

# observant

INDEPENDENT WEEKLY MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY

#1

VOLUME 44 / SEPTEMBER 7, 2023



## FINDING BALANCE

As a student you should try to find balance between performing and relaxing, said UM President Rianne Letschert during the opening of the academic year. This year the ceremony's theme was about **'flourishing through resilience'**

**P.5-7**

## Q & A

Will the UM/MUMC become the biggest organisation in Limburg?

**P.3**

## Discrimination

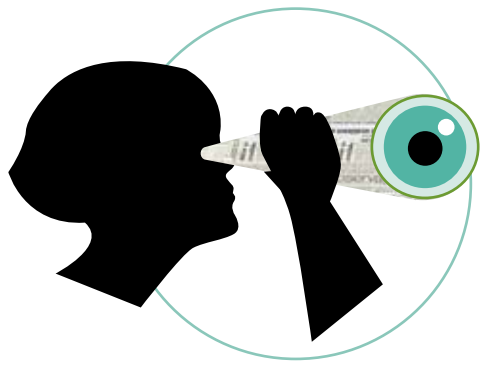
"Things go wrong right away if blood bank staff start off by referring to homosexuality as a 'condition'. It's offensive"

**P.4**

## WHO ARE WE?

This is Observant, the independent newspaper of Maastricht University. We publish articles daily on our bilingual website and almost weekly in the bilingual newspaper. You read that right: we are independent and are therefore critical where necessary. We bring interviews, opinion articles, news items and reports about science, students and developments in higher education.





Riki Janssen

I'd bought a beautiful summer dress with matching shoes and written a speech. Last week, I attended a PhD defence not as a journalist but as a *paranimf*, a ceremonial assistant. And not in Maastricht, but in Nijmegen, where my brother was defending his PhD on the impact of mindfulness on teacher well-being in Dutch intermediate vocational education. Teachers struggle with stress and high workload. It turns out that mindfulness has a positive impact, even after nine months, but a mindfulness course alone is not enough. If the school itself doesn't take action to make teachers' lives easier – think setting up a designated meeting room, adjusting their timetables, or even just repairing broken equipment – high workload will continue to be a problem. This was my first up-close-and-personal experience of a traditional Dutch PhD defence and everything it involves. Even just finding a date that works for everyone who needs to be there – the promotor (supervisor), the co-promoters, the

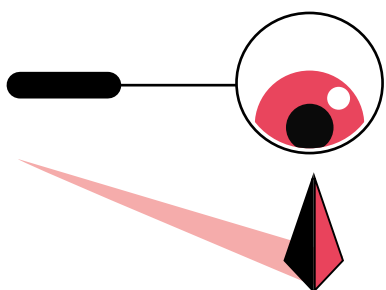
editorial

## A PhD candidate's nerves

doctoral committee members: all people with busy schedules – is a challenge. Then there's arranging the printing of the dissertation, the reception afterwards, the party (a festive lunch, in this case), the rehearsal ceremony, a press summary of the findings, the right outfit, and so on. Surprisingly, my new heels were comfortable right away. The PhD candidate's nerves were manageable, as far as I could judge. I've rarely paid such close attention to an academic ceremony. I couldn't always tell how difficult the questions were, though. Every time my brother slipped up and forgot to address a committee member as "*hooggeleerde opponens*" ("highly learned opponent") before answering a question, my fellow *paranimf* and I nudged each other. We kept a close eye on the time. Ten more minutes – maybe one more question, two more at most. And then the beadle entered the room to speak the magic words. *Hora est*. After years of diligent research work, it was done. Happy

faces gathered outside the room. From the corner of my eye, I spotted a pile of dissertations for anyone who wanted to read more than just the acknowledgements. And I wondered, who's actually paying for all this? The candidate pays for the post-defence party, of course, but who covers the dissertation printing costs, the reception afterwards, the dinner with the doctoral committee? From what I heard around me, it's not the same for all PhD candidates (and definitely not for external PhD candidates) in the Netherlands. During our editorial meeting last Monday, we wondered what the situation is like in Maastricht. We have no idea. We'll look into it.

