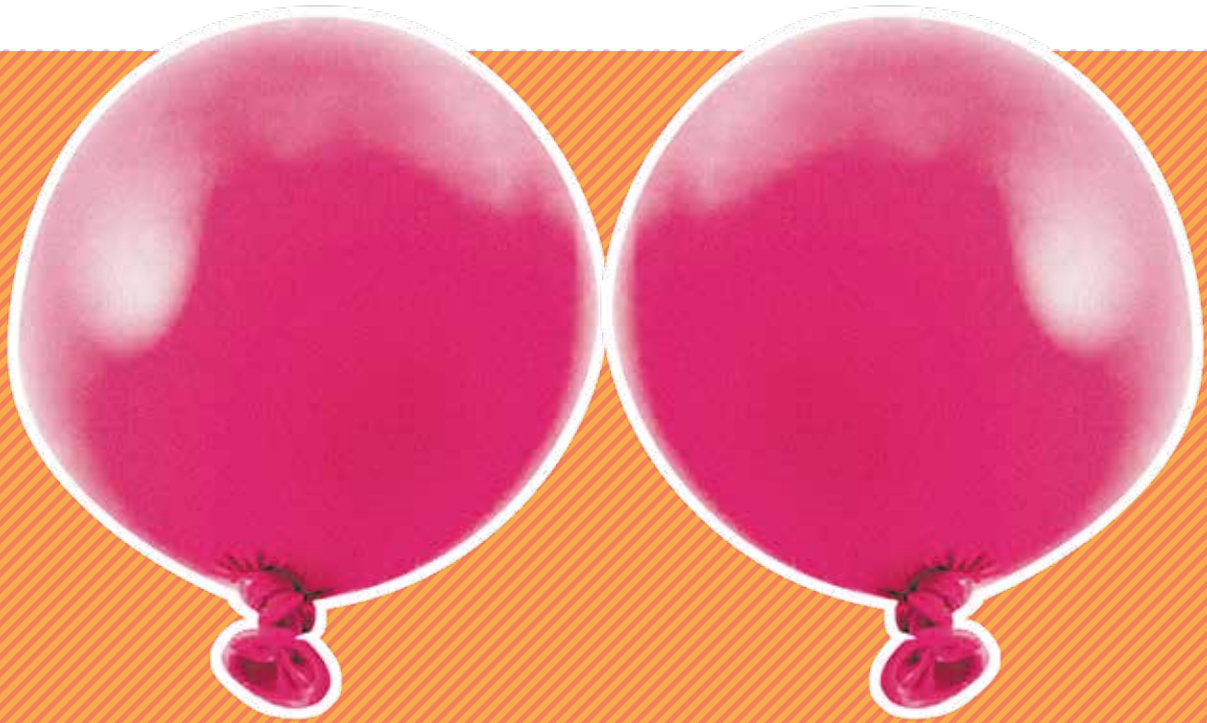


# observant

INDEPENDENT WEEKLY MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY

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**PRACTISING ON BALLOONS**  
STUDENT PRIZE FOR WORKSHOP ON HOW TO  
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## HUNGER STRIKE

“What’s the point of lying around for three days without eating?” mutters an irritated nun as she passes three students on hunger strike in a kiosk on Vrijthof square. Not everyone sympathised with the three in 1993 against the abolition of the public transport card and the reduction in the basic student grant.

