical field, aims to help answer questions that are relevant to the various projects.

4.2.2 Education

Education in humanist perspective is the process of working on meanings of life and humanization. Research into education may be oriented to the visions and objectives, practices and experience of students and education professionals. We view learning as identity development, where people position themselves in cultural traditions and practices, transform them, and gain increasing control over their own multivocal identity development. This sociocultural and socioconstructivist view of learning is a process of giving meaning to one’s own life and that of others. A humanist perspective is oriented to linking autonomy and social involvement (Veugelers, 2003), and on empowerment and social justice (Aloni, 2007). The strengthening of human capacities, such as reflection, empathy and dialogue, is an important aspect. On an institutional level this demands the transformation of a technical-instrumental rationality into a critical-emancipatory normative rationality, the reduction of social and global inequality and exclusion, and the creation of greater freedom for cultural differences.

Education is concerned with individuals’ social, moral, worldview and citizenship identity development. It is about establishing links with other people, ideas and practices, and articulating them in an individual way, which involves acquiring knowledge and skills and developing values, emotions and attitudes. It is about strengthening the capacity of each individual to direct this development and to work on humanitarian relationships with others, social justice and democracy. Learning is about personal development in solidarity. In lifelong learning, the phases of life and stages of development determine the definition of learning processes and possible pedagogical practices.

Pedagogical practices are extremely diverse: from school processes of instruction and learning, to the supervision of personal learning processes and learning questions; from compulsory to voluntary;
from long-term intensive forms to incidental brief activities; from knowledge-oriented to the development of attitudes; from intensively supervised to distance coaching, or using media, etc. Humanist-inspired pedagogical practices such as Humanistisch VormingsOnderwijs occupy a special place in this field.

There are four professional roles in educational work: design, supervision, organization and research. Supervising the above learning processes requires institutions and professionals that themselves embody these forms of learning, where the institutions provide a place for practising identity development, in which professionals themselves showcase these forms of learning. Contexts and real learning environments have a great influence on the opportunities for learning processes and on the normative professionalism of educational staff. Gathering knowledge about the influence of the context and opportunities for change is essential for researchers and for educational workers themselves. The four professional roles facilitate consistency and cooperation in teaching and research with the other University of Humanistic Studies professional variants: critical organization studies (organization), humanist counselling (supervision), and worldview, research and ethics (design and research).

The Education research is oriented to better reflection on obstacles in practices, the continued professionalization of education workers, the design and implementation of pedagogical practices that offer additional options for meanings of life and humanization, a stronger theoretical link between critical-democratic citizenship and (humanist) worldview and moral-ethical development, and greater cooperation between humanistics and the pedagogical and educational sciences.

Research questions of the Education research group are oriented to the objectives, pedagogical practices and development processes of students and education professionals. Relevant questions include:

- what are the larger pedagogical opportunities for meanings of life and humanization, and how can they be implemented?
- what obstacles confront education professionals and students, and how can they be eliminated?
- what political relations are involved in educational relations, and how can social and global inequality in educational opportunities be reduced and transformed?
- what educational experience (meanings of life) and effects (humanization) do students and professionals obtain?

The Education research group already performs a relatively large volume of empirical research, which it aims to increase. The related methodological aim is for a link between quantitative and qualitative research methods and socioscientific and philosophical-theoretical reflection on concepts and collected data. The research is both practically and theoretically framed where possible in social relations and a historical approach.

Education research is embedded in the pedagogical, educational and educational philosophy sciences. The Education research group has an extensive network in Dutch and international universities. The staff in these networks are involved in education research, in soliciting and performing externally financed research projects, and publishing internationally in journals and compilations.