*Every week, the editor-in-chief writes about what has been happening at the Observant office*



## splinters

A funny incident, a striking piece of news, something interesting that happened elsewhere in the country: it is in this column.



### Flooded fossil art

Did the French steal Maastricht heritage? According to a motion, which was broadly supported by the Maastricht City Council last July, they did. The stolen object is an almost complete skull of a mosasaur. The 66-million-year-old fossil remnants were discovered in the Sint-Pietersberg at the end of the 18th century, after which the French carried them off to Paris as spoils of war. That is where "the Tutankhamun of palaeontology", as palaeontologist John Jagt from the Natural History Museum of Maastricht calls the skull in *de Limburger*, has

been one of the top items in the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle since then. In Maastricht, we have to make do with a cast of the skull.

As far as the Maastricht City Council is concerned, this will change – now that the discussion about returning looted art is a hot topic. The motion requests that the municipality, possibly together with the government, opens discussions with France about the return. The eventual winner? Fokeline Dingemans, former managing director of the Natural History Museum of Maastricht, is on two minds about the discussion, she said to *de Limburger*. "The item is Dutch. There are no doubts about that. But the scientific context is French."

### Mice on the "Berg"

Anyone who abhors vermin is perhaps better off staying away from the Executive Board building on the Minderbroedersberg (MBB). An almost annually recurring phenomenon is the presence of two rather innocent, but tough to control insects: mites (dark 'dots' on desks and window sills) and the stink bug (unpleasant odour). This summer, another 'plague' joined them: mice. Multiple people came across the rodents in their drawer units, according to the employee intranet. With this, MBB has become the problem child among the university buildings, says Peter Hamers, involved in pest control on behalf of Facility Services. "In many buildings, we have no trouble with vermin at all; in some, we may find the odd mouse in a kitchenette or canteen, for example. In places like that, we have humane traps with real-time detection. Nor-



mally, we never have an 'explosion' of mice."

Right now, the focus is on pest control and prevention. The many holes and cracks in the centuries-old building will provide an extra challenge. "Filling everything would be quite a job, so you have to focus on 'strategic' places, in combination with traps." Another urgent piece of advice to employees that appeared on intranet: don't leave your lunch in your drawer unit or on your desk.

### Our 'very own' Speedy Gonzales

All eyes were on Femke Bol during the last 400 metres of the relay race on 27 August, but the woman who sprinted away after the starting shot certainly put her best foot forward too. Eveline Saalberg, 25 years old, is a medical student at UM and was chairwoman of student athletics association Uros in 2018. Those days, she dreamed of participating in the European Championship for the under 23, she told *Observant* in an interview at the time. Now she has become world champion with the Dutch women's team in the 4x400 metres during the World Athletics Championship in Budapest. Of course, Uros didn't just let this slip by. Former colleagues from Eveline's own board year travelled to Hungary; they did not want to miss this. And the cherry on the cake was that they did not just witness her participate, but actually gain a glorious victory. "As an association, we are extremely proud of her. Becoming world champion is no small thing," according to the board of Uros.

Online Q&A session about collaboration between MUMC and UM

# Speed up the merger plans; Letschert wants to prevent “endless procedure”



Illustration: Simone Golob

*Are Maastricht University and the hospital now going to merge, or should we not call it that? Is it going to become the largest organisation in Limburg? Are we going to have to speak English in MUMC? These are some of the questions from the Q&A session with the ‘bosses’ of the two institutes last Thursday about their ambitious plans. A lot is still unclear, but no, UM will not become a health sciences university.*

“Sometimes, you have to put some pressure on, otherwise you can end up in an endless procedure,” said UM President Rianne Letschert in reply to the remark by her colleague Helen Mertens, chair of the Executive Board of Maastricht UMC, to “launch the new organisation” in June 2024. Mertens is not saying that everything will be sorted by then, but “I do hope that agreements will have been reached on many issues”.