Read our new series **The Times They Are (Not) A Changin’** on page 2

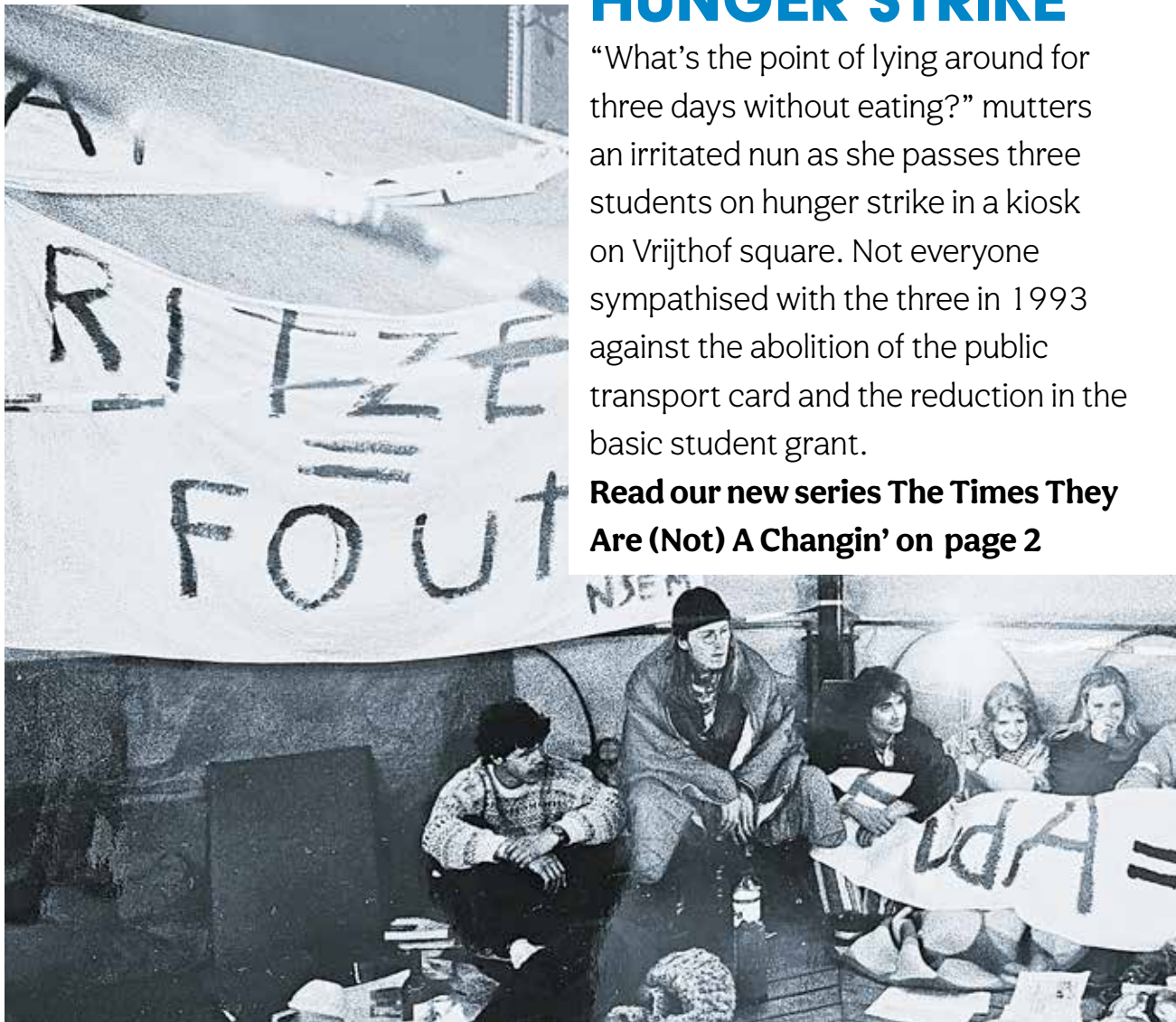


Photo: Nelis Tutkeij



## FEMALE STUDENTS IN MAASTRICHT ALSO FEEL UNSAFE ONCE IT GETS DARK.

“The biggest problems are drunk male student societies, people from Flanders, and children on fatbikes. They’ll shout ‘sluts’ or ‘want sex?’ They don’t even speak good English” **Page 6-7**



## editorial

## Nobody's going to read that

Three headlines from our website:

-The first real biography of the city's patron saint – truly something special

-For every disappearance, the immediate question is, how are you going to tackle this? There are opportunities there

-Judge vindicates students in case over delayed housing complex

“Awful, what were we thinking? Nobody's going to read that!”

During an afternoon discussion, I asked everybody to find the headlines for their last six articles. An exercise in self-confidence, supposedly. “It's enough to make you weep!” said one colleague. Headlines are important, especially on our website, because if they're not eye-catching, nobody will read the article.

It's usually a rush job here at the office. Before submitting the piece to the editor, we'll quickly add a sentence at the top at the last minute. A punchy quote is always a good option, but sometimes it's just the word “HEADLINE!”, hoping a colleague will have a brainwave.

Take one of mine, for example: *Pilot for FPN: Dutch lessons as part of the curriculum*. Should you even use the abbreviation FPN, Faculty of Psychology and Neurosciences, in a headline? Why not just ‘Psychology’? “Because then Neurosciences will complain,” was the response during the discussion. But FPN is ugly (as are SBE, UCM etc.) and new first years from the faculties in the city centre wouldn't have a clue. As for ‘as part of the curriculum’, well, *bo-ring!* Finally, after five minutes of brainstorming, we come up with the following solution: *A first for Psychology: Dutch lessons in third year*.

