

Getting Started Document

[last update: July 1, 2021]

Academic Year 2021/2022

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1 Introduction

1.1 Welcome

Welcome to the Master in Spatial, Transport and Environmental Economics at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam! We wish you a productive, successful, and stimulating academic year.

This document gives first and quick information on finding your way around the university and essentials of the programme. If you have any questions, feel free to ask the programme director Hans Koster at stroom.sbe@vu.nl, but ideally you get your information in other ways (your fellow students, particularly students that have studied before at the VU, or faculty and administration staff).

If you do know your way around, be kind enough to help others.

1.2 Quick Check for the Impatient

To preview very briefly, make sure

- You are aware of uncertainty in the way we teach due to Corona (see Section 2).
- You are aware of the structure of our programme and the different specialisations that are offered (see Section 3).
- You know what VU Net is and how to use it (see Section 4.2).
- You have signed up for courses in Period 1 (see Section 4.3).
- You use your student e-mail account for communication (see Section 4.6).
- You know what Canvas is and how to use it (see Section 4.7).
- You contemplate becoming a member of the Programme Committee and/or STREEM Master Club (see Section 6.3).
- You plan ahead (see Section 8.1).

There's much more of interest: please read the whole document.

2 Changes Due To Corona

The developments in the Netherlands in terms of Covid look good with increasing vaccination rates and decreasing number of cases. This means that we will aim to go back to campus for the new year and have offline classes and tutorials. On August 13, a decision will be made whether the 1.5m rule will be abandoned. If not, then there are some capacity restrictions, but that's for later.

Having said that, we have many international students and there may be inevitable barriers for you coming to the Netherlands. If you cannot come Amsterdam in Period 1 (and Period 2), please e-mail the programme director (stroom.sbe@vu.nl). In principle we will do our best to let the courses be accessible to anyone, whether it will be online or offline.

If you have any other questions related to this, do not hesitate to e-mail the programme director, Hans Koster (stroom.sbe@vu.nl).

3 The Programme Structure

3.1 Overview

The Master in Spatial, Transport and Environmental Economics offers you to choose between 4 specialisations:

- Transport Economics
- Urban and Regional Economics
- Environmental Economics
- Real Estate Economics and Finance

You are not to obliged to do a specialisation. This does not mean you can choose any course you want, as there are restrictions on some combinations of courses.

The Master consists of three types of modules: *(i)* core courses, *(ii)* (recommended and other) elective courses, *(iii)* independent academic work. In Period 1, courses consist of 3 ECTS credits. You have to do Introduction to Econometrics and Applied Econometrics for Spatial Economics. In the first half of this period, you can choose between Introduction to Microeconomics or Intermediate Microeconomics. The latter option is the default choice. In the second half of the first period, you have to do Microeconomics for Spatial Economics.

How to choose between Introduction to Microeconomics and Intermediate Microeconomics? In the past, most students have chosen Intermediate Microeconomics, which is more advanced mathematically and requires more prior knowledge of microeconomics. Only students with little prior knowledge of microeconomics and who have below-average levels of mathematical skills are recommended to choose Introduction to Microeconomics.

As will be explained later on, you have to register for all courses. You have to do that yourself.

You have to do 4 other (core/ elective) courses which are offered in periods 2, 4 and 5. Independent academic work involves writing a paper on a ‘research project’ (period 3), as well as a Master Thesis (periods 5 and 6). Each course and the research project receive 6 ECTS credits, the Thesis 18 ECTS credits. All courses, both elective and core, last 6 weeks and total approximately 30-40 student/instructor contact hours. Individual lecturers have degrees of freedom to allocate these between lectures and tutorials or practicals, and to organize their modules.

Specialisations consist of a fixed set of core courses plus two elective courses in combination with a suitable thesis, and can be indicated on the diploma supplement. Without specialisation you can freely pick and mix courses (one important exception: you may choose maximally one course

from (i) Network Analysis, (ii) Airline Business, (iii) Data Analytics for Economists, (iv) Institutional Investments and Asset Liability Management). You may even choose up to one related and relevant course (of 6 ECTS credits) from outside our list of elective courses, subject to prior approval by the examination board.

On the next pages you'll find the course schedules and time tables for the different specialisations.

3.2 Academic Year and Study Load

The academic year 2021/2022 starts on Monday, September 6. End August there are a number of non-programme and pre-programme activities that are of interest for many students, including an **Economics and Math Refresher** course that also contains a brief introduction to working with statistical software package **STATA**. Both are not part of the official programme, but participation is strongly encouraged. They start in the week of August 30 (please enrol through Canvas, see point [4.7](#)).