#### Autonomy

Two months ago, the plan for the merger was announced; what were the reactions that came in, the panel chairperson wants to know.

Letschert received mainly support for the “strategic foundation”, she says, but there are also worries, because will UM not secretly become a health sciences university? That concern is shared in particular by the inner-city faculties. “We must therefore really think about the management model. Which responsibilities and mandates lie where? You have to maintain the faculties’ autonomy.” In the fields of politics and social sciences, Europa, economics and law, UM has important knowledge and expertise, Letschert outlines, “but a solid medical cluster is necessary to remain stable”. An integrated UMC *could* have led to the largest Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences being transferred to the hospital, but, as Letschert had previously said to *Observant*, “we didn’t think that was wise. If that faculty was to transfer to UMC, we would lose it.” She also refers to that now: the loss of a medical faculty would be at the expense of the innovation and power of other faculties. “You must continue to do things jointly with each other.”

#### Danger

Health will become an important theme, but

that does not mean that all scientists and lecturers suddenly have to change course. Yes, wherever there are possibilities (“that will have to come from the organisation itself” for which an appeal will be made to the deans), bridges can be built, such as in the field of health ethics, health law and health economics, “but we will not force anyone”. Anyone who is doing “great” work in the non-medical sector (examples include tax and corporate law) should continue to do so. “That will not be endangered.”

#### Style

In 2008, MUMC+ was set up. The idea was to interlink education, research and patient care more closely. But the many integration attempts failed. Letschert: “At the time, the university was much smaller, but now we have four campuses, we have developed tremendously.” There are also other personalities at the helm. “Helen and I reached out to each other last year. It helps when you allow each other things and dare to bring problems out into the open. We both have that style.” In addition, the situation in the country has changed, Letschert outlines, such as the competition between the UMC’s and the urge to concentrate, “look at Leiden, Delft and Rotterdam where the universities and hospitals are clustered, you will have to join forces, also because it is becoming more expensive to maintain an expensive infrastructure.” By working together, they also expect to be able to deal with social challenges better, such as the ageing population, the imbalance between the supply and demand of health care, and personnel shortages.

#### Quartermaster

A quartermaster has already been appointed: Dedan Schmidt (he briefly joins in on the session). Schmidt is a 54-year-old public administration expert and organisation consultant, who has several interim management jobs to his name. Last year, he was the interim director of ‘Verpleegkundigen en Verzorgenden Nederland’ (Nurses and Care Providers), so he is aware of all the ins and outs of the Integraal Zorgakkoord (Integral Care Agreement), the agreements that the government has made with parties in the health care sector with a view to the future. Moreover, he knows the goings on inside a higher education institute. He was involved in the (re)organisation of the University of Groningen’s office. Letschert: “From now on, he will direct the process.”

#### Management model

Both chairpersons are aware that the exercise involves “thousands of questions”, risks and concerns. “We often don’t have an answer, we don’t know much as yet.” They still make an attempt during this Q&A session (employees were able to submit questions online). What management model will be used? They are striving towards a model with one organisation and one employee, but whether that will be possible? “No idea,” says Letschert. “This requires a considerable number of legal adaptations.” Will support services be controlled across UM? Mertens: “There are challenges in areas such as HR, facilities, IT, and housing, but the pace of change will differ for each service.” We will also have to map out the role of employee participation, Letschert adds, “because it is a re-organisation”. Will jobs be lost? “The drive is in the strategic co-operation, not in the need to make cuts and lump shared services together. I would not like that, that does not inspire me.” Mertens agrees by saying: “I think we are really going to need the people.”