A different headline, coincidentally also about Psychology: *FPN Faculty Council aims to offer research opportunities for students*. For years, the faculty has reserved 10,000 euros to help underprivileged students. They never managed to actually use the money, but finally, something seemed to be happening, in the form of a paid position as a research assistant. *FPN finally spending 10 thousand euros on student research*, suggested one colleague. “Good one, because the word ‘finally’ is important.” But at the same time, what on earth is ‘student research’? How about: *Underprivileged students get money from FPN?* Shot down, too sensational.

Writing may be an art, but so is writing headlines. We're going to pay more attention and hopefully take our time from now on. Incidentally, this headline actually did particularly well: *Heerlen, get ready for this university*. The article, from a few months ago, is about all sorts of education and research developments for UM in Heerlen, and while it was interesting, it wasn't a smash hit. And yet, it was one of the top five most-read articles of the last academic year. The headline really does make a difference, we decided. No doubt, all of Heerlen read it.

Wendy Degens

The editor-in-chief gives a look behind the scenes at the editorial office.



## series the times they are (not) a changin'

# The 1993 student hunger strike on Vrijthof: three days on water and cigarettes



The 1993 student hunger strike on Vrijthof Photo: Nelis Tutkey

## 1993

“What's the point of lying around for three days without eating?” mutters an irritated nun as she passes three students on hunger strike in a kiosk on Vrijthof square. An older woman who was imprisoned in a Japanese internment camp during the Second World War is equally unimpressed by the ragtag group of hunger strikers and their supporters. They should spend four years in a camp, she scoffs – then they'd know what real hunger feels like. It's early May 1993. Minister of Education Jo Ritzen has announced controversial plans to scrap free and discounted public transport and cut basic government grants for students. Students across the country take to the streets in what will become known as the *Woeste Wilde Weken*, the “Mad Wild Weeks”. During a national demonstration in The Hague, students clash with riot police. The protest on Vrijthof in Maastricht is a more good-natured affair, apart from the occasional critical passer-by.

Most people sympathised with the student hunger strike, dreamt up by the now-defunct Maastricht Youth Platform (an alliance of student unions, student associations, faculty associations, trade unions and political youth organisations) for its publicity potential. It appears to have been the first ever hunger strike by UM students. The next wouldn't happen until 2024 – sparked not by concern for student finances, but by outrage over the genocide in Gaza.

Back to 1993, Vrijthof square. Early in the morning, paperboys hand out free copies of *de Volkskrant* and *de Limburger*. An ice-cream vendor parked nearby isn't worried about losing business; he gives the protesters cans of mineral water and a deckchair, and promises the

three hunger strikers as much ice cream as they can eat if they decide to give in. Shoppers shout words of encouragement as they pass. At night, members of the city's unhoused community stop by for a chat with what they see as their potential future comrades. Meanwhile, the annual spring fair is being set up behind the kiosk. The hunger strikers last three days on water and cigarettes. On Thursday evening, just before the start of a torchlight procession through the city centre – another protest against the rather unpopular Minister Ritzen, who will later go on to become President of Maastricht University – the three students have a few bites of Chinese food. It's tough, they tell *Observant*, but their spirits are lifted when some three hundred demonstrators with lit torches (five hundred, according to the organisers' own tally) gather at the kiosk around 10 pm.

## “What's the point of lying around for three days without eating”

Another protest is planned for the following Monday, when Ritzen is due to visit a local secondary school. But by then, the momentum has faded. Over the weekend, the minister has struck a deal with Dutch Railways to maintain free student travel. One of the hunger strikers, a Medicine student, wasn't keen on showing up again anyway. He doesn't want to become the face of Maastricht's protest movement, he explains.

Riki Janssen

This is a series about fifty years of UM.

On 11 September 1975, the Dutch House of Representatives unanimously gave the official go-ahead for the *Rijksuniversiteit Limburg in Maastricht*. We delve into our own archives: what remarkable, funny, important, or curious news items will we find?

UM ceremony focused on educational innovation

# Opening of the academic year marked by protests against Schoof, budget cuts and the Gaza war – but not in Maastricht

*Dance company O2 livened up an otherwise uneventful opening ceremony at Theater aan het Vrijthof on Monday afternoon, with talks about the future of education and the role of AI. Unlike at several other Dutch universities, no pro-Palestinian protesters showed up in Maastricht.*

The University of Amsterdam's programme was cut short after several pro-Palestinian protesters refused to leave the building, university magazine *Folia* reported. The rector, standing in for the university president who resigned unexpectedly a few weeks ago, just about managed to finish his address. In it, he offered a few words of reassurance to Jewish students who, he said, had felt less at home at the university over the past year: "You belong here. This is your home, too."

