

# observant

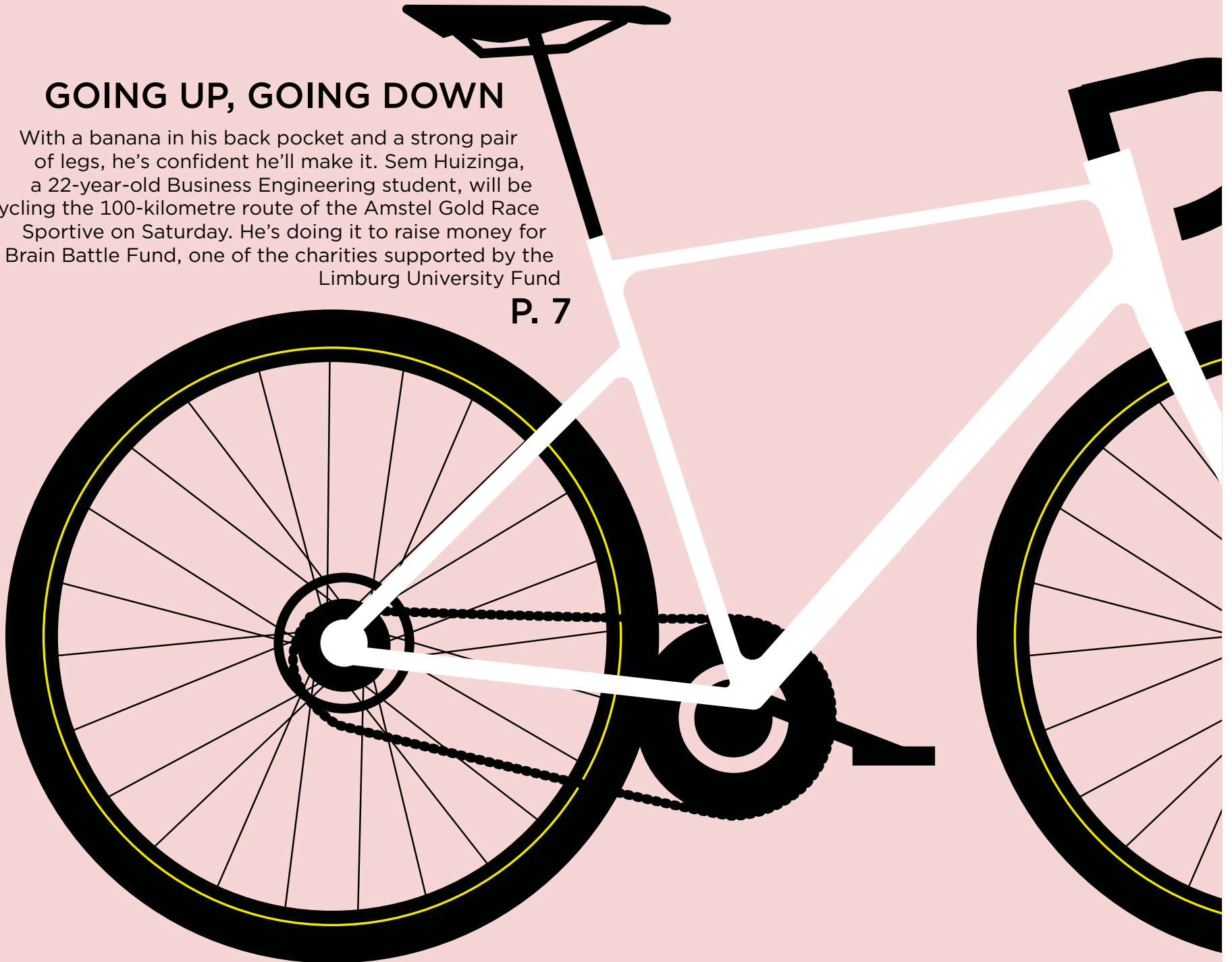
ELECTION PAPER  
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## GOING UP, GOING DOWN

With a banana in his back pocket and a strong pair of legs, he's confident he'll make it. Sem Huizinga, a 22-year-old Business Engineering student, will be cycling the 100-kilometre route of the Amstel Gold Race Sportive on Saturday. He's doing it to raise money for Brain Battle Fund, one of the charities supported by the Limburg University Fund

