

Criteria

VU Master's Thesis Award and Student Talent Award

2025-2026



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VERSION ADAPTED FOR PROCEDURE AND TIMEFRAME BETA

1. MASTER'S THESIS AWARD

1.1. BACKGROUND

- Every year, theses from different faculties compete for the Master's Thesis Award. All theses submitted are of high quality, with a wide variety of topics.
- The Master's Thesis Award is awarded to the master student who can best argue the (potential) societal impact of their thesis research.

1.2. CONDITIONS

- Eligible final papers are those concluding a (research) master's programme at VU Amsterdam.
- The final papers are nominated by the faculty board; students cannot nominate their own final papers. It is left to the faculty board how they select this thesis, for example, based on the grading of the thesis.
- The submitted thesis should be accompanied by a social impact summary written by the student in Dutch or English. The elements to be included in this summary are described in the 'Format' chapter.
- A thesis written by several students is also eligible for prize award. Any prize amount to be awarded will be distributed. It is advantageous if the group of students is diverse.
- Coproductions by students and staff are not eligible.
- Only final works from the academic year 2024-2025 are eligible.
- **The grade with which the master's thesis was assessed does not constitute a criterion.**

1.3. CRITERIA

The Academic Committee judges submissions based on the social impact summary. This summary motivates the student to tell a lay audience why the thesis contributes to society.

- The social impact summary can be divided into the following sub-criteria:
 - > What makes the thesis relevant to the field and society?
 - > What recommendations would you give to society based on your thesis?
 - > How did the thesis contribute to your own learning curve?
 - > How might students align the thesis research with VU values of 'open, personal and accountable' in future further elaboration of the research?

The Masters Thesis Prize Reading Committee evaluates submissions based on the following criteria:

- Scientific quality and originality, with sub-criteria:
 - > Internal logic of the tekst;
 - > Originality;
 - > Readability;
- Social relevance;
- Relevance to the field;
- Potential for alignment with VU values: open, personal and accountable.

1.4. PROCEDURE & TIMEFRAME – BETA SPECIFIC

In order to streamline nominations within BETA, the procedure and timeline below has been established. The mentioned deadlines thus differ for courses from what may be disseminated by central level (e.g. via newsletters or VUweb).

Nomination by programmes to BETA faculty board (hereafter BETA FB)

Theses eligible for the VU thesis award can be nominated to the BETA FB through the BETA Education Policy Team (onderwijsbeleid.beta@vu.nl). Each programme can nominate a maximum of 1 thesis. The nomination can be made by the programme director (OD), programme coordinator (OC) or the thesis supervisor. However, the nomination should always be coordinated with the programme director, and the OD should be put in the CC of the e-mail message if the OC or supervisor makes the nomination.

The nomination should be accompanied at least by:

- (1) A brief substantive letter of recommendation, showing why the nominated thesis is a likely thesis for the VU thesis award (prepared by OD, OC or supervisor);
- (2) A complete thesis;
- (3) A completed nomination form (see: 1.6 Thesis Award Nomination Format).

Deadline for nominations is 17 October 2025, 12:00 CET (via onderwijsbeleid.beta@vu.nl). Late or incomplete nominations unfortunately cannot be considered for selection.

Selection and determination of nomination BETA

If there are more nominations than the maximum BETA can submit (2 master's theses), the most likely theses will be selected by an internal committee headed by the education director. The VU thesis award criteria as described above are leading in this process. The selection will be submitted to the BETA FB to determine which theses BETA will submit to VU central.

1.5. FURTHER PROCEDURE & TIMEFRAME

Faculty boards can digitally nominate a final paper to the secretary of the jury committee: Kristel Struiksma (k.struiksma@vu.nl) **until no later than Friday 7 November 2025 23:59**.

For this year, the maximum nominations per faculty and school are as follows:

Faculty of	Number of students Master	Number of students Bachelor
Dentistry	1	N/A
Amsterdam University College	N/A	1*
Behavioural and Movement Sciences	1	N/A
Humanities	1	N/A
Religion and Theology	1	N/A
Social Sciences	1	N/A
Business and Economics	2	N/A
Law	1	N/A
Medicine	1	N/A
Science	2	N/A

***Important side note for AUC**

The Bachelor thesis award was abolished in 2023-2024. Only the Masters Thesis Prize will be retained. The jury realises that Amsterdam University college does not offer Master's programmes, and that abolishing the Bachelor's Thesis Prize has the consequence that AUC can no longer compete for any Thesis Prize. AUC may therefore exceptionally submit a Bachelor Thesis for the Master Thesis Prize.