Tensions also flared at Eindhoven University of Technology, where police officers dragged at least four protesters out of the hall after they disrupted caretaker Minister of Defence Ruben Brekelmans's speech by speaking up against Israel's genocidal violence in Gaza.

In Enschede, at the University of Twente, protesters demonstrating against the presence of caretaker Prime Minister Dick Schoof were removed from the hall. Their anger was directed at populism, cuts in education funding and the government's insufficient action on the war in Gaza, *U-Today* reported. Schoof expressed understanding but also defended government policy, including the cuts. "Politics is about allocating scarcity."

And the criticism of the government didn't come only from protesters. The university president sharply reminded the prime minister

that cuts in research funding have far-reaching consequences: "If you think knowledge is expensive, just wait until you see the cost of ignorance."

Last year, it was Maastricht University's president, Rianne Letschert, who strongly criticised the government during the ceremonial opening of the academic year. At the time, she accused Dutch politicians of "intellectual laziness", narrow-mindedness and a lack of long-term vision. This year, she took a calmer tone, focusing instead on the university's core values – open science, academic integrity, academic freedom, and diversity, inclusivity and equal opportunity – and looking ahead to 2026, when UM will celebrate its 50th anniversary.

CF/HOP



Rector Pamela Habibovic (on the left) and UM President Rianne Letschert before the ceremony at the Minderbroedersberg Photo: Joey Roberts

Student Prize 2025 for project raising awareness of breast cancer and self-exams

## Have you checked your breasts this month?

On Monday afternoon, a tearful Jane De Raeve crossed the stage during the opening of the academic year in the Theater aan het Vrijthof. Her daughter, Medicine student Laura De Raeve, had just won the Student Prize 2025, together with fellow student Eva De Groeve, for Busted!, in which they raise awareness of breast cancer and the importance of self-exams. De Raeve senior accepted the prize on their behalf, as

both students are currently abroad, in Australia and India, for their studies.

Over 70 per cent of breast cancer patients discover the tumour themselves. And yet, not everybody checks their breasts every month for abnormalities – a lump, the colour of the nipple changing, a strange patch of skin. De Raeve and De Groeve decided to start hosting workshops about how best to check your

breasts. Participants use balloons to learn to make the right movements. De Raeve was inspired by her mother, who has had breast cancer and who talks on the project's Instagram about how discovering the cancer early through self-examination meant she was able to be treated successfully. They want to use the prize money of 1000 euros to expand the number of workshops. CF



## Woman overboard

“

I am beginning my last academic year of paid employment. According to the Dutch rules, I will retire on my 67th birthday in May 2026. I'm more or less OK with this. In better financial times, I would certainly be happy that my departure would create space for younger colleagues.

Just as we now try to help new colleagues find their way through a process of 'onboarding', those of us who leave are 'offboarded'. I've been trying to discover what this means. It seems to be yet another example of corporate-speak permeating universities. In corporate settings, one purpose of offboarding is to ensure the employer retains all physical and intellectual property. It won't be a problem to return my four-year old laptop and any unused pens and paper.

Handing over my accumulated intellectual property contradicts the university's commitment to open science. And it might be difficult, as I've reached the age where I no longer know what I know and don't know. Sticking with the water-related language, common in Dutch sayings, I hope waterboarding isn't involved to try to get me to give up my secrets, about the university and about my research.

Somebody from what we now call the 'People and Development Team' might want to hold an 'exit interview' with me. This sounds like the final chat with a doctor to confirm a euthanasia decision. 'Offboarding' also sounds rather ominous. Is my dean going to push me into the Maas on my birthday next year? Which bridge is used for offboarding? She's younger, so I'm not sure if I can outrun her. I am bigger than she is, so might be able to escape. Will she call upon the rector for help?

One thing I do know is that universities should not aspire to emulate private corporations, neither in words nor deeds. And words do matter. People and Development is a bit better than Human Resources. The latter was dehumanising, suggesting that we (people who work here) were similar to the laptops, pens, buildings, desks, chairs and other resources, to be written off – financially and metaphorically – as our value declined.