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## BROWNIES AND DOWNIES

The current Bakery Café on the square outside Universiteitssingel 40 will become a Brownies & Downies branch, employing people with (intellectual) disabilities. At Tapijn 'sign-language baristas' will be introduced; staff with hearing difficulties, allowing customers to order their coffee in sign language. These are plans of Appèl, the new university catering partner, which will be providing catering services within UM from 1 July

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## NO PRINT EDITION

Due to the May holiday and Ascension Day, there will be no print edition of Observant in the coming weeks. For the latest news, visit [www.observantonline.nl/english](http://www.observantonline.nl/english) or subscribe to the newsletter. A new issue will be available in the familiar stands on 21 May



## editorial

## Seven steps

As I cycled past the School of Business and Economics this morning, I snuck a glance through the windows. In a flash, I saw them, sitting in a typical square: students in the first tutorials of the day. In the late nineties, when I was studying Arts and Social Sciences with a modest number of fellow students, you could occasionally switch groups. Nobody wanted to be in the tutorials at half past eight on a Monday or Tuesday morning, or at three thirty on Fridays, because then you wouldn't catch a train home until late. They weren't strict about switching, what did it matter to them whether it was Jenny or Bob who showed up. There was a chance the new face would be forced to take the minutes (not exactly anyone's 'favourite' pastime). At the time, the seven steps – the basis for all problem-based learning – were still very strictly adhered to. When we started in first year, we were even given an instruction manual explaining those seven steps. It was in my parents' attic for years, shoved between stacks of summaries and course readers.

Last week, colleague Deborah Blekkenhorst and former editor Wammes Bos recorded a podcast about problem-based learning, as part of 50 years of UM. Their guest was PBL celebrity Henk Schmidt, who started at the medical faculty of the State University of Limburg in 1974, and Oscar van den Wijngaard from EDLAB. In an old interview with Schmidt in *Observant*, when he had already moved from Maastricht University to Erasmus University, he said that he had been tasked with setting up a new psychology programme using the classical form of PBL. An amazing opportunity, he felt. At the time, he said that Maastricht was showing "signs of fossilisation". The teaching was often done by senior staff members, "researchers who had grown bored of PBL after a few years. So what did I do in Rotterdam? I chose to have limited senior academic staff, combined with young psychology graduates who were focused solely on teaching. But for no more than two days a week and no longer than three years." In a bid to keep PBL fresh.

My cohort of Arts and Social Science students also had an enthusiastic academic team, young and old. Professors regularly joined tutorials as tutors, they took their time and added their expertise whenever the discussion ground to a standstill. Over the last few years, we have heard that tutorials don't always work very well. Sometimes there's more silence than discussion (participants are quiet or unmotivated) or tutors don't know anything (either they're still a student or they're an expert in a different field). Silence is not a new phenomenon. In 1997, discussions were also sometimes impossible to keep going.

It took an hour and a half to record the podcast. It's up to Deborah to cut it down by about half. A lot of work, because – irony of ironies – there were no such silences in the podcast studio.

Wendy Degens

Wendy Degens

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



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

## From "a place for everyone" to "elite club": Maastricht student life takes shape



50 Years of UM:  
The Times They Are  
(Not) A Changin'

Tragos pub Photo: Nelis Tutkey

## 1971-1985

The four student associations that dominate Maastricht student life in 2026 – Tragos, Circumflex, KoKo and Saurus – have been around almost as long as the university itself. But some of them have changed quite a bit over time.

It is now hard to imagine that Circumflex – today a traditional student association with hazing rituals and beer nights – once revolved mainly around poetry readings and film screenings. Its first members, in 1971, came from Maastricht's art institutions, including the Academy of the Arts, the Conservatoire and the Jan van Eyck Academy. That began to shift in 1974, when the first Medicine students arrived in the city. "We aimed for a broad membership base – a place for everyone, that was the philosophy", Sjef Tilly, chair of the first board ("a bunch of idealists"), later recalled in *Observant*. The Association of the Five Art Institutions was renamed Circumflex, "after the diacritic – the 'little hat' – that stands for 'overarching'". Membership quickly grew to six or seven hundred members. "There was very little for students at the time."

That all changed with the official founding of the university in 1976. A "Koördinatie Commissie" (Coordination Committee) was set up, soon shortened to "KoKo", for active students at the brand-new institution to help decide all sorts of things, from canteen food to party planning. In 1978, it became independent as it moved into its own building. The founding board suggested a name change to "Diogenes", but it never caught on – KoKo had already stuck. "We thought it was awful. It sounded like a monkey's name", its first chair, Paul Zwietering, admitted years later in *Observant*. There was little rivalry at first: "Most people were also members of Circumflex." Finding a clear identity, however, wasn't easy. "We absolutely didn't want to become an elite club", said Zwietering. "When other faculties were established in Maastricht, we had discussions about it. Law and Economics students are just different from Medicine students."