The academic year is split into semesters and teaching periods. There are two semesters, each having 3 periods, roughly (plus minus a few days) allocated as follows. Semester 1: period 1 (Sept/Oct), period 2 (Nov/Dec), period 3 (Jan); semester 2: period 4 (Feb/Mar), period 5 (Apr/May), and period 6 (June). No activities are planned in July/August. For course schedules and timetables see Sections [4.3](#) and [4.4](#).

Completing the programme involves successfully finishing a number of courses, and writing academic papers, totalling 60 ECTS credits. We aim to have students finish mid July, but the year formally ends at the end of August. *Students who wish to do more courses than required, are allowed to do so.*

3.3 Research Project and Thesis

The research project is a self-contained, critical literature survey that each student writes on a topic of her or his own choice, under close supervision by a faculty member. From 2021/2022 onwards we also offer the opportunity to write a case-based literature review based on more practical questions provided by several companies and public institutions. This work may be presented at the relevant company/institution.

After completion of all course work, a final Master Thesis will be written, again under supervision. It can be written on a closely related topic as the research project, and usually takes the latter as point of departure. The main aspect is to show that you master the academic discipline of economics by answering a sufficiently deep, well-defined, and interesting research question. Both the research project and thesis will be presented.

Students have the responsibility of choosing a suitable topic. A list of suitable topics will be provided. Faculty members are happy to make suggestions. Please have a look at the master theses from previous years which are available www.ub.vu.nl.

4 Electronic Services and Practical Aspects

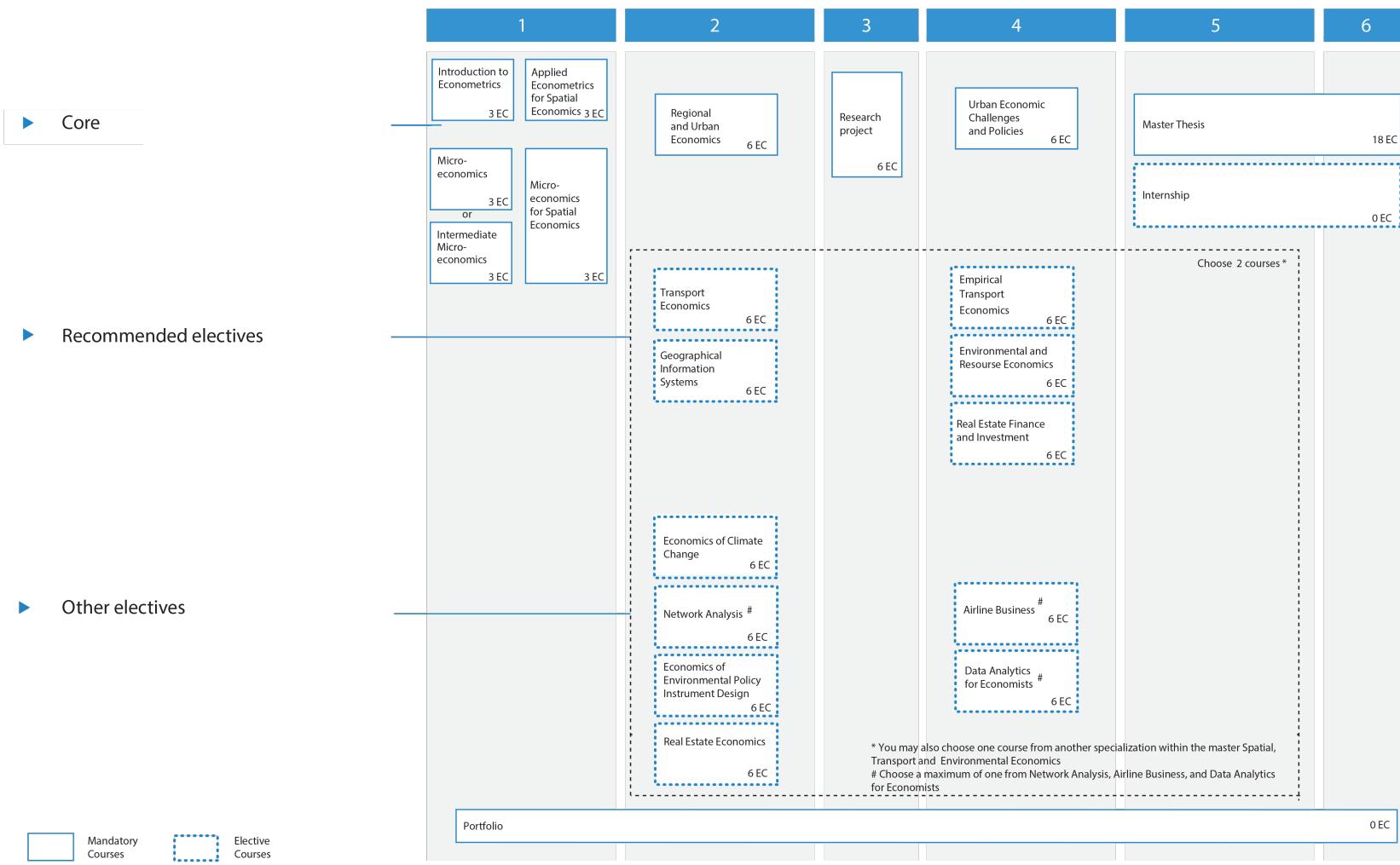
4.1 Identification Numbers

Each student has two identifiers: a student registration number (something like 1234567), and a VU-net ID (looks like abc123). You may want to memorise both.