Wendy Degens



## One of the boys

“

Since my High School years, I’ve taken on various summer jobs. I delivered newspapers, waitressed, worked as a barkeeper, or interned in an NGO. Most jobs paid minimum wage at best, but they left me with new experiences and a sense of accomplishment each year.

This summer I stumbled across a company that offered work at my local football stadium. I thought, “Pouring beer while watching the game? Sounds pretty good!”. But my lack of attention during the registration landed me the logistics role instead, so the setup before the game even starts. Now, I am a person who struggles with opening a jar of pickles, so you can imagine my panic when I realized my mistake. My dream of handing out cold beers turned into a nightmare of me being crushed by heavy boxes while being laughed at by a bunch of muscly tattooed men. And indeed: lots of tattooed men (although not as muscular as feared), cigarette smoke, and forklifts, yet to my relief also some other women.

Our job primarily involved moving beer crates, drinks, and refrigerators to different locations. Despite the physical demands, I genuinely enjoyed the work. Yet, what struck me was the distinct treatment of female workers, including myself. Women seemingly had to fight daily for a respect in the workplace that male colleagues inherently earned.

So there I was, in a traditional “man’s job”, feeling an unspoken pressure to match or exceed the physical output of my colleagues. If someone carried three instead of two crates I had to do the same. This feeling was fed by well-intentioned but unasked-for offers from male coworkers to assist me or explain machinery that I had used countless times before.

After multiple weeks I realized that regardless of whether I carried one or ten boxes, my abilities were still questioned. Then I stopped trying to prove something that was not acknowledged no matter how hard I tried, and look: my work became much more enjoyable. So other than a bad nicotine habit and some new arm muscles, I walked away from this summer job with the realization that the heaviest lifting I had to perform in a “man’s job” was the weight of having to constantly prove myself.

”

Line-Marie Eichhorst,  
student UCM

serie societal impact of research

# No more discriminatory questions for gay men at the blood bank

In today's world, the societal impact of research findings seems more important than getting published in an academic journal like *Nature* or *The Lancet*. So, what impact has research conducted at UM had in recent years? This week: how a UM study put an end to discrimination against the gay community in blood donation.



Kai Jonas Photo: Ellen Oosterhof

In the early 1980s, blood banks like Sanquin in the Netherlands sounded the alarm. They noticed a new virus among patients with haemophilia, one that appeared to be circulating primarily among gay men. When HIV and AIDS were identified, men who have sex with men were banned from donating blood. The Netherlands lifted this ban in 2015. Since then, gay and bisexual men have been allowed to donate blood under certain rules. They still have to answer a set of screening questions about their sexual activity. When was the last time you had anal sex? Was it within the last four months? If so, you're not allowed to donate blood.

This might seem like a good thing, says Professor of Applied Social Psychology Kai Jonas, but the gay community doesn't experience it that way. "Gay men are essentially asked to bare it all – to disclose what they do in bed, who they do it with, and how long they've

been doing it. Straight people don't have to do that, even though they are able to contract AIDS just as any gay person is." It's unacceptable, say LGBTI+ rights groups like COC Netherlands.

## Blood supply

Jonas set out to remedy the situation. First, he interviewed men who have sex with men to find out how they would prefer for blood bank staff to communicate with them, how to have a respectful conversation about sexual activity, and their preferred language use. "Things go wrong right away if blood bank staff start off by referring to homosexuality as a 'condition'. It's offensive. And yes, it still happens." Based on these interviews, Sanquin revised the language used in screening questions.

Next, Jonas conducted focus groups with gay men,

Sanquin staff, and LGBT+ rights groups to determine the attitudes and preferences of all parties involved. His goal was to propose a new, non-discriminatory approach. Interestingly, there was quite a bit of resistance among Sanquin staff. "The organisation already knew that things had to change, but some employees – nurses and doctors – struggle with it. They were trained to maintain the safety of the blood supply and identify potential risks among gay donors. They will have to adopt a new way of working. It isn't easy for some."