The master’s research and research performed by PhD students is linked as much as possible with the research of the Education research group. Interesting perspectives in recent and ongoing
research include: pedagogical viewpoints, normative professionalization, curriculum development and identity development, and citizenship education for young people. Because Education research is on the level of goals, practices, professionals and identity development, it is linked with the ‘Citizenship in an Intercultural Society’ (see 4.1.1), ‘Normative Professionalization’ (see 4.1.4) and ‘Resilience & Humanism’ (see 4.1.3) projects. There is an interplay between the developments in these research projects and Education research. With regard to ‘Normative Professionalization’, there is additional theoretical and empirical research into the intrinsic normativeness of educational institutional environments and professionals. Furthermore, there is additional theoretical and empirical research into the development of critical-democratic citizenship in informal and formal educational settings. The practical and professional relevance of Education research is reinforced by intensive cooperation with educational settings and professionals and educational organizations. There is intensive cooperation in particular with Humanistisch VormingsOnderwijs (HVO), Stichting LeerplanOntwikkeling (SLO) and the public education organizations (VOO, AOB) and private nondenominational education (Privately Run Nondenominational Schools Council of the Netherlands, NABS).

4.2.3 Critical Organization and Intervention Studies

The research performed in the Critical Organization and Intervention Studies research group focuses on one of the key questions of humanistics, as to the conditions under which people are capable of linking their personal meanings of life with social engagement and the humanization of society. An assumption of Critical Organization and Intervention Studies is that organizational processes in today’s societies strongly determine whether or not these links materialize. In other words, Critical Organization and Intervention Studies explores the conditions needed within today’s organizations to foster links between meanings of life and humanization, and conditions that could create obstacles. This also points to the critical perspective that underlies Critical Organization and Intervention Studies research. In a nutshell this perspective is of humanization through giving meaning to life. Critical Organization and Intervention Studies research is oriented to promoting humanization in and of organizations by strengthening people’s opportunities for a meaningful life and work, for, or in contact with, organizations. By nurturing links between individuals’ own meanings of life and questions surrounding humanity and humanization in organizations and the practices in which they operate, Critical Organization and Intervention Studies research aims to contribute to new links between the micro level of everyday interactions, the meso level of organizations and social domains, and the macro level of international relations and global developments.

The research duly focuses on four key themes. The first theme is about trends in current organization theory and utilizing and strengthening the constituent reference points for the Critical Organization and Intervention Studies critical perspective, including within critical and postmodern movements in organization theory, narrative approaches and complexity thinking. The second theme is about questions surrounding corporate social responsibility against a background of global justice and sustainability. The third theme is about questions surrounding citizenship, public administration and policy, in particular with a view to strengthening the civil society. The final Critical Organization and Intervention Studies research theme is concerned with normative professionalism and normative professionalization, in particular with questions surrounding business and organizational ethics, integrity, and the importance of the personal factor for the quality of professional conduct. This fourth theme is fully covered in the ‘Normative Professionalization’ umbrella research project (see 4.1.4).
4.2.4  **Worldviews, Research Methodology, Ethics and Practical Skills**

The *Worldviews, Research Methodology, Ethics and Practical Skills* research group is responsible for teaching and research concerned with various elements of humanistics: humanism and worldviews, ethics, the theory of science, and methodology. These elements serve humanistics as a whole (and are therefore not related mainly to one of the three directly professionally oriented humanistics master’s tracks, but all three). A description of these elements is given below.

**Worldviews**

The research into *humanism and worldviews* has three aspects: (1) the critical articulation and development of humanism as a worldview; (2) worldview diversity and interworldview dialogue; and (3) worldview philosophy and theory.

The critical articulation and development of humanism as a worldview is about the history and current relevance of humanist attitudes, manifestations, movements, thinkers, and so on. The focus is on Europe, in particular the Netherlands. Furthermore, humanist viewpoints are developed about existential questions: life and death, illness and health, good and evil, happiness and setbacks, despair and courage, acceptance and improvement, oneness and solidarity, humans and nature, pleasure and addiction, and so on. These issues are brought into connection with sociocultural (and technological) trends, such as genomics and globalization. The research on this topic is largely executed within the ‘Resilience & Humanism’ and ‘Ageing Well’ projects (see 4.1.3 and 4.1.2).

The worldview diversity aspect is about humanism in relation to ‘other’ worldviews and religions, in a multicultural context. The research is concerned mainly with the relationships between humanism, Islam and Christianity, with a view to opportunities for interworldview dialogue. The primary aim is not therefore the development and drafting of a humanist worldview alongside and in contention with others, but a humanism that cuts across and participates in ‘other’ worldviews. The internal diversity in these worldview movements is necessarily relevant. The role and potential of humanism through interworldview dialogue in the movement towards a more open and human society is emphatically on the research agenda.