The VU-net ID is used as the login user name for an array of electronic services provided by the university. Make sure to choose a strong password to protect your identity.

URBAN AND REGIONAL ECONOMICS

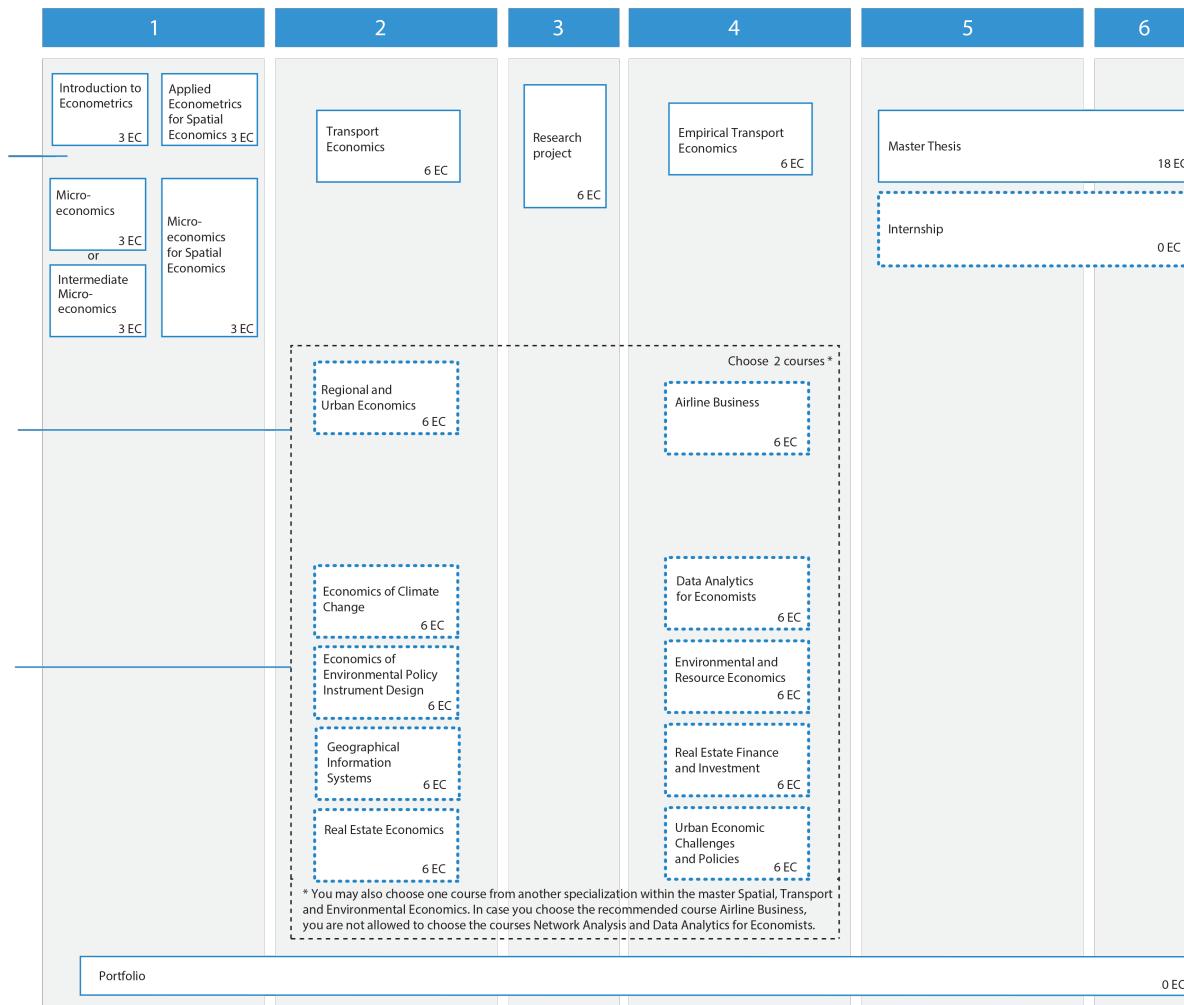
Regions, cities and buildings: Understanding the spatial and economic dimensions of urbanization, agglomeration, and regional decline and development