Not everyone agreed. Marcel Herpers, initially a KoKo member – and, notably, a Medicine student himself – felt

something was missing. The associations, he argued, were "loose sand"; he felt "a need for continuity, traditions, a place that felt like a second home". In 1981 he founded Tragos, inspired by traditional student fraternities elsewhere in the Netherlands. Its success didn't go unnoticed at Circumflex. "By the mid-eighties, their chair was no longer wearing wool socks, but suddenly showing up in a three-piece suit", Herpers recalled in *Observant* during the university's 25th anniversary in 2001. In the same edition of the newspaper, the Circumflex board gave a slightly different explanation for going down a more traditional path: the association had no permanent home in the early 1980s, so "core members felt a need for more cohesion and traditions".

Meanwhile, interest in a student sports club was picking up. The rowing club Saurus was founded in 1983, although "nobody really had any rowing experience", recalled the secretary of the first official board, Hera Lichtenbeld, in 2001. "Most of our boats were second-hand, bought for next to nothing or donated." To spread

"By the mid-eighties, their chair was no longer wearing wool socks, but suddenly showing up in a three-piece suit"

the word in Dutch rowing circles, the board drove around the country in a white Lada. The fact that they had "a relatively large number of women members went down well with other clubs, which mostly had male members". In May 1985, large numbers of visiting rowers came to Maastricht for the opening of Saurus's own boathouse by astronaut and keen rower Wubbo Ockels, who dropped the keys by parachute from a small plane. It put the club firmly on the map. As its focus broadened to include social life, Saurus went on to become one of the "Big Four" of Maastricht's student associations.

Dennis Vaendel

Maastricht University was founded fifty years ago. In this anniversary series, we delve into our own archives to rediscover memorable, funny, relevant and curious news stories from the past

# New catering partner: more plant-based food and ordering coffee in sign language

*The selection of food and drink available at Maastricht University's various food outlets is set for an overhaul. Within a year, 52 per cent of all food and drink sold on campus will be plant-based – so less meat and dairy on the plate and more vegetarian and vegan options. The changes will be implemented by Appèl, the new university catering partner that will take over from Eurest on 1 July.*

The university's sustainability ambitions have increased in recent years, resulting in a demand for a catering partner that offers a "healthier, more eco-friendly and more animal-friendly" selection, explains Mike van Gerwen, contract manager for food and drink at Facility Services.

As this would've required major changes to the existing contract with Eurest – the initial five-year term had expired, with an option to extend – a new tender process was launched

instead. "Appèl came out on top. Sustainability is embedded in the company's DNA, and our tasting panel enjoyed the food; they gave very high scores to all four hot meals and the selection of lunch foods they tried."

Not unimportantly, Appèl also offered the most competitive prices. "One of our requirements was that hot meals should weigh a total of at least 500 grams, so you actually feel full afterwards, and cost €6.50. That's the value for money students are looking for", says Van Gerwen.

The shift towards more plant-based food (currently 40 percent of the total) will be gradual. "The selection won't change overnight. But we also won't stop at 52 per cent. That's just the target for the first year; after that, it will increase further."

Appèl will take over all locations and staff previously managed by Eurest, but there will be some changes. At Tapijn, for example,

"sign-language baristas" will be introduced. "These are baristas with hearing difficulties, allowing customers to order their coffee in sign language. A tablet will show users how to sign their order." The current Bakery Café on the square outside Universiteitssingel 40 will become a Brownies & Downies branch, employing people with (intellectual) disabilities. "It won't be run by Appèl, but they will work together."

A University Council committee recently raised the question of whether the university should bring catering back in-house. Until 2010, campus food outlets were run by Unica-tering, which was part of what is now Facility Services. Van Gerwen: "The new contract runs for four years. During that time, I will look into whether this is a realistic and desirable option for the university to pursue."