The research on this aspect would become better nuanced and more meaningful if the spectrum were broadened to include the Buddhist worldview, in view of its influences on contemporary forms of Western spirituality. This broadening must remain a wish because of a lack of vital research information.

Research on this topic is largely executed within the ‘Resilience & Humanism’ and ‘Citizenship in an Intercultural Society’ projects (see 4.1.3 and 4.1.1).

The philosophy and theory of the worldview aspect is about research into worldviews as such. This includes research into the nature, substance, functions, and (historical, current and future) manifestations of worldviews, as well as the relationships between worldviews and politics, society, the mass media, morality and art. Particular attention is given to the meaning of worldviews for mental resilience, where life sciences research augments traditional social science and humanities approaches. The research on this topic is largely executed within the ‘Resilience and Humanism’ project (see 4.1.3).

An important point for the ‘Normative Professionalization’ project (see 4.1.4) is to develop the role of worldviews, spiritual and aesthetic sources of inspiration, in particular the possible meaning of an open and binding humanism in professional practice.
Ethics

Ethics is an important component of historical and philosophical humanism and the humanist worldview. Humanistics is based on a moral anthropology, whereby people are inherently capable of moral actorship. The academic research of humanistics aims to support and promote moral actorship in many ways, whether individual, social, or institutional, and on micro, meso and macro levels. Special attention is given to the contentious link between empiricism and normativity.

Within the framework of the *Worldviews, Research Methodology, Ethics and Practical Skills* research group, the main research is into the relationship between ethics of the art of living (self-care), virtue ethics, and the ethics of care. This research is about situated normative-ethical issues against the background of the posttraditional order. This entails a critical stance towards the current neoliberal morality of self-determination and the lack of moral ideals and goals (nihilism and indifference).

Self-care ethics and virtue ethics are compatible with individualization and the modern need for the development of an individual lifestyle. Conversely, the (partly feminist) ethics of care is based on relationships, dependence and vulnerability. The first two moral theories above have regard to people’s relationship with themselves, whereas the last ethics category is based on care for others. The ethics research within the *Worldviews, Research Methodology, Ethics and Practical Skills* research group focuses on fruitful links. Various subthemes that are relevant within the above basic themes are: attention, autonomy, authenticity, virtues, death, happiness, enjoyment, attitude, integrity, sympathy, time, values, care and meanings of life. Specific contexts include moral education for young people and the morality of ageing well. The research objective is to promote personal responsibility and social self-actualization.

Ethics is necessarily related to each of the research projects, in view of the importance of moral perspectives in them. ‘Citizenship in an Intercultural Society’ (see 4.1.1) is concerned with formulating and testing new concepts of citizenship and identity issues. There is a search for novel forms of engagement that determine the articulation of identities in a diverse society, which refers to the tension between autonomy and community. The name *Ageing Well* (see 4.1.2) is significant. The research views the new ageing as an existential, socially located process that allows discussion and reflection with a view to a meaningful and dignified life course. ‘Normative Professionalization’ (see 4.1.4) is described as a process of continuing professionalization with respect to the normative, value-laden aspects of professional conduct. Important moral themes are justice, diversity, corporate social responsibility, sustainability and integrity. The ‘Resilience & Humanism’ project team (see 4.1.3) has the aim of rethinking the connection between mental resilience and humanism, with reference to vital values such as freedom, responsibility, solidarity and human dignity. Ethics research at the University of Humanistic Studies aims to contribute to the articulation of these moral perspectives and ethical questions in the various projects, from which it is also nourished.

Research: theory of science and methodology

In view of the intrinsic nature of humanistics, reflection on the theory of science and methodological developments are crucial for both research and teaching. It is hard to overestimate the importance of reflecting on and legitimating the nature and position of humanistics as a new social science, and the research methods with the greatest potential for humanistics.

The starting point is that humanistics favours an integration into broad academic domains of philosophy, historical studies, social and behavioural studies and the life sciences. Determinants of humanistics research are the chosen perspective of actor, the principle of intentional action, normative effect in professional conduct, and the principle that phenomena should be investigated in
their cultural and historical contexts. Furthermore, the research performed at the University of Humanistic Studies is descriptive, evaluative and change-oriented in nature, and oriented to practical application.