TRANSPORT ECONOMICS

Understanding the economics of the great societal challenges in urban and international transport, mobility and accessibility

► Core

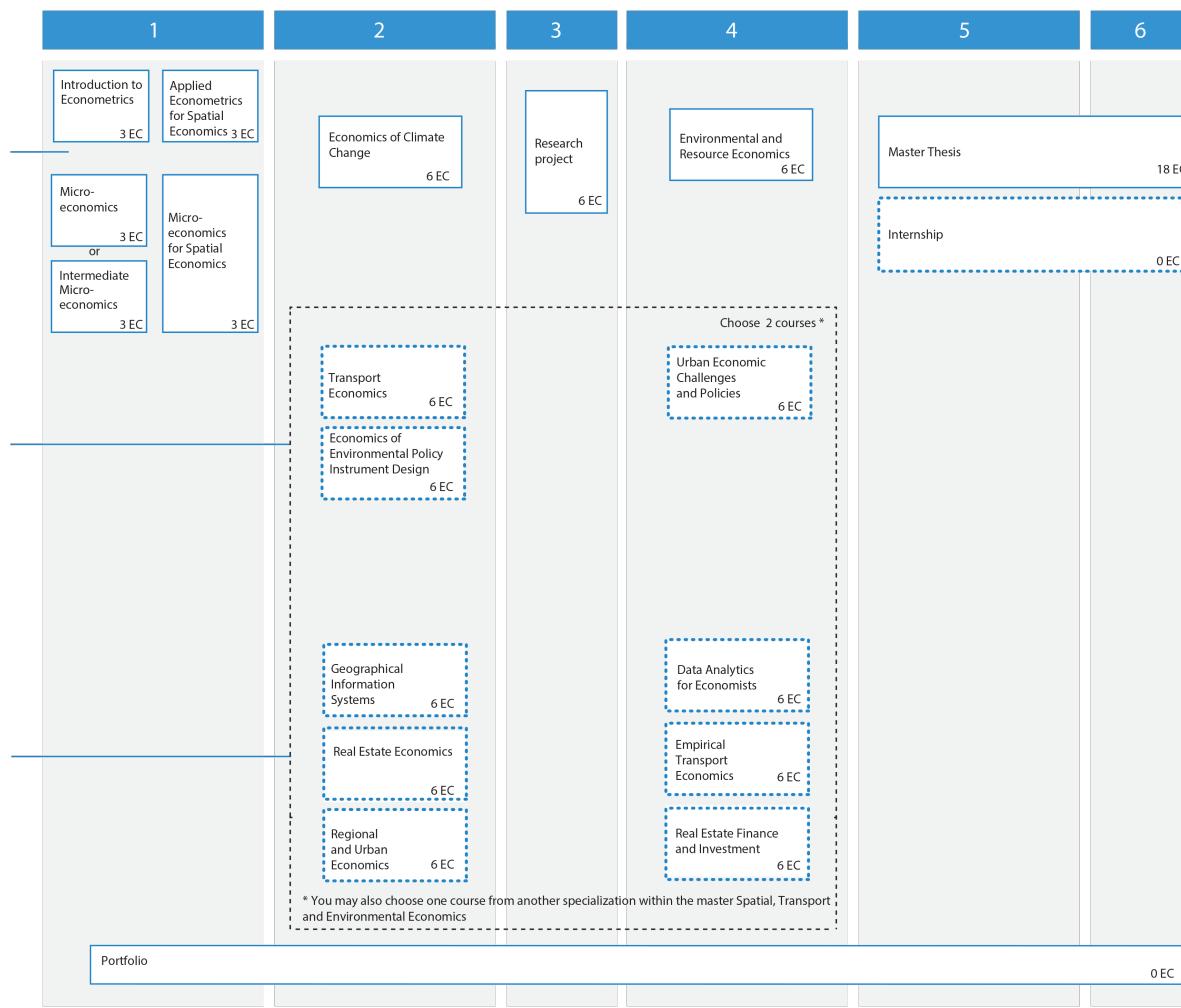


ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMICS

Understanding the economic and spatial aspects of the great societal challenges in managing local and global environments, natural resources and the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy.