Cleo Freriks



Mensa Tongersestraat Photo: Observant

# Doctors' social skills are just as important as their medical expertise

## How to prevent a toxic hospital work environment

*Mutual distrust, a lack of psychological safety and no room for criticism: the report on workplace culture at MUMC+ late last year pulled no punches. Can such a toxic work environment in hospitals be prevented? Yes, says Walther van Mook, an intensivist and professor of Professional Development, but it takes time and effort. "You can weed out most of the bad apples by improving the way you select students, specialists in training, specialists and people in leadership positions. Ultimately, that's how you address the culture problem."*

Van Mook – who sits on both the hospital's Professional Development Committee and the Committee on Professional Behaviour at the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences – explains that organisations recruiting doc-

tors for leadership positions tend to focus first on a candidate's medical expertise, for example by looking at their publication record. But that tells you nothing about their leadership skills, their ability to train new doctors, or even whether they will be a good doctor in practice. Those roles require different skills: reliability, the ability to listen, empathy, communication skills and the capacity for self-reflection – in short, professional conduct. "For a doctor to succeed in the labour market, these skills are just as important as their medical skills", says Van Mook. "I've conducted research involving complaints committees and I sit on a regional medical disciplinary board. Formal complaints are almost always about non-medical aspects. Generally speaking, if you treat your patients, colleagues and other healthcare professionals well, you're unlikely to receive a formal com-

plaint." That is why Van Mook argues that candidates should also be selected on non-medical skills, often referred to as "generic competencies". The same applies to department heads and instructors, who should serve as role models for the future specialists they're training. "That includes admitting when you've made a mistake or wrong decision, or behaved unreasonably because you were running on four hours of sleep."

But it may also apply to selecting medicine students and specialists in training. According to Van Mook, training posts are currently appointed largely based on candidates' CVs, including their grades and work placements. Aspiring specialists are well aware of this and

To be continued on page 8



## Reading and writing obituaries

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In May, I reach the official retirement age, so this is my final column. My bucket list consists largely of books to (re)read. The list of things I will never do includes extreme sports, and quite a few non-extreme sports.

A few days before I retire, I will give a farewell lecture, open to all. It's a strange genre, rather like making arrangements for one's own funeral. In preparation, I've been doing something I used to do when I started learning Dutch, namely reading obituaries in Dutch newspapers. They are short, unlike those in Canadian and British newspapers. I thought the brevity would make them easier to read. I was very wrong. They are highly coded texts, and I soon learned the euphemisms for suicide and euthanasia. The fun part is decoding the family relationships, especially those of the deceased (Tom) who left behind both a current (Anne) and ex-partner (Marie). It's complicated, certainly when Marie is the mother of Tom's children. Are the children included in Anne's 'death advertisement'? Or does Marie place her own message, with the names of the shared children? Or both? I have seen it all. On one occasion, competing advertisements appeared over several days. I was tempted to go to the funeral to see who would be sitting in the front row, who would give a eulogy, and whether Anne or Marie would be pushed into Tom's open grave.

Going to the funerals of strangers could be a ghoulish post-retirement activity. These announcements sometimes specify the colour or type of flowers. A few days after my farewell lecture, I am going to a conference far, far away. I really don't want people to bring me flowers as it would be a terrible waste. My macabre reading has taught me that I should say to those who might attend: *no flowers, no visitors.*

I've enjoyed writing these columns, sometimes commenting on current UM news, sometimes on wider issues. Many thanks to the *Observant* staff and my readers for their encouragement and feedback. *Observant* will remain a valuable source of UM news, though it rarely publishes obituaries.

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Sally Wyatt,  
professor of Digital Cultures

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



Leonardo Montariello  
(Naples, Italy, 2005)

\ Second-year European  
Law School student

\ Relationship status:  
single

\ Lives in:  
Maastricht

Photo: Joey Roberts

# “ Dating apps? Hell no. Judging someone based on a photo feels so fake ”

**Which book do you like to reread?** *The Basic Laws of Human Stupidity* by Carlo Cipolla, an Italian historian who worked in the US. It's very funny. He divides humanity into four types of people, each of whom are stupid in their own way. The point is to see things in perspective. As a student, I know a fair bit about law, but I know nothing compared to a lawyer who has been practising for years. It also taught me to look critically at other people's theories and ideas.

**I feel Italian when I...** Always! I was five when we moved to Brussels, where my mother works for the European Commission, but I never really picked up the Belgian culture. We spoke Italian at home, and at school I was surrounded by Italians and other internationals. I always spent holidays with my father in Rome – my parents separated when my sister and I were still young. Maybe I'm most Italian when it comes to food. I can't stand it when people don't rate our cuisine as the best, or think it's just about pizza and pasta. Each Italian region has its own dishes; there's so much variety that I don't even know them all.