”

Sally Wyatt,  
professor of Digital Cultures

## series sing, fight, cry, pray, laugh, work and admire

Louis Urlings  
(Milan, Italy, 1968)

\ Pre-master's student  
of Arts and Culture

\ Relationship status:  
lives together with Ellen

\ Lives in:  
Gulpen



Photo: Joey Roberts

“I sometimes shed a tear for what I can no longer do, but I'm grateful for what I still can”

**I'm a late bloomer.** I achieved very little in the first 21 years of my life. Then something clicked, and since then I've never really stopped studying. I took courses in healthcare, business administration and computer science. I completed reserve officer training at the Royal Military Academy (KMA) and worked for a few years in an ambulance control centre. There, I became more and more involved with IT and eventually decided to make the switch. I spent the rest of my career as a consultant and manager in IT, most recently as Chief Information Officer at NATO in Brunssum. And now I'm going back to university in Maastricht, and writing about the experience for the *Observant* website.

**My optimism is indestructible.** In 2014, I was bitten by a tick. At first, I hardly noticed anything, and then it was too late – I had contracted Lyme disease. It was brutal. I struggled to speak, my memory was shot, my concentration gone. I suffered excruciating headaches and joint pain so severe that it had me crawling up the stairs on my hands and knees. It took me almost nine years to recover to some extent; I'd say I'm at about thirty per cent now. From the outside you can't tell, but if people knew what some of my days look like... I had to stop working, which left me facing two black holes: one of ill health and one of lost purpose. Work has always been central to my life.

What do you do when it disappears? I dabbled in a few courses, like photography and watchmaking, but as I slowly began to feel a bit better, I wanted something bigger. And what's bigger than a master's degree? I've always been the kind of person who sees opportunities everywhere. For me, the glass is always half full.

**My childhood bedroom maak kans opdown looked out on...** I was born in Milan, but I didn't grow up there. When my parents got married in 1966, the housing shortage in Limburg was as bad as it is now. Nothing was available. My father was offered a job in Italy with a Dutch accountancy firm, so off they went. Then I was born, and my parents soon decided they wanted me to grow up in the Netherlands. During my primary school years, we lived close to the Dommel, a small river. If I looked out of the maak kans opdown at a certain angle, I could see the fields and the water. It was a lovely place to grow up.

**I tell my mother everything.** Our relationship is still evolving. My father passed away four years ago; he spent the last three years of his life in a wheelchair in a nursing home. During that time, he and I learnt more about each other than in the fifty years before. I'm now getting to know my mother in the same way. Our bond has been grommaak kans opdown stronger

and deeper. We're finally talking about lots of things, not just the day-to-day.

**What would you redo if you could?** I'd go back to my primary school days. Back then, I was constantly being told where I was falling short or what I couldn't do. Looking back, it was all nonsense. I refused to jump through certain hoops, and that wasn't accepted. My school reports always said, "Louis can do it, but won't." It was very demotivating. If I could go back, I'd tell myself to jump through those hoops – just to make things a bit easier and get to where I wanted to be faster.

**My partner is worth her weight in gold.** More than gold. Ellen is very down-to-earth. We've been together for 36 years; we never wanted children. She's the reason I saw the light at 21 and wanted to do better – to be a stable and worthy partner. We met at the Red Cross, where we both volunteered. From the moment we met, sparks flew. And that spark is still there. She takes care of me without a word of complaint.

**When I look in the mirror, I see...** someone who, to my eyes, is ageing rather well. When I compare myself to others, I'm not unhappy with what I see. I've got good genes; my father kept his looks well into later life. And I was brought up with the idea that you should always leave home looking presentable.

**Who doesn't like you?** I can be quite clear about what I want and don't want, and I don't shy away from communicating it. That doesn't always go down well – some people find it unsympathetic. To me, beating around the bush is unsympathetic. Just be clear and don't string people along. But not everyone appreciates that.

**Are you happy?** [Thinks] Yes. Though I do sometimes shed a tear for what I can no longer do. I took a mountaineering course once, but I'll never climb another mountain. Physical exertion is harder now, and so is travelling long distances. When I spend too much time around other people, I get overstimulated – which will be a challenge in tutorials. But I'm grateful for what I still can do, and I won't give up. I still see signs of progress. My life has taken some strange turns; five years ago, I'd never have imagined myself here. I've stopped looking too far ahead.

Louis writes a blog for *Observant* about his experiences as a pre-master's student. Read his story at [observantonline.nl](https://observantonline.nl).

Deborah Blekkenhorst

Weekly personal interview with a student or employee

## Hustinx Award goes to research on AI in the workplace

# Secretly using AI at work? “We should be more open about it”

How is AI affecting workplace dynamics? At the Opening of the Academic Year last Monday, researcher Roman Briker was awarded the Hustinx Science Award for his research on this subject.