- ▶ Core
 - ▶ Recommended electives
 - ▶ Other electives



* You may also choose one course from another specialization within the master Spatial, Transport and Environmental Economics

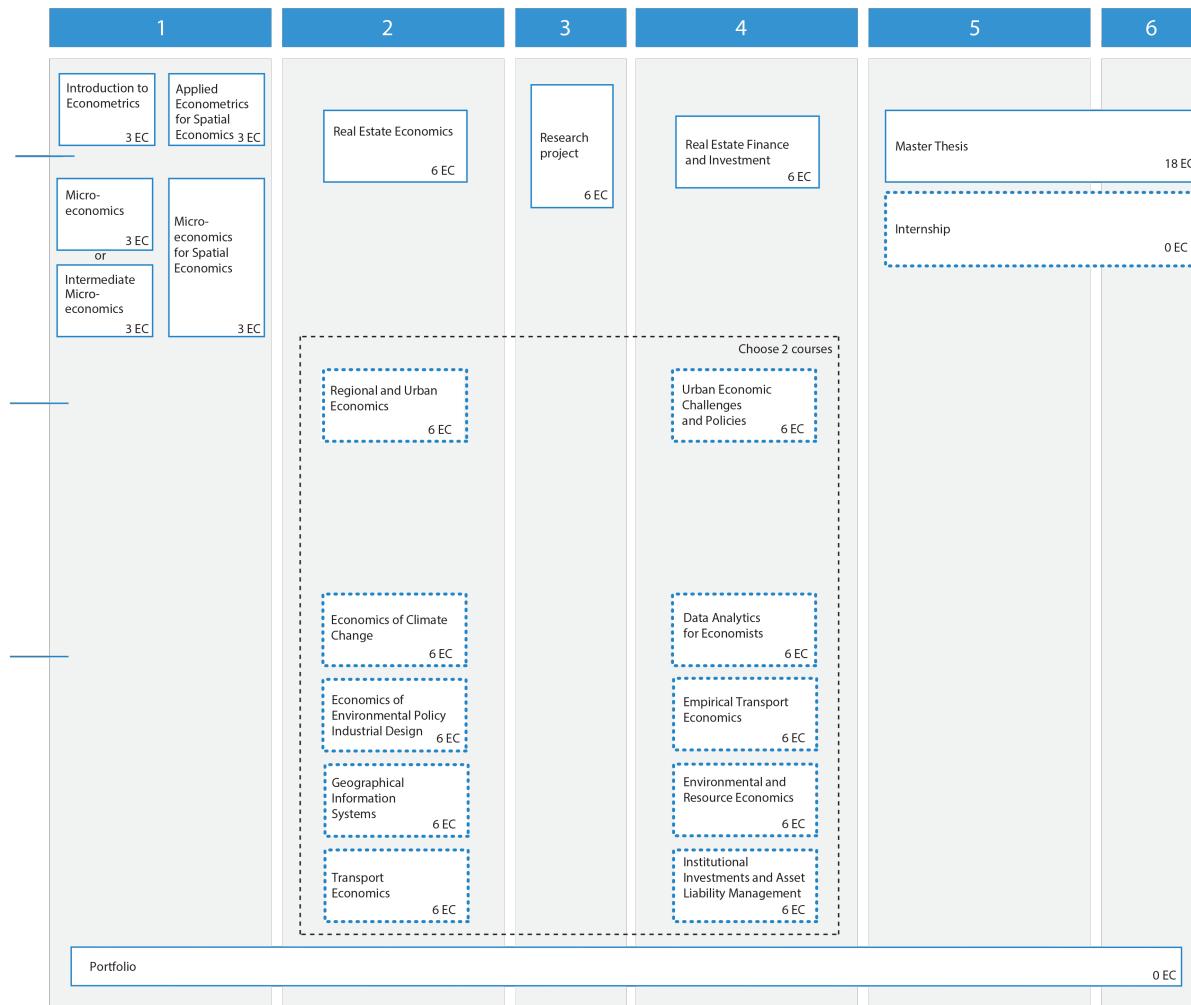
Mandatory Courses

Elective Courses

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REAL ESTATE ECONOMICS AND FINANCE

▶ Core



▶ Recommended elective

▶ Other electives

4.2 VU Net Student Portal

The student portal is a central entry point for using various electronic services, and has links to the student administration system. It also displays messages and announcements from an array of sources (such as Canvas and e-mail). Via the webpage vunet.vu.nl you can get access to individual grades and check your credits obtained. You can also enrol or dis-enrol for individual courses, view your grades, register for exams, apply for your diploma, and many other things.

4.3 Course and Exam Registration

VU-net also has a course and Exam registration system. Go to Register for Courses and Exams and follow the instructions.

- Registration for courses in semester 1 (period 1, 2 and 3) starts on July 15. The registration for courses in the second semester (period 4, 5 and 6) opens in December.
- Always check your personal timetable on VU-net to make sure that you enrolled for your courses and exams.
- Strict registration deadlines apply:
 - for courses in period 1: **before** the start of the academic year (see Section 3.2).
 - for all other courses: four weeks prior to the start of the course
 - for exams: two weeks prior to the exam date.

4.4 Course and Exam Schedules

There are two types of schedules: a personal timetable and a generic one.