The nomination should be accompanied at least by:

- (1) A brief substantive letter of recommendation from the faculty board, showing why the nominated thesis was chosen based on final assessment and (potential) societal impact;
- (2) A complete thesis;
- (3) A nomination form completed by the student with social impact summary (see: 1.5. Master's Thesis Award Nomination Format);

Late nominations or nominations with incomplete documents will not be considered. Judges refrain from judging nominations from their own faculty.

Upon receipt, the secretary sends an acknowledgement of receipt to the faculties. Subsequently, the Academic Committee, under the guidance of the jury chair, compiles a shortlist of three master's theses. The secretary informs the students and faculty boards of the interim results through a letter. Afterwards, the Master's Thesis Award Reading Committee reads through the three master's theses and elects a winner.

The finalists, the winner and their respective faculties will be informed of the results as soon as possible after the final decision of the jury, and may also share the result with their surroundings.

The finalists and winner will be honoured and presented to the public during the VU Education Awards ceremony on 5 March 2026 at the VU Education Day. The winner of the Master's Thesis Award will receive €2,000 and will be paired by Alumni Relations with a VU alumnus of interest to him or her.

BETA education awards

Since 2021, the Faculty of Science Education Awards' have existed within BETA. With these faculty awards, the FB gives open appreciation to people who excel in various aspects in education. The candidates nominated by BETA for VU-wide education awards all receive a faculty education award (the faculty thesis/ StudentTalent/ Education Impact Award). The winners of the faculty thesis award each receive a book token worth €100.

1.6. FORMAT NOMINATION MASTER'S THESIS AWARD 2025-2026

Thesis title:

Faculty:

Training name:

Initials/Surname/First name student:

VU email student:

Personal email student: (important to add - this allows the secretary to contact the student even after graduation!)

Student address details:

Names of thesis assessors:

Mail addresses of thesis assessors:

Write a social impact summary of the thesis in up to 1,000 words. The challenge for this summary is to write it in such a way that a layperson can understand what your thesis is about. You may supply your own Word file for this purpose. In your summary, use at least the following elements:

- > What makes the thesis relevant to the field and society?
- > What recommendations would you give to society based on your thesis?
- > How did the thesis contribute to your own learning curve?
- > Imagine that in the future you will build on your thesis research. Perhaps you will pursue a PhD, or start a startup, project or foundation based on your research. What opportunities do you see for taking your thesis research further, and how might this align with the VU values of 'open, personal and accountable'?

2. STUDENT TALENT AWARD

2.1. BACKGROUND

- The Student Talent Award was established to appreciate students who have made a big impact within society and/or on VU campus. These students are role models for other students, showing that you can contribute to society with small and big things. In doing so, they take on the role of bridge-builder and show connection to the VU community. When they receive the award, they are connected to VU as student ambassador for one year.

2.2. CONDITIONS

To be eligible for the Student Talent Award, the nominated student must at least meet the following conditions:

- Final-year undergraduate or graduate student;
- Enrolled as a full-time VU student;
- No older than 30 years;

Explanatory note: The Student Talent Award is primarily intended to reward young and promising students who are in the early stages of their professional careers, who make exceptional achievements during their studies and can act as role models for the student population at large.

VU uses an age limit of 30 years for the Student Talent Award because older students tend to have more life experience and have a larger professional and social network than younger students. Given the conditions and criteria for this particular prize, this could give older students an unfair advantage over younger students during jury assessment, when younger students make up the vast majority of the student population at VU.

At the same time, the jury realises that there are students who start their studies at a later age and that they too can make a special contribution to society and/or the VU. The jury therefore adds an addendum to this condition.

If a faculty feels that a student over 30 years old deserves to be nominated for the Student Talent Award, they are requested to consult with secretary of the Education Awards Kristel Struiksma before submitting the nomination. Provided the nomination can be substantiated well by the faculty, the jury will make an exception.

- No more than one year of study delay;
- **Note: A student's grade point average does not constitute a criterion!**

2.3. CRITERIA

To be considered for the Student Talent Award, the nominated student will be assessed on the basis of the following conditions:

- The student makes a special social or cultural contribution;
- The student has organisational talent, managerial talent, creative talent and/or sports talent;
- The student is boundary-pushing, entrepreneurial, intrinsically motivated, resilient and wants to use these talents;
- The student possesses traits that allow them to act as role models for (VU) students;
- The student is a bridge builder and committed to VU.