Studies show that people are viewing AI more and more as a colleague. For this occasion, Observant asked ChatGPT to generate an image for this article

From helping to write or proofread essays, analysing papers or application letters to giving relationship advice, AI has quickly made its way into virtually every aspect of our lives – at work, at university and at home. How is this changing the way we behave? “The research field is exploding right now”, says Roman Briker, a Moldovan-German assistant professor at the School of Business and Economics (SBE) with a background in psychology. “Most researchers focus on how people use AI in their own work or personal lives. I’m more interested in its effect on groups – how it affects social interactions. We still don’t know much about that.” An often overlooked aspect, Briker says by way of example, is the influence your colleagues have on your attitude towards using AI tools like ChatGPT in your work. “We see that if a colleague trusts using AI, you’re more likely to trust it too, especially if it’s a colleague you find nice, smart or helpful.

But this effect is weaker, or even absent, if you don’t like the person. In other words, our attitude isn’t just shaped by how well AI works, but also by the social context.” Another of Briker’s research questions is what happens to workplace hierarchies and dynamics if your boss is an AI. “So, a computer that gives instructions, evaluates performance and provides feedback. Or one step further: a computer that decides who gets hired or fired, or how much you’re paid.” This may sound futuristic or even dystopian, admits Briker, “but we need to start studying these applications now. You have to try to anticipate where things are heading, or you’ll always be one step behind. Researchers are always a

*“Our attitude isn’t just shaped by how well AI works, but also by the social context”*

step behind anyway – it can take years to go from starting a study to publishing its results – but the lag is especially pronounced in this field, which is developing at breakneck speed.”

### Developing a bond

AI is already displaying abilities researchers thought impossible ten years ago, says Briker. “Take creativity. AI models can now write poems and stories that people judge as more original than human work in blind tests.” Another rapidly growing application is AI as a therapist: apps or robots that keep people company through conversation, or provide support and advice on issues like relationships. “That’s actually the most widely used application at the moment. And developers are making these systems increasingly human-like – robots that move naturally, or computer voices that pause, laugh and interrupt you.” People are beginning to view AI less as a machine and more as a colleague, friend, coach or leader, observes Briker. “And we’re accepting these new roles. More and more people genuinely collaborate with AI and develop relationships with it. That’s a big difference from older technologies. You don’t bond with your Firefox browser.”

### Fear

This makes the idea of an AI boss less far-fetched. “There are already companies publicly claiming to be run by AI, though they are exceptions.” Much more common is what Briker calls “shadow AI”: companies using AI for specific purposes, like screening application letters or other HR tasks, but keeping it under wraps. “They fear backlash. People often believe that they themselves use AI the right way, but we tend to believe that others who use it are lazy or overlook AI mistakes.”

The same is true in the workplace. “At least half of all employees keep quiet about using AI in their work or even lie to colleagues about it. Maybe they fear for their jobs, worried their boss might decide a computer could do their work instead.”

### More productive

But that isn’t necessarily the case, says Briker. “Ultimately, I see AI as a powerful, augmenting tool that we can work with, not something that replaces us. It can give you new ideas, act as a sparring partner, and take over tedious tasks. Research has repeatedly shown that people who use AI this way are far more productive.”

That’s why Briker believes companies should introduce clearer AI guidelines for their employees. “People need to know what their managers find acceptable and what’s legally permitted. They’re often unsure about that. I’m in favour of more openness. Let employees experiment. The genie is out of the bottle anyway – otherwise, they’ll just use AI in secret.”

Importantly, this would also help people learn how *not* to use it. “AI isn’t always 100 per cent accurate, and it can be biased, which is how you end up with discriminatory hiring algorithms. But if you use it wisely and carefully, AI can be far more objective than a biased, racist or sexist human boss.”



Roman Briker

## Hustinxprijs

The Hustinx Science Award (formerly Edmond Hustinx Prize for Science), awarded annually at the Opening of the Academic Year by the Hustinx Foundation, aims to highlight the practical relevance of research and underscore Maastricht University’s importance to the Limburg region. The €15,000 cash prize rotates between faculties. This year, the honour fell to School of Business and Economics.

How safe do Maastricht students feel on the streets at night?

