KEER OM VOOR NEDERLANDSE EDITIE

observant

INDEPENDENT WEEKLY MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY / VOLUME 46 / JANUARY 15, 2026 / Nr 15

No *Prinseorde* this year, but *'t Perfesserke* (the little professor). Carnival association De Tempeleers honours the fifty-year-old university with a special medal

PAGE 3

"HOW I'D GRADE MY WORK-LIFE BALANCE? ***AT MOST A SIX"***

Illustration: Bas van der Schot

RUSHING, RUNNING, AND JUST KEEP ON GOING

And yet many young researchers struggle with a sense of guilt

PAGE 5-7

BACK TO 2004: WAS IT POLITICAL SCHEMING OR A 'ROUTINE' BUDGET CUT? HOW THE UM'S SCIENCE SHOP WENT UNDER

PAGE 2

editorial

TikTok

Trump's attack on Venezuela? The sixteen-year-old son had heard all about it. The fact the President of the United States wants Greenland? Knew about that, too. Protests in Iran? Likewise.

The discussion at our dinner table was about what news reaches young people. It was an open-ended question posed to the eldest. He looked thoughtful. Spelling mistakes, missing punctuation and lack of capitalisation are just a few of his editor-mother's pet peeves and are always corrected immediately (which is usually met with: "But you knew what I meant, right?"). I could see a thought clearly cross his face, 'What is she going to accuse me of this time?'.

Observant is organising a yearly conference for about a hundred fellow members of the higher education media. The theme: how do you reach readers? Last week, we compiled a list of possible speakers. While doing that, my eye fell on a newsletter from Villamedia, a magazine in the industry, which featured a short article about a million euro grant for research into how journalism can reach young people. I read that this target audience *is* absolutely interested in the news, but that it does have to have added value. They often seek out media that is less traditional, as they don't feel an affinity to the former's content and format. They get their news from other sources. I'm sure you can guess which ones.

The sixteen-year-old, on TikTok: "Everything I need to know or that I'm interested in is shown to me."

Me: "But how do you know if it's reliable?"

Him: "*NOS Stories* is reliable, they make good videos."

Me: "And other sources?"

Him: "The BBC. *Daily Mail*. Also, if I see something on my feed forty times, or so, then I know it's real. And anyway, I can tell straightaway if something is fake news, made by AI."

I sincerely hope so.

I asked a little more: "Do you know *why* Trump wants Greenland? Do you read ever the background articles?" The answer, paraphrased: only if it's interesting, if it's important to the world that he and his friends find themselves in. That doesn't sound that strange to me, we've noticed the same at the editorial office. Students are worried about the university restaurant prices, the library opening hours, the new exam regulations, tutor groups – stuff that affects *them*. The faculty budgets, or the integration of the hospital and the university: not on their radar. Still, we cling to the hope that they see an article on our website and think: 'That looks interesting, I might read that, even if it's nothing to do with me.'

Meanwhile, I have taken to giving the sixteen-year-old one news item or background article a week from *de Volkskrant*'s Saturday edition, "about something I think might interest you". It was quite hard this week... subjects such as chess, treating depression, giving birth, polar bears – I flicked through it a number of times. Until I read the ombudsman's editorial, where she wondered whether or not you should put the name of reality tv winners in the headline. Nothing too heavy, just this once. Even if it's just to gain some insight into what his mother does for a living.

Wendy Degens

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

series the times they are (not) a changin'