## Dominant

Jonas concluded that the new, preferred approach aligns with the British model of donor risk assessment. "Staff no longer ask donors about their sexual orientation, but only about high-risk behaviour. And they don't just ask potentially high-risk donors, but all donors. In other words, a straight, over-65 woman from a rural town – let's call her Frederieke from Meppel – would also be asked when she last had anal sex. One might wonder if this will deter older adults from donating blood."

Asking straight people about high-risk behaviour arguably makes more sense in the UK than in the Netherlands. "In the UK, straight people – especially those with a migration background – are at higher risk of HIV infection."

Is the British model the best fit for the Netherlands, then? Yes and no, says the UM researcher. "Yes, as it looks like this model is becoming internationally dominant. All countries, including the Netherlands, may eventually use the same risk assessment approach, which will make exchanging blood even easier."

But Jonas also has some reservations about the approach. "The odds of Frederieke from Meppel having recently had anal sex with a new partner are quite low. Our recommendation was not to be too direct, but to build up to the potentially more intimidating questions. That's what Sanquin is going to do."

## Iceland

In any case, Jonas's research – partly funded but not commissioned by Sanquin – will put an end to discrimination in blood donation in the Netherlands. As of January 2024, gay and straight donors will be treated equally by the Dutch blood bank. Germany also introduced blood equality just this week. Jonas has held Sanquin in high regard ever since his study, he says. In some countries, including Austria, equal treatment for donors was hotly debated. In Iceland, men who have sex with men are not allowed to donate blood at all.

President Rianne Letschert on the balance between performance and relaxation

## “Without mistakes, no growth”

*Making mistakes is allowed, being uncertain is not shameful, it is actually quite normal. This was the message to students that Rianne Letschert, president of Maastricht University, conveyed during the opening of the new academic year, last Monday. The theme – thought up by students this year – of the opening in the Vrijthof theatre was: Compassion and challenges: flourishing through resilience.*

That one's time as a student is the greatest time of one's life, has been a popular expression for a long time. But if that was ever true (“then you have had your best at 25, which would be sad”), it is even more of a question these days: students are burdened by stress and high demands, Letschert told the well-filled hall. They feel rushed, overloaded, sometimes lonely, and struggle to meet expectations: of themselves, of the study programme and of their surroundings. It is no wonder that half of them suffer from psychological complaints (of which 12 per cent are serious complaints), as appeared from a Trimbos survey on the mental health of students.

