

Erasmus Policy Statement

22nd of May 2020

The Newman Institute is an autonomous Jesuit university college, founded in 2001. Since 2010, the Institute is accredited by the Swedish Government. Today it is granting two bachelor's degrees, one in theology and one in philosophy, both with a distinct orientation towards cultural studies. The institution hopes to receive recognition also for a master program in theology during the next few months. International cooperation and strategies for internationalization form the basis of its milieu for higher education.

With theology and philosophy as its core competencies, the Institute is especially interested in the relationship between religion and science and the phenomenon of secularization that marks the countries of north-western Europe. The Jesuit character of the Newman institute expresses itself in the international dimension of our work, in the ongoing intellectual dialogue with the surrounding culture, in its pedagogical profile and in the commitment to contribute to the development of the society in which we live.

In 2018 the Newman Institute became a founding member of IAJU, the International Association of Jesuit Universities (www.iaju.org) and its European regional association, the Kircher-Network. The Kircher network unites 30 member institutions all over Europe and the Near East. Some of these institutions are large universities (as the Gregorian University in Rome, Italy or the University of Deusto in Bilbao, Spain), others are small specialized schools of theology and/or philosophy. In 2019 it also joined the ELEA-network, under the leadership of Leuphana University (Lüneburg, Germany) which aims to establish a European cooperation on liberal education within the European Universities Initiative. The Newman Institute is actively participating in the development of these three networks. Here are a few reasons why the European cooperation is of particular importance and of strategic interest for the Newman Institute:

- Sweden is a secular country with a small Catholic minority. However, as the Newman Institute intellectually is rooted within the philosophical and theological tradition of the Catholic Church, one of the great sources for European thinking, an academic exchange with the leading universities belonging to this tradition is vital for its own intellectual integrity.
- The study of philosophy and theology used to shape the intellectual discourse within Europe for centuries. Even today, many of the great challenges that Europe faces require philosophical and theological reflection in order to be addressed adequately. These questions stretch from social ethics to religious dialogue, from environmental challenges to a re-evaluation of the current economic model. All of these challenges can only be addressed in a European context and the Newman Institute wants to be part of this endeavour.
- The Jesuit intellectual tradition is based on an understanding of the human being that is closely related to the concept of liberal education. Education is not only the transfer of knowledge but the formation of a human being, shaping responsible citizens. Some European universities have made liberal education the core of their pedagogical model. The Newman Institute wants to cooperate with these institutions more intensely and is therefore committed to the ELEA initiative. A precondition for this cooperation is the framework that the Erasmus+ program offers.
- One of the main research areas within the Newman Institute is the relationship between science and religion. Faculty of the Newman Institute is involved in common projects with

other European schools of theology who are working in this field. In order to develop this cooperation, the Erasmus+ program is of crucial importance.

The competence that the Newman Institute is offering is dependent on its European partners. Being a small institution, international exchange is even more necessary for our institution than for bigger universities. But the unique competence that our faculty provides, the geographical positioning of the Newman Institute and the access to a particular academic tradition, pertinent to the field of philosophy and theology in the Northern part of Europe, is also an important contribution that we offer our partner institutions. Thus, the relatively small size of the Newman institute constitutes definitely a limitation and a liability for its work. But in the context of a strong cooperation with our European partners it also has the potential to turn this into an important asset.

The Newman institute partakes in Key Actions 1, mobility, and 2:1, partnerships for cooperation and exchanges of practices. The Kircher network and the European Liberal Education Association will be the framework in which the academic exchange activities of the Newman Institute will take place during the next few years. The envisioned forms of cooperation will be mainly:

- Peer research groups. These are related to the topics “philosophy of religion” and the relationship between science and religion. These research groups create valuable academic contacts for the Newman Institute that already have produced additional access to teaching competence for courses at the institute. During the next few years we would like to receive at least two teachers from partner institutions per academic year within the above mentioned academic fields. Reciprocally, the Institute would send one teacher for a corresponding exchange to one of the participating institutions.
- Shared resources. We will share library resources, exchange academic staff and learn from each other’s experiences by publishing best practices, organized through webinars, for example by the Kircher network. In order to increase the level of the exchange of best practices, we want to send at least one member of staff per year to Erasmus+ partner institutions, beginning with the librarian and course administrator.
- We will offer a European bachelor in liberal education, organized within the ELEA network, receiving and sending students and helping them to take part in a truly European education (including the demand to learn at least one more European language, besides English and native Swedish). As part of this bachelor program we expect at least two students per year to attend courses at the Newman Institute. In addition, we hope to recruit at least one or two of the Institute’s own students to participate in this program and to consequently study a period of time at any of the ELEA partner institutions. Even though it has been notoriously difficult to motivate Swedish students for studies abroad, we hope to recruit additionally one or two students for the exchange program with any of our Erasmus+ partners, however outside of the ELEA network project.

The Swedish Government is the principal agent in assessing the quality of our academic program and of the modules of international exchange that the Newman Institute is involved in. However, both the European Association of Jesuit Universities (Kircher network) and the European Liberal Education Association (ELEA) offer a framework and resources to monitor and to promote the development of the aforementioned activities. The targets of these initiatives are partly defined by the sub-groups mentioned above. The “science and religion peer group”, for example, is evaluating its work in three-year periods, under the supervision of the board of the Kircher network. A critical review of the conferences and publications as well as relevant student exchange that was achieved during this period of time is crucial of the continued work of each group. In a similar way, the steering group of ELEA plans and evaluates common activities.