Political turmoil and the demise of UM's Science Shop

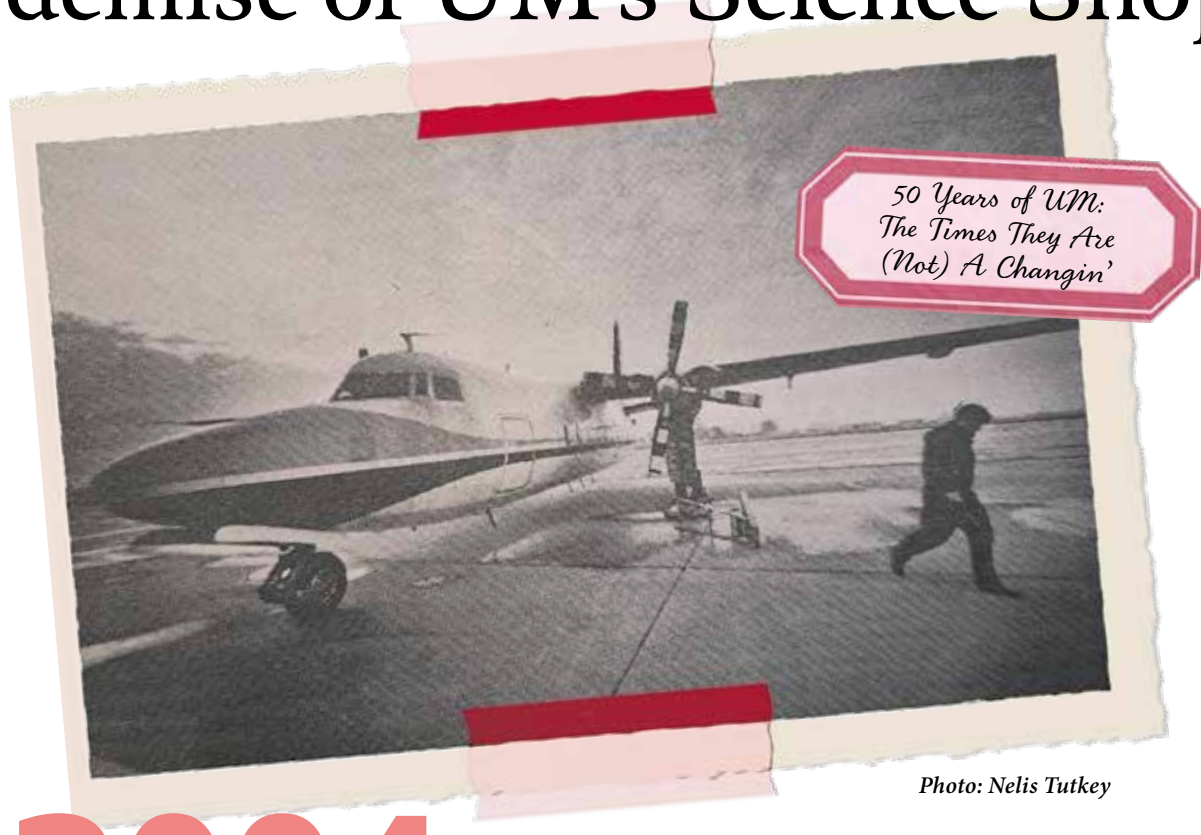


Photo: Nelis Tutkey

2004

Imagine a place where citizens, neighbourhood committees and action groups can go with questions requiring scientific research. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Dutch universities enthusiastically embraced that idea. It was in keeping with the spirit of the age, which highly valued the democratisation of knowledge. Maastricht's then brand-new university opened such a place in 1986. Like elsewhere in the country, it was known as a "science shop".

The questions submitted ranged from "Is that foul-smelling ditch a health risk to local residents?" to politically sensitive issues like "Is it economically necessary for the airport in Beek [now Maastricht Aachen Airport] to add another runway?" The idea was simple: the science shop paired a question with one or more students, who worked on it under the supervision of a lecturer or professor. It was a win-win situation – the students gained research experience, while the clients received a scientifically based answer.

Of course, those answers didn't always go down well. Sometimes the outcome wasn't what the client had hoped for, but more often the people being investigated weren't happy with the findings. Several studies, for example, concluded that the airport in Beek could do without an additional runway and more night flights. This was good news for the Federation for Nature and Environment in Limburg, which had commissioned the research, and for local residents, who would be spared more noise pollution. But the airport's management team, keen to expand in the mid-1990s, was far from pleased. In 1996, their displeasure reached UM President Karl Dittrich in the form of a personal note from the Queen's Commissioner of Limburg, the head of the province's government. Acting as a mouthpiece for the airport's management, the commissioner accused the researchers of sloppy work on "our airport" and of "dragging the university's name through the mud", and asked Dittrich to rein them in.

> The science shop concluded that the airport in Beek could do without an additional runway and more night flights. The airport's management team was not pleased

When regional newspaper *De Limburger* revealed the note, it caused a political stir. The university's Executive Board stood its ground, *Observant* reported: the commissioner was told to take up any complaints with the science shop itself. The shop never heard another word on the matter and, later that year, celebrated its tenth anniversary.