**My friends describe me as...** hyperactive, and I kind of am. I like to cram my days full and enjoy being busy. They also say I tend to look for the positive in people. I'm always laughing; even if I've had a bad day, I've forgotten all about it the next morning. After all, what do I have to be sad

about? My mother always told us, "There are children without homes or food, and they have a right to be sad, but you have everything." She was right. I have my family, my friends, I can do what I want... I'm happy.

**Studying law was always on the cards for me.** Not really. My mother is an economist, and my father is an artist and architect. I studied economics for a year in Rotterdam. It was challenging, and I loved the city, but I couldn't see myself working for an investment bank or accountancy firm. I enjoy reading and writing, I like solving conflicts and I wanted a programme that would broaden my horizons. Law does that. It suits me.

**Losing hurts.** I'm very competitive, especially when it comes to football. I've learnt to accept defeat, but it wasn't always like that. Back when I still thought I'd go pro, I wouldn't speak for the rest of the day if we lost. I played in Belgium at the second and third highest level, attracting interest from clubs at the highest level. But going pro is hard. You need luck – to be noticed, to have a coach believe in you, to play well at the right moment. And football is corrupt; at the time, I didn't want to be part of that world. But I wouldn't rule it out in the future if the right opportunity came along. I currently play for Maastricht West. When I'm frustrated, like when exams don't go well, football helps me feel balanced

again. I can let go of all that negative energy on the pitch, meeting every challenge head-on. [Chuckles] Sometimes I'm shouting in Italian and people just look at me like: who is that guy?

**If I had a time machine, I'd go back to...** the 1990s. Life seems to have been more carefree back then, with no smartphones to distract us. I waste too much time on my phone as well. You need it for everything these days. It's fine to use it for messaging and watching the occasional reel, but the real issue is how much time we spend on them. When I visit family, I leave my phone behind so I can actually be present with them.

**Love is complicated.** Yes, it is. I've never been in a long-term relationship. I would like one, but I'm not going to plan it; it will happen when it happens. Dating apps? Hell no, never. I don't want to judge a girl based on a photo – it feels so fake. You don't make friends through a screen either, do you? For me, what matters is someone's vibe and energy. You can't get that from an app. I want to meet someone in real life, wake up one morning and realise I'm in love. To see her and think: wow!

**The best advice I ever received...** came from my grandmother. She always said: when one door closes, another window opens. Some things just have to happen. And Socrates' saying that the only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing. What I take from that? Stay curious, listen to people, read, try to keep learning. "The more you mess around, the more you learn about yourself" – that's something I try to live by.

**In ten years...** I hope I'll have a good job, perhaps in football. Maybe as an agent or a scout. I might be able to make a difference in that world, make it a bit less corrupt. As for my personal life, I'll be thirty years old. A relationship will have to come naturally. My mother always says, "Help yourself and God will help you." To me, that means: always do your best and see what happens. In the end, good wins.

Peter Doorackers

Weekly personal interview with a student or employee

## Students showcase Mail Art

# The comeback of the post box

Sending a text message or posting a picture on Instagram is the work of seconds. Writing and decorating a letter can take hours. The slowing down is exactly what makes Mail Art so attractive, fifteen students of the master's in Arts & Culture discovered. Together with the Limburgs Samenlevingsarchief Tracé, they developed the exhibition Stories from a post box.

The collection on display in the Oude Minderbroederskerk is by British artist Rod Summers, a resident of Maastricht. His so called Mail Art archive contains thousands of items that he has received from all over the world since the 1970s. The display cases in the exhibition contain a wide range of exhibits, from small envelope art works to unexpected objects such as seeds or confetti.

### Experience Mail Art

As part of their course on 'public participation', fifteen master's students were tasked with creating a complete presentation for this archive. In addition to developing the exhibition, they also organised an educational programme and the marketing and advertising. They met Rod Summers and were given the opportunity to handle some of the Mail Art treasures. "That made a big impression, especially because we're so used to digital communication. This felt more immediate, more real," said student Beatrice Contini.

Visitors can look *and* listen: Summers's music can be heard through an old-fashioned Walkman. After that, it's time to have a go yourself, using stamps, fabrics and collage materials. "It's not about perfection," explained Alessia Moro. "Everyone can make Mail Art." Afterwards, the item is deposited in a post box and sent to Summers – or whoever else you might wish to send it to.