- If your course and exam registration is correctly administered you should see the information from rooster.vu.nl that applies in your individual case also on VUNET (section 4.2) for courses you are enrolled in.
- Generic course and exam schedules can be found at the following web page: rooster.vu.nl. They are determined by the administration and not by individual professors. It may take a little clicking around to figure out how this web tool works. It is useful if you want to check on a time table of a course before actually enrolling. Note that teachers only have access to this generic page, not to VU-net schedules.

4.5 Internship, traineeship

Given the time constraint on the programme, **internships, traineeships** are not an official part of the programme, and no credits can be obtained. Internships can be mentioned on your diploma. The only formality is then that you send an email at the end of your internship an email to the programme director, stating that you have finished the internship with a copy to your supervisor of the organisation where you have done your internship.

We encourage students who want to embark on an internship as part of writing their thesis, to first contact their supervisor from the VU. Students are being reminded that they bear the responsibility of planning and careful preparation to avoid study delay. The programme does not accommodate internships through deadline extension. Students may also want to consider post-thesis internships.

4.6 E-mail

Every student has a student e-mail account that can be accessed via <https://webmail.vu.nl>. Both student registration number and VU-net-ID serve as aliases for e-mail addresses ending on @STUDENT.VU.NL (e.g., ABC123@STUDENT.VU.NL or 1234567@STUDENT.VU.NL).

Make sure to check your @STUDENT.VU.NL e-mail account **daily**. Faculty and administration will use *these* addresses for contacting you. There is a central list of e-mail addresses that is used for this purpose. No-one will keep track of individual hotmail.com addresses and the like (in addition, e-mails received from student accounts have a lower probability to end up in the spam folder).

Faculty can be most easily and conveniently reached by e-mail. Make sure to sign each e-mail with your full name and student number. Faculty is held to not respond to incoming e-mail that is either anonymous or cannot be identified as coming from a student enrolled in their course. It is therefore strongly advisable to use your student-e-mail account for all communication with faculty and administration. Allow a couple of days for response. Please **respond** to e-mail queries received from administration staff or faculty.

Not all staff regularly checks their Canvas e-mails, so please send e-mails directly to their VU e-mail addresses.

4.7 Canvas

All courses have a page on the campus Canvas system (web: canvas.vu.nl) where additional course-related resources and information will be posted (things like lecture notes, syllabi, assignments, and so on). Communication with faculty and other course participants also relies on Canvas tools. Make sure to log in to Canvas regularly (use your VU Net ID) and check for announcements and information updates.

4.8 Web Sites

Useful information to find your way is available at

- www.vu.nl/en and then click through to MENU > Study at VU Amsterdam

The faculty and the Spatial Economics Department have their web pages at

- spatialeconomics.nl (Website of the department with blogs and info on research done at the department).
- www.sbe.vu.nl (School of Business & Economics).
- <https://sbe.vu.nl/nl/afdelingen-en-instituten/spatial-economics/> (Department of Spatial Economics).

General and more detailed information about courses can also be found at the following pages:

- www.vu.nl/en/study-guide (course descriptions)

4.9 Books and Library

Much of the literature used in various courses and useful for thesis work can be accessed using the VU library's electronic (www.ub.vu.nl) and physical (main building, 1st floor) resources. Familiarise yourself with its use. Electronic library resources may also be accessed off-campus (e.g., from home). Interlibrary loans are also possible for items carried elsewhere.

Note: you may want to buy a personal copy of the main textbooks, as the library typically carries only one or two copies for short-term loan. There are various bookstores in town, the closest one

resides inside the VU main building (next to main entrance). There is, in addition Aureus bookstore (8th floor) that sells textbooks to members at discounted prices. As books can be expensive, it may in addition pay to compare prices on the internet. Second-hand markets for books exist, and older editions of textbooks may be used if approved by the individual lecturer.

Important: Buy books before courses start.

4.10 Department of Spatial Economics seminars/webinars

The Department of Spatial Economics organises on biweekly lunch seminars/webinars. You are very welcome to join these. You will receive weekly notifications by sending an e-mail to Sacha den Nijs s.den.nijs@vu.nl. She can put you on the list.

4.11 Help

The first help is self-help. Start on VU Net (section 4.2). Here, you can also find relevant contact forms applicable to the domain of your query.

There is also a Central Student Desk physically located on the ground floor of the main building for information about registration, graduation, study advice, examination, etc.

For computing related issues (hard- and software) you can contact servicedesk.it@vu.nl.
Canvas can be contacted via canvas.sbe@vu.nl, the schedules administration via roosters.sbe@vu.nl.
Contact academic advisors through VU Net or studieadviseur.sbe@vu.nl.

5 Assessment and Evaluation

In principle, subjects, skills and tools covered in lectures or workshops (whether in-class or otherwise on reading lists etc.), are subject to assessment.