All's well that ends well? Not quite. At the end of 2002, *Observant* wrote that dark clouds were gathering over UM's Science Shop. The Student Services Centre, which the shop was part of, was told by the Executive Board to cut costs and chose to do so at the science shop's expense. People were disgruntled, not only within the shop but also in the University Council. With a total budget of €180,000, the cuts – €50,000 in the first year and €100,000 per year after that – effectively amounted to shutting down a valuable social showcase for the university, critics argued. And the University Council hadn't even been consulted! A debate eventually took place in early February 2003, but got bogged down in procedural wrangling.

In May of that year, the University Council revisited the issue. This time, the question was not whether the cuts would be made, but how. The outcome was a "slimmed-down" version of the science shop, with some of its tasks transferred to the faculties, which would also be expected to pay for them. It was a recipe for a slow death. The science shop's advisory board was concerned about the plan: "Everyone we've spoken to says they like it", but whether faculty boards would actually cough up the money was another matter. Ultimately, they did not. The prediction at the start of the article on this second debate – "It is highly unlikely that the science shop will survive in its current form" – proved accurate in 2004.

That's it for the *official* story of the beginning of the end of UM's Science Shop. But according to Maurice Evers, who ran the science shop from 1998 until its closure in 2004, there was also an *unofficial* version doing the rounds. When asked about it now, he explains that this story had everything to do with the airport and its management's resentment towards the shop. Dittrich and his colleagues may have resisted political pressure, but according to Evers, the same could not necessarily be said for their successors who took office in 2002. That, he believes, may have been at the root of the fatal budget cuts. "I'm not sure", he stresses. "But that was the feeling at the time, based on what people close to the Executive Board told us. The €100,000 wasn't the real issue. Unfortunately, this only became clear after the closure, otherwise we would have made a lot more noise."

Whatever the truth, Evers still clearly mourns the loss of the science shop. "Especially when you see that the university is now once again actively reaching out to citizens and organisations."

Peter Doorakkers

Maastricht University was founded fifty years ago, on 11 September 1975, when the Dutch House of Representatives gave the official go-ahead for the State University of Limburg. In this anniversary series, we delve into our own archives to rediscover memorable, funny, relevant and curious news stories from the past.

news

Not enough focus on Meuse-Rhine Euroregion in teaching or policy

Researchers urge university: don't forget the Euregion

While Maastricht University acknowledges the importance of the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion, this is not adequately reflected in its teaching or policy. That is the conclusion of researchers at the Institute for Transnational and Euregional cross-border cooperation and Mobility (ITEM) of the Faculty of Law. According to them, UM stands to gain a lot from engaging more with the Euregion.

The Euregion, officially called the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion, is a transnational cooperation area stretching from Belgian Limburg and the German-speaking part of Belgium to beyond Aachen in Germany, with Maastricht and South Limburg at its heart. The area featured prominently in ITEM's study last year on the impact of the Internationalisation in Balance Act (WIB) on Dutch border regions such as South Limburg. The WIB, currently under review by the Council of State and set to go to the House of Representatives later this year, aims to limit the internationalisation and use of English in Dutch higher education.

Among other things, the ITEM researchers looked at how universities in the region – Maastricht University, Hasselt University, the University of Liège, RWTH Aachen University and the Open University in Heerlen – actually engage with the Euregion and how this is reflected in their teaching, language policies and partnerships. For UM, the researchers concluded, the answer is "still not enough". Take the Transnational University Limburg (tUL), a partnership between UM and Hasselt University, offering several science programmes and a law programme. In practice, it exists largely on paper, explains Pim Mertens, scientific coordinator at ITEM, to *Observant*. Students either study in Hasselt or in Maastricht. "There's no real cross-border teaching. Only in the law programme do UM lecturers teach in Hasselt."

The five universities in the Euregion signed a joint declaration on increased cooperation last year, but according to Mertens, this has yet to translate into systematic research or teaching partnerships between the institutions.

The Euregion is also largely absent from education at UM, the researchers found. How can it be integrated into teaching? Mertens says: "In the Bachelor of European Studies, students learn all about how the European Union functions as a whole, but nothing about how it works at the Euregional level, or what goes on in Eupen, the capital of the Meuse-Rhine

Continued on page 8

Carnival society De Tempeleers celebrates 50 years of UM

Prince Carnaval in a professor's mask

Illustration: Hans Volders, commissioned by De Tempeleers

This year, people who have thrown themselves heart and soul into Maastricht's Vasteloavend – the local carnival celebrations – will receive a special medal from Prince Carnaval, chosen by city carnival society De Tempeleers. Instead of the usual Prinseorde, they will be awarded 't Perfesserke – "the little professor". The medal features a portrait of Maastricht University co-founder Sjeng Tans, marking UM's 50th anniversary.