FASoS students at exhibition Photo: Joey Roberts

### Care and connection

"The exhibition is not just about Mail Art as an art form, it's also about connection. There's a level of care to sending a card or a letter," said Contini. Tracé public relations officer Sterre Boessen affirmed this: "Someone has put effort into physical mail. That makes it worth more than a quick message. It makes it more personal and more meaningful." She also found it "very refreshing to let students curate accord-

ing to their own vision." Moro: "It was more than a theoretical assignment. You learn how to work together and deal with deadlines."

Karlijn van Oosterhout

The exhibition can be viewed at Tracé, St. Pieterstraat 7, until 30 April. Free entry

## Opinion article:

# Students are not a security threat

*Staff members of Maastricht University are concerned about "the expansion of security-oriented rhetoric and the escalation of repressive violence against student protestors", following the recent occupation of Oxfordlaan 55. They call "on a reflection on how these actions harm UM core values, notably academic citizenship".*

On Thursday 2 April, we saw the deployment of police and fire-department forces, road blockades, an extended security perimeter and finally the intervention of security forces as a needless escalation. We believe that this excessive force was avoidable and in part enabled by the negligence of the Executive Board to explore alternative routes towards a peaceful ending of the protest. As a result, twenty students were taken into custody for up to 48 hours, with numerous reports of physical and verbal abuse on the part of the police. Setting aside concerns about the appropriateness of allocat-

ing public resources, we regret that the communication from the Executive Board was lacking in transparency and consistency. The Board attempted to contact them through Instagram messages and by brief conversations through the window, restricting their messaging to demands of them leaving the building. As some of us offered to mediate, we noticed no willingness on Executive Board's part to enter into substantive conversations. As the police intervened "due to security reasons regarding high-field MRI scanners", the situation was "out of the hands of UM, and in the hands of the security forces", the Board claimed. Eventually, all students protestors inside the building were arrested starting from around 17.30 and brought to the Maastricht and Heerlen police stations. Student protestors report disproportionate use of force during and after arrest, they say they have been dragged by their hair, kneed in the stomach, slammed onto the ground with enough force to

cause blurred vision and later nosebleeds and bruises, and having boots and knees placed on their backs, arms, heads and necks, and more.

We wish to emphasize the importance of restoring dialogue and trust between the Executive Board and the UM community, and we call for accountability for the failure to prevent an escalation of violence. Both the University and media must cease treating our students, who have not harmed anyone in the course of these protests, as the security threat. We also call on a reflection on how these actions harm UM core values, notably academic citizenship.

*Jakub Ac, teacher FASoS, UM Staff for Palestine (together with other UM staff members who were on the scene, some of whom are members of UM Staff for Palestine, some who attempted to mediate between UM and activists – they want to stay anonymous)*

## science



Photo: Observant

Results of thousands of Maastricht bachelor students examined

# UM students score higher with more nationalities in tutorials

In general, students achieve higher grades if they are in a tutorial group with more nationalities – but not too many. Maastricht researchers came to that conclusion after examining the results of roughly 19,000 UM students. “This is the first time this has been examined so extensively.”

The researchers looked at the grades achieved in nine English-language bachelors, spread across all the faculties at Maastricht, between 2015 and 2021. The results were published last month in the scientific journal *Higher Education*.

It is not a direct response to the most recent government’s discussions about internationalisation in higher education, said Patrick Bijsmans, associate professor at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS), who carried out the research together with researchers from the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA). “We started researching this in 2019, before the political debate really took off. Based mainly on the thought that, as a university, we assume that an international classroom works well, but does it really? There has been very little research on the subject. At the same time, you could see more and more assumptions arise in politics, such as that the level of education and the performance of Dutch students was going down as a result of more international students. We could counter that anecdotally, but had no data to back it up.” Maastricht is the ideal place to test the idea that students score higher “if they come into contact with more different perspectives, instead of staying in their national bubble”, said Bijsmans. Not just because the number of internationals is high here, but also because of the smaller set-up of problem-based learning (PBL). “It means students really have to interact with each other,” said professor Carla Haelermans of the ROA. “Furthermore, on most courses, they are split into groups randomly. They can’t choose to be in a tutorial group with only friends from their own country.”

Thanks to this random distribution, the number of different

nationalities in the groups for one particular course can vary greatly. “On average, we saw that groups with, say, three to six different nationalities achieved higher grades than those in a group with only one or two different nationalities,” said Haelermans. “Although there was an upper limit, too. If there are, for example, ten different nationalities in a group, the effect disappeared again.” That was the case in the Maastricht Science Programme, where the groups are not assigned completely random, but the diversity is deliberately as broad as possible. “When there are slightly fewer nationalities, the chance that you are in a group with a compatriot is bigger, which can also provide some support. For example, if you can’t quite find the right word or run into cultural differences.”