2.4. PROCEDURE & TIMEFRAME – BETA SPECIFIC

In order to streamline nominations within BETA, the procedure and timeline below has been established. The mentioned deadlines thus differ for courses from what may be disseminated by central level (e.g. via newsletters or VUweb).

Nomination by programmes to BETA faculty board (hereafter BETA FB)

Students eligible for the VU Student Talent Award can be nominated to the BETA FB through the BETA Education Policy Team (onderwijsbeleid.beta@vu.nl). Each programme can nominate a maximum of 1 student. The nomination can be made by the programme director (OD) or programme coordinator (OC). However, the nomination should always be coordinated with the programme director, and the OD should be put in the CC of the e-mail message if the OC makes the nomination.

The nomination should be accompanied at least by:

1. A completed nomination form (see: 2.6 Student Talent Award Nomination Format);
2. A short nomination letter on behalf of the programme;
3. The CV of the nominated student.

Deadline for nominations is 17 October 2025, 12:00 CET (via onderwijsbeleid.beta@vu.nl). Late or incomplete nominations unfortunately cannot be considered for selection.

Selection and determination of nomination BETA

If several nominations are made, the most likely student will be selected by an internal committee headed by the education director. The criteria for the VU Student Talent Award as described above are leading in this process. The selection is submitted to the BETA FB for determination of the student whom BETA will nominate to VU central.

2.5. FURTHER PROCEDURE & TIMEFRAME

Faculty boards can digitally nominate a candidate to the secretary of the judging committee: Kristel Struiksma (k.struiksma@vu.nl) **until no later than Friday 7 November 2025 23:59**.

Each faculty may submit one candidate. The School of Humanities, School of Religion and Theology and School of Social Sciences are also allowed to nominate one candidate. **Please note that the Faculty of Science is an exception - this faculty is allowed to submit 2 candidates.**

The nomination should be accompanied at least by:

- (1) A completed nomination form (see: 2.5 Student Talent Award Nomination Format);
- (2) A short nomination letter on behalf of the faculty board;
- (3) The CV of the nominated student;

Late nominations or nominations with incomplete documents will not be considered. Judges refrain from assessing nominations from their own faculty.

After the nominations are submitted, the secretary sends an acknowledgement of receipt to the faculties.

Nominations for the Student Talent Award are assessed in two stages. In the first stage, the Academic Committee, under the guidance of the jury chair, compiles a shortlist of three candidates. The secretary informs the students and faculty boards of the interim results through a letter.

The second stage involves a pitch and interview round. The secretary asks the shortlisted candidates to prepare a short pitch. Each interview starts with a pitch by the shortlisted candidate, followed by a conversation with the judges. After the interviews take place, the Academic Committee deliberates to designate a winner. The finalists, the winner and their respective faculties will be informed of the final results as soon as possible after the interview round, and may also share it with those around them.

The finalists and winner of the 2025-2026 Student Talent Award will be honoured and presented to the public on 5 March 2026 during the Education Awards ceremony at the VU Education Day. The winner of the Student Talent Award will win € 2,000 and will be paired by Alumni Relations with a VU alumnus of interest to him or her.

BETA education awards

Since 2021, the Faculty of Science Education Awards' have existed within BETA. With these faculty awards, the FB gives open appreciation to people who excel in various aspects in education. The candidates nominated by BETA for VU-wide education awards all receive a faculty education award (the faculty thesis/ StudentTalent/ Education Impact Award). The winner of the faculty StudentTalent Award receives a book token worth €100.

2.6. FORMAT FOR NOMINATION STUDENT TALENT AWARD 2025-2026

Initials/Surname/First name student: Training: Faculty: VU-mail student: Personal email student: (important to add - this allows the secretary to contact the student even after graduation!) Student address details: Faculty contact: VU-mail faculty contact:	
Criteria	Comments from the faculty
The student makes a special social or cultural contribution such as; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organising activities that promote dialogue and understanding; - Volunteering; - Setting up specific activities with high social impact; - Practising top-level sport or (performing) arts at a high level and using this to encourage others to get more out of themselves. 	
The student is innovative in social and/or scientific fields.	

<p>The student has proven to have a special talent in organisation, management, innovation, creativity, music or sports.</p>	
<p>The student is entrepreneurial, intrinsically motivated, resilient and knows how to use all his or her talents.</p>	
<p>The student is a role model for fellow students.</p>	
<p>Student is a bridge builder and involved in VU; for example, she or he has served on a student council, programme committee or contributed something substantial to the university.</p>	
<p>Other comments</p>	