# “I ‘CHASE AWAY’ UNSAVOURY INDIVIDUALS WITH A GRUMPY LOOK”

“That could have been me, or a friend of mine, or my sister.” The news about seventeen-year-old Lisa, who was murdered on 20 August when she was cycling home from a night out in Amsterdam, has also hit students at Maastricht hard. The campaign ‘Wij eisen de nacht op’ [We claim the night] wants women to be able to walk around safely. What is that like in Maastricht now? How do women feel walking around at night, and what measures do they take?

**Text:** Peter Doorakkers, Cleo Freriks, Riki Janssen **Photo:** Observant

“When I was fifteen, a man showed me his penis. I froze”

Yes, they’ve heard about Lisa’s murder; they have no words. She is the latest female victim of male violence. “Can’t the government do more to prevent this, however hard that may be?” The two research assistants (and friends) who are sitting on a bench in the garden of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences on Monday, the first day of the introduction to the faculty, are from Czechia and Peru. Nicole Králová is from Prague, has been living in Maastricht for four years, and will start her Master’s in European Studies next week. Ana Lucia Zumarán Valencia is from Lima, has also lived here for four years, and has just finished her Bachelor’s of Global Studies.

## Grumpy look

They both live in rooms in the city centre, just a few streets apart. And absolutely, sexual comments, gestures, whistling, being followed, catcalling – they’ve had to deal with all of it. Although it is significantly worse in both their home towns. “It was worse for me in Prague. When I was fifteen, a man showed me his penis. I froze. When you’re younger, you’re

more likely to freeze, I think. Now I ‘chase away’ unsavoury individuals with a grumpy look,” says Králová, grinning. As soon as it gets dark, they hold their keys in their hand (just in case they need to hit someone), and “are ready to run away”, explains Zumarán Valencia. Once, she was unable to find her house keys quickly and a man on the other side of the street asked if he could help. She didn’t trust the situation and was able to slam the door closed just in time.

## Scream loudly

In Prague, Králová went to a course in self-defence. “It was mostly about prevention: if you don’t feel safe, try to join a group of women, stand near a mother and child, ask the bus driver for help, they’re allowed to refuse passengers. And if something does happen, hit them once with your keys – hard – start screaming loudly, and run away.” The two send their friends messages when they leave the house alone, and if it feels unsafe, they call a friend. What’s the most uncomfortable public space? Central station, is their simultaneous response. “You don’t want to be there when it gets dark. There are always strange people around. All the shops are closed at night, as is the information desk, so who could come to your rescue if you need it?” The area around the Wilhelminabrug – “full of coffee shops and dealers” – is also high on the list. As is the Markt. “Not in the bars and cafes, but as soon as you’re outside, it’s creepy.”

## “Want sex?”

The biggest problems are drunk male student

societies, people from Flanders, and “children on fatbikes. They’ll shout ‘sluts’ or ‘want sex?’ They don’t even speak good English. They’ll shout it in Dutch, so I’m happy that I can’t even understand them properly. I just pretend they’re saying something nice about my hair,” laughs Králová.

One last thing: recently,

when a man got very pushy and asked Králová for sex, some male friends escorted her home and even stayed for a while. “Does that happen a lot? They wanted to know if I was always careful. I said yes.

It wasn’t until that moment that I realised how true that was. I’m now even careful that nothing is put in my drink. It would be good if people would help each other, if we were all more alert about stuff like this and showed them that we don’t accept it.”

## Super safe

On the other side of the Maas, in Randwyck, a group of medical students is sitting in the sun (they would prefer to remain anonymous). Do they feel safe cycling through Maastricht at night? “Super safe,” say two of them. A third one hesitates. She has been spat at and cat-called. “Although nothing has happened since – it was about a year and a half ago – so maybe it’s better now. Or maybe I’m just not out at night as much since I started my residency.” Like the two second years, the other two

A student who lives in a village near Maastricht, never cycles at night. “I always ask my parents to come pick me up after going out, otherwise I just don’t go”

The biggest problems are drunk male student societies, people from Flanders, and “children on fatbikes. They’ll shout ‘sluts’ or ‘want sex?’ They don’t even speak good English”



## Hotline for street harassment

To support the campaign “Wij eisen de nacht op,” people took to the streets in a number of Dutch cities last weekend. During the protest in Maastricht, participants were insulted and (sexually) harassed. Action group Dolle Mina’s Limburg is calling on Instagram for people to report unwanted behavior to the online hotline for sexual street harassment of the municipality of Maastricht.