5.1 Grades and Credits

Per course and module, a pre-specified number of credits will be awarded, if you have at least passed the course requirements. Grades range from 1 to 10, with higher numbers indicating higher levels of achievement. Obtaining an overall grade of ‘9’ or ‘10’ is possible, but very rare. Passing grade is ‘6’.

Final grades of a module may be awarded on the basis of several sub-grades, for instance written examination or home work assignments. Details are determined at the individual course level. Final grades below the passing grade will not lead to credits. Partial credits will not be given.

Diplomas may carry a degree classification (“cum laude”), depending on grade point averages and minimum grades obtained. Criteria may change over time, see the documents referred to in Section 5.4. On your diploma, your specialisation(s), as well as your internship, will be mentioned.

5.2 Examination

Most courses use, inter alia, written exams/take-home exams. A single possibility for a resit will be offered for any written exam. If you have passed all your courses (including your thesis), and you have not passed a course despite having done the exam as well as the resit and you cannot do the exam again within 6 months, you have the chance to do a second resit. Requests have to be made to the examination committee. Written exams/take home exams last between 2 and 3 hours, dependent on the course. Exams are held at the end of each teaching period, resits typically at the end of the subsequent teaching period.

Exam schedules are posted on the internet www.rooster.vu.nl and on VU Net. Exam results will be visible on VU Net only.

Lecturers may (but are not obliged to) make a mock exam available to let you anticipate structure and difficulty of the real exam.

Students may review their exam. Organisation is left to individual instructors. It is customary, however, that the instructor sets one particular date and time for review, where all participating students may show up.

The examination board sets the overall rules for examination and supervises compliance.

5.3 Code of Conduct and Plagiarism

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam has developed its academic code of conduct, supplemented with rules by the faculty. This includes, among others, guidelines on dealing with plagiarism. We would like to emphasise that copying of texts involving more than one sentence without giving a reference between quotes is almost always regarded as plagiarism.

Our faculty is very experienced in detecting and dealing with fraudulent behavior, and is, among others, supported by expert software. *Do not test where the limits lie. Do not even think of plagiarism.* Master theses require a score from a plagiarism software to be reported on an official document. The same software will be used for the research project. If in doubt, please always ask your supervisor what is allowed and what is not.

5.4 Regulations

There are prominently two documents laying down rules and regulations. One is the AER (Academic and Examination Regulations) as communicated by the examination board and one is the Regulations and Guidelines set by the Faculty Board.

These documents can be found at:

www.sbe.vu.nl/en/education/schedules-and-regulations/academic-and-examinations-regulations

6 Organisation

6.1 School and Location

The School of Business and Economics, SBE, has a number of business and economics departments. Teaching in the Master in Spatial, Transport and Environmental Economics is conducted by faculty members from the Department of Spatial Economics, located at the 9th floor of the main building. You may need to make a phone call to meet anyone in the department, even if you have an appointment. Many teaching activities will take place in the main building. All rooms and lecture halls have a number, e.g., 2A00. ‘2’ means: 2nd floor (ground floor: ‘0’), ‘A’ means: A-wing, and ‘00’ is the room number. Other important buildings are the ‘Bellevue Building’ (H-wing indication, e.g. OH20), and the Sciences Building (WN-indication, e.g., WN-F123). The G-wing in the main building is tucked away inside an inner court of the main building. For a campus map see

www.vu.nl/en/about-vu-amsterdam/campus/today/map/.

Academic advisors and the office for Career Services are located on the 8th floor.

6.2 Faculty and Administration

As a student you will get in touch with teaching faculty and administration at several layers:

- course instructors/professors & associated teaching assistants: teaching faculty can be approached in office hours, as well as by e-mail, typically for anything related to the content of a particular course

- faculty student administration; please call at the Central Study Desk on the ground floor of the main building. They help with organisation of exams, rooms, diplomas, etc.
- academic advisors: for help in getting organised, help in solving problems that cannot be addressed to teachers, taking into account personal circumstances, counselling, etc..
- programme committee: internal quality control of the programme and feedback, see [6.3](#) below
- examination board: makes final decisions about anything that has to do with examinations in a wider sense, and resolves disputes; get in touch with academic advisors if you want to write a request to the examination board

6.3 Programme Committee

The programme committee is a joint body of student and faculty members that supervises the quality of the entire programme, of its specialisations, and of individual courses and modules. The programme committee reports to the faculty board. To function well, it is of utmost importance to annually recruit new student members who are willing to put some effort to the common cause. The work involves preparing, attending and contributing to meetings, writing reports, and being in touch with the entire student population of the programme. There is a monetary compensation upon completion of the task.