The medal commemorates "everyone who has put Maastricht on the map as a student city for the past fifty years", the society says on its website. Complaints about badly parked bicycles and noisy parties aside, De Tempeleers adds with a wink, "Maastricht wouldn't be Maastricht without students."

Tans was chosen "for historical reasons as well as to emphasise the connection with the city. He was a true *Maastrichtenaar*", explains spokesperson Armand Perenboom. The portrait, drawn in pen by artist Wendy Wasbauer, will also appear on the side of the *prinsenwagen*, the Prince's float. On Sunday 18 January, the float will take Prince Carnaval – then known as the *Groeten Oonbekinde* – from the train station to Vrijthof Square, where he will be officially revealed.

The celebrations on 18 January will also mark the university's 50-year milestone, says Perenboom. "During the procession, the Prince will wear a professor's mask. The Tempeleers members walking in front of the float will also dress according to the theme."

Each year, the carnival society picks a theme based on major events in the city. "We look at which organisations are celebrating anniversaries that year." Last year, the honour went to the paper factory Sappi, marking its 175th anniversary.

CF

column

Identity doesn't need permission

"

It was in high school, at about 18 years old, that I started questioning my gender identity, probably after seeing nonbinary and gender-nonconforming characters in shows and reading articles about people who existed outside traditional categories of men and women. I had always felt uncomfortable with binary norms, long before I had language for that discomfort.

After years of learning and unlearning, I began identifying as nonbinary around 2022. Yet until recently, I still questioned my queerness. I wasn't cis or heterosexual, but society perceived me that way, and I went along with that perception because it felt easier and safer. I couldn't tell most people I was nonbinary because I didn't know how it would be received; whether I'd be dismissed, misunderstood, or forced into long explanations I didn't feel ready for. From the outside, I only ever appeared to be in "straight" relationships, and without many queer connections, my identity wavered. I often felt I wasn't "queer enough" to claim the words that felt true to me.

Since October this year, I've been involved in organizing the Kansai Queer Film Festival, and the experience has genuinely shifted something in me. Watching films where people lived their identities – flawed, joyful, contradictory – loosened something in my chest, a quiet permission to imagine a life beyond binaries. I became more aware of cis-hetero expectations, both within myself and throughout society, and sensed that my way of living and connecting with others could move toward something freer. That shift deepened when I met queer people in person whose genders and relationships weren't restricted by binary norms. Sharing conversations that didn't require translation or justification grounded all those loosened feelings into something real. For a long time, I thought I needed to "prove" I was queer, that my identity required some dramatic narrative before it could be valid. But queerness isn't earned through suffering or spectacle. It's lived.

A final push came when Cocona, a member of the pop group XG, whom I had followed simply because I liked their music and style, came out as a nonbinary person last week. Seeing someone I already admired step into their truth so openly felt unexpectedly empowering, like a reminder that identity doesn't need permission. My own remains fluid, still being written, and I'm finally learning to embrace that.

"

Yuki Nakamura,
third year bachelor student
Arts and Culture

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

Sïbe van Aken (Roosendaal, 2002)

\ Third-year bachelor's student of Biomedical Sciences

\ Relationship status: single

\ Lives in: Maastricht

Photo: Joey Roberts

> I want to meet someone I can spend the rest of my life with

As someone from Brabant, I feel at home in Maastricht. I love it here. I originally wanted to study medicine, but I didn't make it through the selection process. I enrolled in Biomedical Sciences instead, and ended up enjoying it so much I decided to see it through. After completing my bachelor's degree, I would like to pursue a master's in psychology or neurology. I have changed since starting university; I've become more open, more sociable. I find it easy to connect with people, I have plenty of friends, I'm a member of the student tennis club Stennis and I'm much happier than I used to be. As a child, I was very quiet and shy. I always cried at birthday parties when the family came round – it was too overwhelming for me. My uncle recently remarked on how much I've changed. It may be the best compliment I've ever received.