The hotline has been available on the municipality’s website since February. Anyone who has experienced unwanted sexual advances – from wolf whistling and unwanted touching to hissing and blocking the way – can submit a report on the council’s website with the date, time, location and type of harassment. The municipal council wants to use this information to form a clear picture of the scope and any potential hotspots. The idea is to implement more targeted measures, such as better lighting or trimming bushes. The hotline, currently only available in Dutch, although they are working on an English version, is part of the council’s programme to tackle sexual street harassment.

Data from the 2023 Security Monitor – bi-annual research of the Dutch population over the age of 15 carried out on behalf of the Ministry of Justice and the Central Bureau of Statistics – showed that 21 per cent of the people surveyed in Maastricht reported being insulted, followed by wolf whistling and sexual comments. It also showed that street harassment was most prevalent in and around the city centre. **WD**

[www.gemeentemaastricht.nl/seksuele-intimidatie](http://www.gemeentemaastricht.nl/seksuele-intimidatie)

## Associations: ‘Never cycle home alone’

How do the Maastricht student associations handle members going home in the evening or at night? “Our guideline is that nobody should cycle alone, members should always leave in groups,” says Joost Mol, chair of Circumflex. The association still remembers the disappearance of Tanja Groen, a first-year student who never arrived at her student accommodation in Gronsveld after leaving a party at Circumflex on the night of 31 August 1993. “It’s something we don’t just remember during the introduction of new members, but at other times too. It helps make members aware that they should look out for each other. It’s better to offer to cycle home with someone too often than one time too few.” Student romaak kans opg association Saurus also encourages members not to cycle alone, says chair Joep Eijkens. “During drinks and parties, there is always someone at the door to prevent it from getting too noisy. They also often talk to people who do choose to leave alone.” Saurus is the only one of the four biggest associations whose clubhouse is so far out of the city centre (next to the boat hut on the north side of the city), which means the more than four hundred members have to cycle along a long, fairly remote road, after training or parties. “When reports come in about suspicious or unsavoury people along the route, they are for example always shared in the members group chat,” says Eijkens. “Sometimes, we ask the police for extra patrols. We have a good relationship with the community officers and the student liaison officer.”

The board “doesn’t hear much” from the members about unsafe situations. “At least, not about major incidents or members who feel consistently unsafe. Sometimes there is verbal harassment, but that isn’t necessarily related to our remote location, that happens just as much in the city centre.” **DV**

Master’s students have never had a problem here. “I’m from Rotterdam, it’s so much worse there,” says one. What is it about Maastricht that makes it safer? It’s not as big (so you never have to cycle far), relatively well lit (“I only have to cycle in the dark a short distance”), and relatively well policed (“especially in the area where the nightlife is”).

So are they care-free when they go out? Well, no, not exactly. In fact, now they come to think about it, there is a long list of measures they take. “I always cycle faster at night, I pay more attention, only ever wear one earbud,

so that I can hear what’s going on. And I share my location permanently with a few people, so there is always someone who knows where I am,” says one of the Master’s students. One of the second years, who

lives in a village near Maastricht, never cycles at night. “I always ask my parents to come pick me up after going out, otherwise I just don’t go.”

### “Text me when you get home!”

More tips are shared: sending voice messages, so that it looks like you’re on the phone and so that if something *does* happen, it will be recorded, keys in your hand, cycling together, and – a chorus of voices – “text me when you get home”. Although that doesn’t actually work at all, says the student from Rotterdam. “I forget about 90 per cent of the time.” There is much nodding in agreement, except from

the one who was harassed. “I’m going to start stalking you, I’m going to call and text you until I get an answer.”

Inside, near the entrance to the building at Universiteitssingel 40, Floor Peters, a second-year Psychology student, is sitting at a table. The news about Lisa’s murder has hit her hard, she says. “My friends and I talk about it a lot. It feels so close, that could have been me, or a friend, or my sister.”

### Followed

In her friend group, the arrangement is that they call each other if anyone has to walk alone at night, because you’re less alone that way. Personally, she avoids unlit streets and alleyways after dark. “I don’t always feel safe, I look over my shoulder twice, I put on a long jumper or jacket to cover my party outfit when I leave.” Has anything actually ever happened to her? “I did once feel like I was being followed, that I thought, ‘that man happens to be going in the same direction for a very long time’. That was intense.” And the sad thing is, “it has almost been normalised”.

Peter Doorakkers, Cleo Freriks, Riki Janssen

“I always cycle faster at night, I pay more attention, only ever wear one earbud, so that I can hear what’s going on. And I share my location permanently with a few people, so there is always someone who knows where I am”

“And if something does happen, hit them once with your keys – hard – start screaming loudly, and run away”