Administration is done by Sabrina van Raat (s.p.van.raat@vu.nl). Chairperson of the programme committee is Thomas de Graaf (t.de.graaff@vu.nl). Please contact him directly if you are interested.

6.4 STREEM Master Club

The goal of the STREEM Master Club is to enhance the connections between fellow students through social activities, as well as organise master-specific events to provide opportunities for students to meet their future employers. It consists of a team of 2 STREEM student members. This team works under supervision of two Aureus board members (who have expertise in organising events). Members improve networking skills by being the contact person for students, professors and employers and gain organising and communication skills. Last years, the STREEM master club has organised drinks, an R-bootcamp and set-up a speaker event. The commitment will be about 3-4 hours a week. Interested candidates can apply through the Aureus website. *At the same time, please send your application to streem.sbe@vu.nl.*

7 Careers and Alumni

As an academic programme we are committed to make sure that our graduates are prepared for the labour market in the sense that diplomas we issue testify to relevant knowledge and applicable skills in economics. While it is not our task to find a job for our graduates, during the academic year we may point to or co-organise a number of activities relating to labour market prospects, career choice, and alumni contact.

7.1 Career Services

The SBE Career Services team guides and supports you as you prepare for your career after graduation. Services include career workshops, individual coaching, online tools and an internship/job

board, and are available free of charge throughout your MSc programme until one year after graduation. You can find more information on www.careerservices.sbe.vu.nl or through Canvas: SBE Career Services.

7.2 Graduation

After successfully having completed all modules and thesis, and before you can graduate, apply for your diploma. Again this is done through VU Net (Section 4.2) and choosing the relevant form. For queries you may contact the graduation administration (afstuderden.sbe@vu.nl).

Graduation ceremonies usually take place in the beginning of October. This date will be published on the faculty website and you will be contacted by email to attend the event.

8 Planning and Advice

8.1 Planning

Plan ahead and plan well. Many students are surprised to see how fast time flies and that they have to make choices at certain points in time. The programme is meant to finish by the beginning of July, and this involves proper planning on the student's part. Be reminded that getting through the programme in a timely fashion is your responsibility.

Here some general hints on planning.

1. If you want to attend the **Economics and Math Refresher** workshop, make sure to be around in the end of August!
2. Think of what interests you most, and which courses/modules in particular meet your needs and wishes.
3. Courses are quite intensive, students typically attend two courses a week, and the **studyload** for the average student is meant to be about 40 hours per week. In individual cases, this average number can be exceeded substantially! This may in particular apply to the core courses that are mandatory for everyone. Study effort will have to be spent on class attendance, reading, take-home assignments, and exam preparation. There may not be much scope for major extracurricular activities (incl. work for pay or volunteering, following other studies, etc.).
4. **Enroll** for courses and exams in a timely fashion, see Section 4.2.
5. There are restrictions on the combinations of courses you can choose. If you're not sure whether your combination of courses is allowed, please check with the programme director. Over the last 10 years, we had only two students who made a mistake in this respect, and we hope this does not happen again.
6. If you want to choose a **specialisation**, you need to enroll in certain courses that are part of a specialisation (you do not enroll for a specialisation as such). Depending on the course mix you choose, you preclude a later choice of specialisation if you do not attend the respective courses and meet all their requirements. Also remember that if you are interested in a specialisation, you need to choose a suitable thesis topic.
7. You may want to start collecting thoughts already early on in the year and try to identify an area that you would like to spend a considerable part of your time on when writing **research project and thesis**. Start thinking about this as soon as course work starts. Talk to faculty members about topics.

8. **Further studies**, such as enrolling in a PhD programme or summer schools, may require your attention very early on. Deadlines will vary across schools and individual student background. Do check these as early as possible. Contact faculty early on for writing recommendation letters (and make sure you get noticed in class in a positive way).
9. Before August 31 (precise dates vary between years) is the last possibility to **apply for a diploma** for the current academic year. On application, all results have to be registered on VU Net. Graduation ceremonies then take place in October.

8.2 Advice

The Master is a relatively small scale programme and benefits strongly from short ways of communication between students and faculty. So, whenever you have a practical problem, talk about it with someone suitable. Do not wait until the problem gets more pressing and harder to solve.

- If you have trouble with understanding study material, ask teaching faculty and TAs.
- If you are interested in a subject matter but don't know where to start reading, ask teachers.
- If you have issues with particular courses, talk to teachers directly. If that is too bold a step, talk confidentially to the student members of the programme committee.
- If you have trouble making plans for yourself or sticking with them, consult an academic advisor. They may be able to provide general hints on how to get organised.
- If there are medical or personal issues that require attention, first talk to academic advisors, and then contact examination board if certain exemptions or exceptions are to be applied.
- You may also talk to the programme director Hans Koster (streem.sbe@vu.nl) about nearly anything.