What's on your bedside table? Nothing. I keep everything I need in my bed, like my phone, which I use as an alarm clock. I don't keep a book nearby; I deliberately read in other places and force myself to get up instead. My bed is for sleeping. I don't linger in bed after waking up.

I spend most of my money on… I recently got my motorcycle licence and bought a motorbike. I'd promised myself I could get one if I passed all my second-year courses. I had to repeat part of the year because I was just one credit short of being allowed to move on to the third year. It was very painful – I had to resit two courses and rewrite a paper. On the upside, I had a lot of extra time to work and save money, and now I own a 300cc Kawasaki – basically the most powerful bike you're allowed to ride as a young new licence holder. You're more vulnerable on a motorcycle, but that doesn't scare me, unlike my mother. My father doesn't mind, and my stepfather loves it. He used to run a motorcycle shop.

Are you closer to your mother or your father? My parents are divorced, I have a very close relationship with my mother. Very different from the one I have with my father – more special. She has multiple sclerosis, a neurological condition, and has been ill since I was little. It's because of her that I wanted to study medicine and now plan to go into neuropsychology. I'm her carer; when I go home at weekends, I do things like grocery shopping and walking the dog. Years ago we climbed Mount Ventoux together, twice even – a 22-kilometre hike to raise money for research. The second time, I could see her decline. My mother reached the summit on sheer willpower. She wouldn't be able to do it now, and she's told me to stop her if she ever wants to try again.

At night I lie awake worrying about… all sorts of things. I used to lie awake worrying about my parents' divorce and my mother's illness. Back then, it was usually about what might happen; now, it's mostly about social things. I'll worry that I've said something wrong to someone and that person no longer likes me. I'm impulsive and need to learn how to handle my emotions better. I've talked to a therapist about it, which helped a little. I'm not ashamed to say that I sought help; I don't understand why it's such a taboo subject. By being open about it, I hope others will feel more comfortable talking about it too.

I was named after… no one in particular. Sibe is a Frisian name, but my parents aren't from the north of the Netherlands. They found it in a booklet and liked it. It's just a bit different from the usual spelling, "Siebe".

What's hard about love? I want to meet someone I can spend the rest of my life with, someone with whom I can think about a future together. I dream of having my own home, a family and a job as a researcher in neuropsychology, whether here at the university or elsewhere. I can already picture my son or daughter playing football, with me coaching the team – just like my father used to coach mine. But dreams like that aren't easy to share with the girls I meet here; we tend to be at different levels. Not everyone my age is thinking as far ahead about their future as I am. I had girlfriends in secondary school, but I haven't been in a relationship since starting university.

What can people find out about you online? Not a whole lot. I do have an Instagram account and post the occasional photo of a holiday or a nice day out, but I'm not really into social media. I don't think my life is interesting enough to share extensively. Besides, it's smart to keep things professional, especially for when you're looking for a job later.

What is your greatest fear? I'm not a particularly fearful person, but if I had to say something, it would be dying. I have a pretty nice life, and it would be a shame for it to end. I don't believe in life after death; I'm quite down-to-earth and look at it from a scientific perspective. When our brains stop working, it's like switching off a computer. There's nothing after that – no pain, no suffering, that's it. I was raised religiously and received my First Communion, but above all I was taught to find my own path. My mother does believe there's something more; she likes to think that my late grandfather makes sure the weather is always nice on our birthdays.

Deborah Blekkenhorst

Weekly personal interview with a student or employee

Young researchers about their work-life balance

Hard work and a constant feeling of guilt

Two young researchers are sitting at a table. The topic? Work-life balance. The conversation quickly moves to Recognition and Rewards ("I've yet to really notice anything"), how lucky you are if your parents live around the corner, and the eternal sense of guilt: "When I'm at home with the kids and my inbox explodes; at work when I know they're missing me at home."

Text: Wendy Degens and Riki Janssen **Photo:** Ellen Oosterhof

He was woken up at four o'clock on this particular Tuesday morning. His little boy is eight months old and although he laughs a lot, he doesn't sleep nearly enough. "Does it get better?" Gabriel Paiva Fonseca, assistant professor and father of two small children, asks in hope. Jenny Schell-Leugers, associate professor and mother of two teenagers, is quick to reassure him: "Yes, it gets better. Although you'll get other problems in turn, worrying about teenagers!"