## German student

Nevertheless, the consistent use of a common language is important. In groups where teachers stimulate the use of English, even during breaks, the effect was stronger. “It’s about balance,” said Bijsmans. “On the one hand, there is an opportunity to check whether you understood something correctly with a compatriot in your own language, but at the same time, keeping the conversation going for everyone.”

Not every student benefits though. There is little difference for the average German student when the number of nationalities increases. “Although there could be other reasons for that,” said Haelermans. “For example, at the School of Business and Economics, where there are many Germans, they use selection. So the average German student there is highly motivated and already achieves higher grades. That leads to a ‘ceiling’

effect: it is hard to further improve a grade that is already high.” According to Bijsmans, there is little point only focusing on specific nationalities within PBL. “In the end, it’s about improving the performance of the whole group.”

Opponents of internationalisation might object to the fact that the results of Dutch students in ‘international’ groups were not compared to those of students surrounded only by other Dutch students. Why weren’t they? “At Maastricht, groups consisting solely of Dutch students only happens in Dutch-language courses,” said Haelermans. “Their results cannot be compared to those of groups for the same course with multiple nationalities, as they simply don’t exist. And comparing the difference in results between two different programmes is like comparing apples to oranges.”

## Diversity

It is also not the case that UM – who funded the research, including through a Diversity and Inclusivity grant – were looking for a favourable outcome, said Bijsmans. “The university is interested in what works and what doesn’t. There is no earlier research that has been able to examine this much data.” There’s no inherent conflict of interest, added Haelermans. “A researcher in Groningen examining the data would reach the same conclusions. We were very thorough.”

Finally, is there anything the university could do to improve? According to the two, the way groups are assigned could be changed. “At random is good, but try to prevent creating groups with too few or too many different nationalities.” More in-depth research currently in the pipeline, in which the researchers observed tutorials and interviewed teachers and students afterwards, has “highlighted other areas of attention”, said Bijsmans. “For example, you could train teachers to take better advantage of the diversity of a group, so that students can give voice to their own perspectives more. That currently doesn’t always go as well as it could.”

UM student to cycle 100 kilometres for charity in Amstel Gold Race Sportive

# Tackling the Limburg hills with determination, a banana and a clear head

A banana or two, a strong pair of legs - and tyres - and, hopefully, some decent weather. That's about all Sem Huizinga will need to complete the amateur version of the Amstel Gold Race, the Netherlands' only classic road cycling race. This Saturday, the 22-year-old Business Engineering student will ride 100 kilometres through the Limburg hills for charity. "Luckily, I've got the body of a climber."

"Here I am. Yes, right in front of you." Huizinga waves from a distance to make himself known. Dressed in full cycling gear, with his helmet on and a gleaming bike at his side, he's hard to miss in Maastricht's busy market square. He's about to head out for a training ride; conditions are good, with little wind and some pleasant sunshine. "I'll probably do about 45 kilometres, maybe take on the Bemelerberg. A few days ago, I did 80 kilometres through the Dutch Hills and the Voer region - that went well."

## Raising money

Although Huizinga enjoys cycling, he never quite planned to take part in the Amstel Gold Race Sportive. That changed when he was approached by the Brain Battle Fund, one of the charities supported by the Limburg University Fund. It raises money for research into the treatment of brain injuries through various campaigns and events. "I worked as a student assistant at Development & Alumni Relations, and colleagues from the Limburg University Fund were just a few doors down. I've always found their work interesting. That's how it all started - I was asked to take part", explains Huizinga. With that came the challenge of raising money. "A thousand euros is the standard target. I think I've already passed that." He checks his phone for the latest total. "Yes, I'm already over €1100, thanks to friends and family. I didn't expect it to go so quickly."

For a moment, it looked like he might miss out, as the event had already sold out due to high demand. "But someone dropped out, so I could take their spot." He only got final confirmation about six weeks ago, which wasn't ideal in terms of preparation: some cycling enthusiasts train all year for this event. "But I've got a good basic level of fitness. I referee foot-

ball matches every weekend - that's my passion. In spring and summer, when the football season winds down, I like to get out on my bike."