The University of Humanistic Studies is a worldview university, with a strong philosophically oriented research tradition. As the above suggests, the university’s research interest is focused sharply on issues from the social and life sciences. The aim is to integrate the research orientations of the humanities and the more empirical social science.

An important part is played by reflecting from a theory of science viewpoint on the positioning of humanistics as a new broad social science. Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research are gaining in importance in the search for solutions to the major problems facing our society. Adhering to a single philosophical paradigm, whether it is neopositivistic, interpretative, critical, structuralistic or postmodern, is no longer an option in this complex, rapidly changing society. Frameworks require constant development and adjustment.

For several years the University of Humanistic Studies has accordingly been exploring the opportunities presented by complexity thinking in the academic pursuit of humanistics. In 2006 the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) put complexity thinking on the research agenda as an approach with the potential to build bridges between the various disciplines. NWO emphasized the need to transcend the boundaries of classical disciplines in order to properly understand social and cultural systems. This approach fits seamlessly with the University of Humanistic Studies’ aim of building bridges between disciplines, and creates cross-fertilization opportunities for strengthening our philosophical, historical and social academic research. To this end, our research into practical aspects centres not around the disciplines, but the research question, since only in this way can findings from the social and life sciences be linked to existential and normative questions, and a shared language be developed for communicating the results.

Whatever the importance of reflection based on theory of science, the priority of our research is methodology. It is necessary to develop systematic knowledge for a methodology that can do justice to the multidisciplinary and practically oriented science of humanistics and its interdisciplinary aims. A ‘multitool’ has accordingly been developed to help link qualitative (relatively ‘soft’) and quantitative (relatively ‘hard’) research methods in mixed-method designs, and extend and promote the repertoire of qualitative methods. This will reinforce the image of humanistics as a new social science, and contribute to a reassessment of the qualitative methods in social science research. With a view to achieving this goal, the Worldviews, Research Methodology, Ethics and Practical Skills research group will be promoting empirical research in the widest sense in the next few years.

Research into theory of science and methodology is performed cooperatively in the four research projects ‘Citizenship in an Intercultural Society’ (see 4.1.1), ‘Ageing Well’ (see 4.1.2), ‘Resilience & Humanism’ (see 4.1.3) and ‘Normative Professionalization’ (see 4.1.4). Its task is to serve and nourish these projects and the domain-specific research within the research groups, which takes the form of advising and consulting on methods and techniques, and practical assistance in data collection and analysis (qualitative and quantitative). There is a special link with the ‘Normative Professionalization’ project: attention is given to the many theory of science questions that have a connection with normative professionalization, such as those concerned with the relationship between ‘evidence-based practice’ and ‘practice-based evidence’, including the clarifying role of empirical research.
Practical skills
The research performed by the practical skills lecturers is not included in the research programme.
The main point is the drawing together of: philosophy, sociology, psychology, pedagogy, history, studies of religion and worldviews, and finally theory of science and methodology.

A list of 17 candidate themes is currently available. A point for attention in the selection will be compatibility of the final result with the six themes selected by the General Council of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) in connection with the elections: sustainability, safety, economics, care, education and the open society. The focus of University of Humanistic Studies research will be on the fields of sustainability (‘Citizenship in an Intercultural Society’ and ‘Normative Professionalization’ projects), care (‘Ageing Well’, ‘Resilience & Humanism’ and ‘Normative Professionalization’ projects), education (‘Citizenship in an Intercultural Society’, ‘Resilience & Humanism’ and ‘Normative Professionalization’ projects) and the open society (‘Citizenship in an Intercultural Society’, ‘Resilience & Humanism’, and ‘Ageing Well’ projects).

The Association of Universities in the Netherlands is now refining the thematic priorities. Where possible the University of Humanistic Studies intends to participate in this discussion through the Network of Worldview Universities in the Netherlands (NLU). Moreover, the ‘mind maps’ of the Long-Term Innovation and Knowledge Compass (MIKK) will help us determine the priorities in our research projects.