Grades

Just about any research done into workloads has shown that younger researchers in particular, in their thirties or early forties, work incredibly hard. What's more, many start a family at the same time as working on their careers. What does that mean for their work-life balance? In absolute terms, on a scale of one to ten (one being bad, ten, amazing), what would they rate it?

"Either six or seven," says Pavia Fonseca. "I like working with 3D printers, it's my hobby. I make drones and toys for my dogs in my spare time." But he also uses the printers for work. In the evenings, he can often be found 'fiddling' with a prototype. "At the MAASTRO clinics, we're developing and improving radiotherapy treatments. You want to target a tumour with radiation, but you also want to put as little extra pressure on the patient as possible. So I build patient-mimicking devices at home or in the lab, for example lungs that can deform or simulate breathing. Doing that at home, doesn't feel like work, because I enjoy doing it. I do realise that I need to slow down a bit, especially for my family. They deserve more quality time."

Schell-Leugers rates her experience lower. "A five. Not terrible, but not good either. Although I used to work more before, every weekend and every evening. For a long time, I didn't have a permanent contract – I waited six years, I was still part of the old system – and I always said yes to everything. I wanted to show how engaged I was, I'm interested in a lot of stuff, and I felt I couldn't really say no, because then someone else would do it instead. And there was always that sense of uncertainty, would I be allowed to stay? At a certain point, all you do is work, work, work. I sometimes ask myself how I managed to do it for so long."

Pressure to perform

What changed? Health problems, being diagnosed with a chronic disease. "It's a shame that's what it took to get to that point." It has been "easier to say no to things" since she was appointed to a permanent and more senior position. "You have more freedom to decide what you want to do – of course, you have to work on grant submissions, there are people working under you, but there

Continued on page 6

is less pressure. I no longer think, if I don't do this thing, I might lose my job."
Pavia Fonseca recognises that pressure to perform. "I work in the clinic. Ultimately, my research has to be in service of the patients, which adds pressure, but it's amazing when it works."
Like Schell-Leugers, he sees a difference between how research and education is valued. The Recognition and Rewards programme (started in 2019) has yet to sufficiently change that. "I like teaching. But then there's an assessment and they say, your teaching is great, but it mustn't get in the way of your research. Which makes the teaching look like something I do on the side, whereas it actually takes up half my time. Developing a new module counts for much less than publishing a paper. I work in the clinic a lot, but I think it's the same in other departments: large grants are celebrated, new courses receive far less recognition."
There is a possibility of an associate professorship, but he's unsure whether he'll be able to 'tick' all the boxes, "you don't know what aspect they value most. If I want to advance my career, then I will have to compensate the time I now spend on teaching. But that shouldn't be how it works; it's part of my job and of the university."
Schell-Leugers is grateful that she works at an educational institution (UCM), where education is prised more highly in general. But she recognises the problem. "Recognition and Rewards should broaden the focus, but I can still see around me that it's all about publication numbers and money."

Parents just around the corner

Although she is at home more, Schell-Leugers believes her children occasionally draw the shortest straws – her husband works even more than she does. "I would love to be there for them more. My daughter had a tough start when moving to secondary school, so I really feel I should be at home in the afternoon. From next spring, I will be working less – 32 hours – and I'm going to stick to that. Thankfully, my parents often help when I'm not there."
The luxury of having parents round the corner is not one afforded to Pavia Fonseca. "My Brazilian wife is a doctor and does research at the university in Leuven. That's an hour's drive from Maastricht; my office is five minutes away by bike. If anything happens with the kids, then I stop working. I don't have a choice, I don't have any family here. In the past, I used to work all the time. So did my wife. The birth of our son and daughter has improved my quality of life."

No time for hobbies

As soon as his children are in bed, at about 19:30, he gets back to work: programming or 'playing' with his 3D printer. The television is almost never switched on, although before his son was born, he did train for and run a half-marathon. Does she have any hobbies? Schell-Leugers laughs. "I

"Large grants are celebrated, new courses receive far less recognition"

Gabriel Paiva Fonseca

> 40, Brazilian

> Assistant professor at the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, associated with the MAASTRO clinic