## "Spaghetti? No"

He hasn't followed any strict training schedule or special diet in preparation. "Eating a big plate of spaghetti?" he laughs, taking another sip of water. "No, I haven't done that yet." A few bananas along the way, some energy gels and a feed zone stop should be enough to get him through all 100 kilometres. Why not tackle a longer distance? The Amstel Gold Race Sportive also offers distances of 150, 200 and even 240 kilometres. "The 100 is just right. It means you don't have to train too much and can just enjoy the ride. If I'd chosen a longer distance, I would've needed to do more training, and I simply don't have the time." Huizinga is currently finishing his degree and doing an internship at the Brightlands Chemelot Campus in Sittard. "Determination will get me a long way - and luckily, I've got the body of a climber."

Huizinga is wiry, not too heavy and not particularly tall, which

will help him when tackling some of the tougher climbs. "The thing is, what goes up must come down", he says optimistically. "Picturing the descent makes it easier. And I'm not thinking of it as a race; it's all for charity."

## An honour

On the Friday evening before the event, he will meet the other riders from the Brain Battle Fund in Valkenburg, where the race will start. They'll collect their race numbers and exchange some final information, after which it's every rider for themselves. "I think I'll be out on the road for about four to five hours." He's looking forward to the atmosphere, the spectators lining the route ("my parents will be there too, they're very proud"), the "beautiful places" he'll pass through - and just the event as a whole. He feels lucky to be taking part, as it usually sells out in no time. "As an amateur cyclist, it's not easy to get a spot. Getting this opportunity is fantastic. It's a real honour."

Deborah Blekkenhorst

## Amstel Gold Race

The Amstel Gold Race Sportive, which offers six distances, takes place on Saturday 18 April, starting and finishing in Valkenburg. The professional races follow on Sunday 19 April, starting in Maastricht's market square and finishing in Berg en Terblijt. The men cover just over 257 kilometres, while the women cover 158 kilometres.

## Brain Battle Fund

The money raised by riders from the Brain Battle Fund will go towards research into improving blood flow in the brains of intensive care patients with brain injuries. The more cells that recover, the lower the risk of permanent damage and the greater the chances of a better quality of life. Each year, around 130,000 people in the Netherlands suffer brain injuries, increasingly due to cycling accidents. "I've never experienced anything like that in my immediate circle", says Huizinga, "but my grandfather has Alzheimer's, so I've seen what can happen when something goes wrong in the brain. It's a cause I'm proud to support."



Photo: Observant

## news

# “We all tend to give people the benefit of the doubt”

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begin building their CVs early on, turning medical education into something of a rat race. “On top of that, they’re all highly competitive and often very perfectionistic”, says Van Mook. “That’s not a bad thing in itself, but always striving for the best can also lead to burnout-like symptoms. And we know from research that people with these symptoms are more likely to behave unprofessionally. Poor work-life balance will eventually affect your work. Perhaps – and I say this with caution – we should consider reintroducing the allocation of medical training posts by lottery. That might help address part of the problem, including in

specialty training.”

The good news, according to Van Mook, is that the vast majority of people can develop professional conduct and generic competencies. At MUMC+, instructors receive mandatory training in this area, as do specialists in training. “We also offer coaching and peer feedback. In most departments, specialists in training are assigned a mentor they can easily approach with any problems. They’re also required to keep a portfolio, which is used as a tool for reflection in discussions with their instructors.” What if problems do arise? “Most problems can be resolved through an informal conversation. Sometimes a formal process is needed. Unprofessional behaviour can usually be cor-

rected.” Only in rare cases is this impossible. “At that point, you need to be clear. If someone repeatedly belittles others, behaves unprofessionally and is unwilling or unable to change, there must be consequences – even if it doesn’t directly affect patient care. In my view, such a person should not be able to build a career here. Unprofessional behaviour is not just disruptive; it also indirectly has a negative impact on the quality of care.”

One issue, he says, is that most people are reluctant to speak up and prefer to avoid conflict. “We all tend to give people the benefit of the doubt. But if you see a problem and don’t report it, patterns will never come to light. We know this from both research and practice, and

it simply isn’t acceptable.”

What can the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences do? Should any changes be made to the medical curriculum? Not necessarily, Van Mook says. He explains that FHML has long paid close attention to professional behaviour: “Professional development is integrated throughout the curriculum. Students are made aware of its importance when it comes to social media use, privacy and integrity, for example. They learn about it and are given the opportunity to develop these skills. The faculty does this very well.”

Peter Doorackers



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