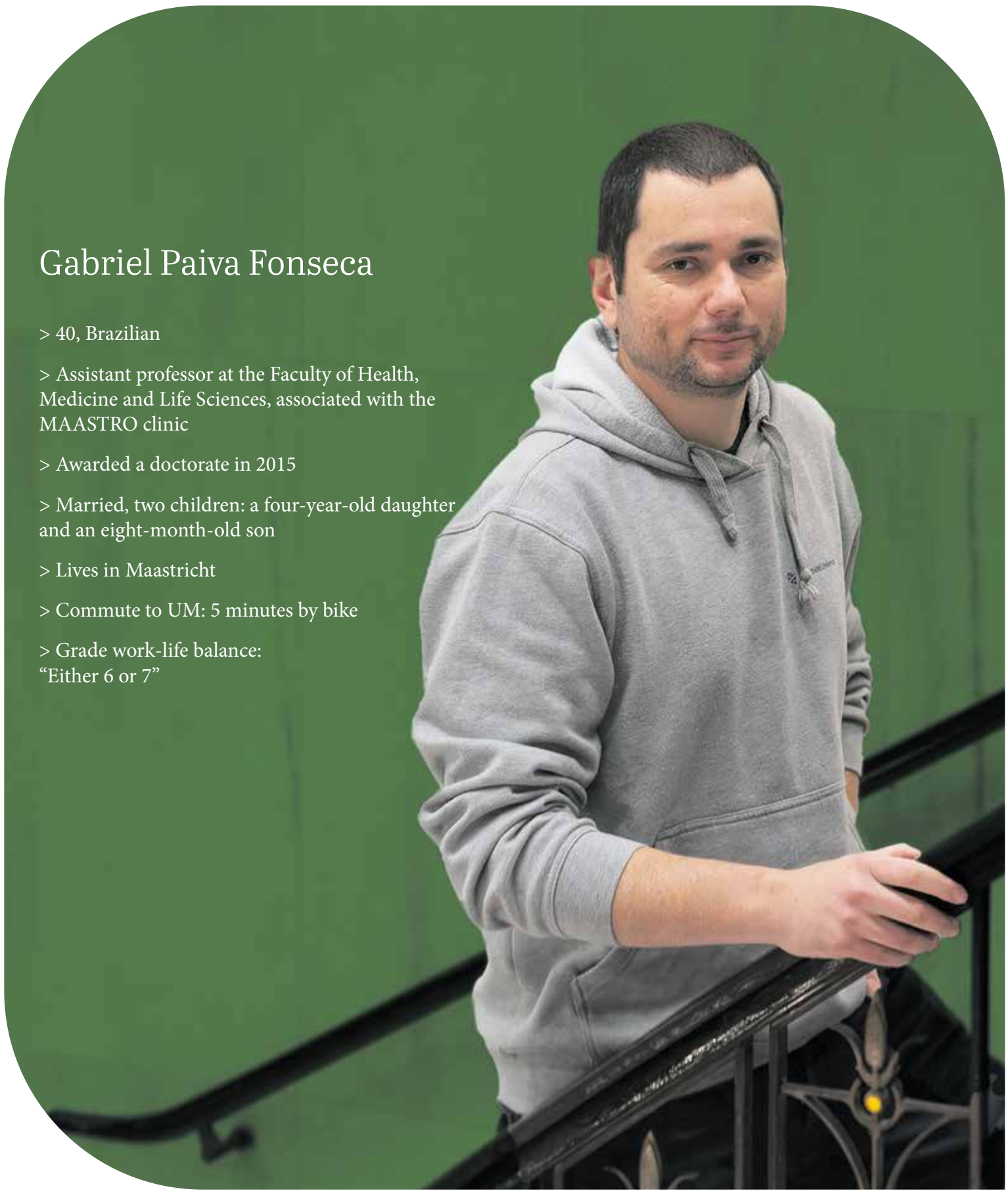
> Awarded a doctorate in 2015

> Married, two children: a four-year-old daughter and an eight-month-old son

> Lives in Maastricht

> Commute to UM: 5 minutes by bike

> Grade work-life balance: "Either 6 or 7"



“If we want working from nine to five to become the norm, then as the person in charge, you have to set a good example”

wouldn’t know what, no time for hobbies.” She gets up at 6:45 every morning. Then she drives from Eschweiler to Maastricht, only returning home by about 18:00. Her parents have often already cooked in the afternoon, which leaves time for her to listen to her two teens and, later on, to answer emails and text messages. She’s often tired by 21:30.

A good example

How do you achieve the right work-life balance? What does it take? “It starts with good leadership,” says Schell-Leugers. “People in charge should serve as role models. For example, today, a PhD researcher came to my office for a meeting, unwell, so I sent them home. And if we want working from nine to five to become the norm, then as the person in charge, you have to set a good example. The young people are not the problem. It’s the older generation who think you can’t be a good academic if you don’t work eighty hours a week.” But there is more: “A good leader gives people their freedom and, more importantly, trusts them. So if a subordinate says, ‘I’m sorry, I can’t do it, it’s too much’, then you believe them.”

She does see that the leadership at UM is improving, albeit slowly: “When I started, people would get shouted at in meetings, that really is a no-go nowadays. I’m glad that we’ve agreed that the position of supervisor doesn’t give someone *carte blanche* to just do what they want.” Pavia Fonseca feels there is also a role here for colleagues to serve as mentors. “In the beginning, I felt a little lost because of all teaching tasks. What’s more, I’m the only one in my group who coordinates courses and teaches. In my first year, I spent so much time running, I asked myself, is this normal? It got better in the second year. After talking to some colleagues who were in the same position, I concluded I had to find my own way. I know that I have to plan carefully and accept that I can’t do everything. Especially now I have two kids.”

Jenny Schell-Leugers

> 43, German

> Associate professor and research director at University College Maastricht

> Awarded a doctorate in 2014

> Married, two children: a 13-year-old son and a 10-year-old daughter

> Lives in Eschweiler, near Aachen, Germany

> Commute to UM: Forty minutes by car, if there’s no traffic

> Grade work-life balance at the start of the interview: “
> A five.” Later: “Maybe I was too harsh, a six.”

Emotional

We have been talking for well over an hour. Are they sticking with their initial assessments of their work-life balance? Schell-Leugers: “I think I was too harsh. I probably gave such a low grade because I always feel so guilty. When I’m at home with the kids and my inbox explodes; at work when I know they’re missing me at home. I’m changing it to six.” To Pavia Fonseca she says, “You really need to adjust yours down, you’re working evenings and weekends.”
He laughs, but sticks with six or seven. “My problem is that it often doesn’t feel like work. I don’t enjoy the paperwork, but then, I don’t work on that at the weekend.” Like Schell-Leugers, he feels he lacks the time to think. “Recently, I had lunch with my boss. He asked after my schedule, saw no empty spaces and was adamant: ‘If you’re going to do research, you have to make time for it. Otherwise you’re merely surviving.’”
Thinking is a part of “our work”, they conclude. But it does feel like a luxury, as a waste of time.
Pavia Fonseca says to Schell-Leugers: “Get a dog. Every time I come home from a walk, I feel relaxed. And you have time to think.”

Maastricht Young Academy & *Observant*

“A day in the life of...” It was Boukje Compen, member of the Maastricht Young Academy (MYA), who approached us last year to ask whether MYA and *Observant* could work together to show readers what life is like for young academics, “and everything that entails”. Many consistently work overtime and feel an enormous pressure to perform. In the end, it can be incredibly challenging to keep everything – both at home and at work – running smoothly.
Observant suggested interviewing in pairs; our first pair is Jenny Schell-Leugers and Gabriel Paiva Fonseca.

news

“Practice what you preach”

Continued from page 3

Euroregion. Or consider offering teaching in French and German at the European Law School [the Faculty of Law’s English-language bachelor’s programme]. In Liège, for example, the French-language law programme offers tracks in German, Dutch and English. It’s a smart investment: knowledge of neighbouring languages increases graduates’ chances of finding work in the region, where English doesn’t play a major role. This, in turn, makes it more likely they’ll want to stay in the Euregion after graduating.”

This matters, Mertens argues. Beyond the principle of “practice what you preach”, he sees a pragmatic reason to put more focus on the Euregion: “To future-proof UM. In 2013, 60 per cent of all first-year students came from the Euregion; by 2024, that had dropped to 42 per cent. Meanwhile, the number of students from other European countries, like Spain and Italy, is increasing. Looking at the likely future coalition parties – D66, CDA and VVD – universities only really have political support for internationalisation from D66. But all three parties are receptive to the idea of Euregional collaboration. Recruiting students from the Euregion [as UM has resumed for certain programmes this year] is more likely to receive support from the government.” And this will be critical: “The ‘exceptional status’ expected to be included in the new version of the WIB is based on the assumption that UM serves a Euregional, cross-border market.”

Peter Doorakkers