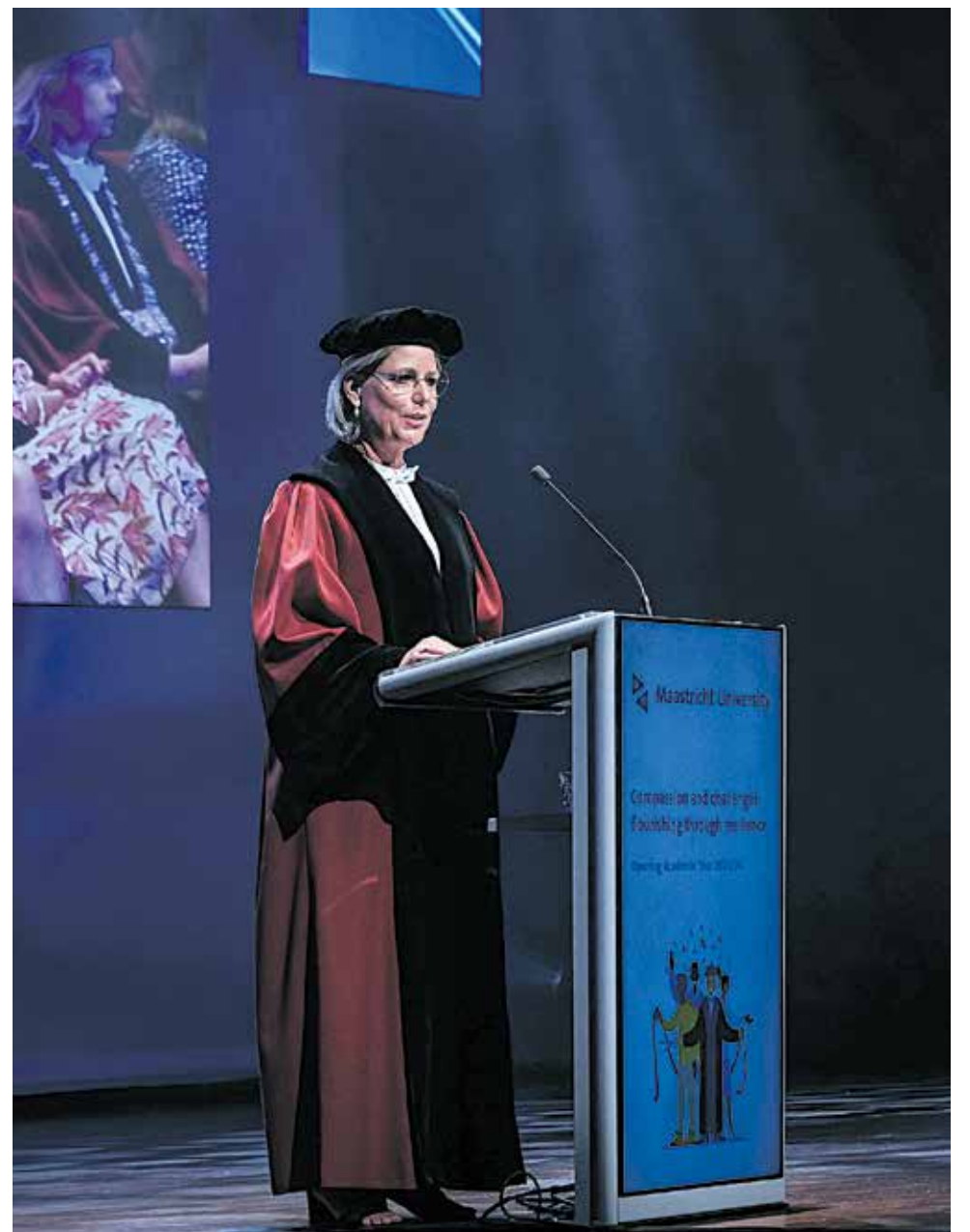
Social media that are full of success stories also play a major role. Failing appears to be something only the weak among us experience. Noth-

ing could be further from the truth, Letschert argued. Without mistakes, without failure, but also without uncertainty, growth is not possible. Everyone makes mistakes, large ones and small ones, everyone feels unsure at times, but those experiences are not always shared and because of this, students of today (and not just students, it applies to all of society) have a distorted idea of what is ‘normal’.

Maastricht University has undertaken a number of actions in many ways to improve the well-being of students – such as skills that will help you deal with setbacks better – and to create a community in which you are allowed to fail. The objective is not to take away all the stress, on the contrary, stress and pressure are not just negative, Letschert argued. They help you achieve a goal and give an extra good feeling when the finishing line has been reached. It is about finding the right balance between performance and relaxation.

“This also means that we won't shy away from difficult topics,” she said, referring to the campaign on sexual safety that was launched during the faculty introductions.

Riki Janssen



President Rianne Letschert Photo: Joey Roberts

Prizes awarded during the opening of the academic year

## Weed, QR codes and effective studying

*As is the tradition, the opening of the academic year – in addition to speeches – was also about awarding a number of prizes.*

### Student prize: QR code in toilets

Last year, they appeared on practically all toilet doors in UM buildings: stickers with a QR code that provides an overview on your phone of the university's facilities that offer help. The initiators – four students from the Diversity, Inclusivity, Accessibility and Sustainability (DIAS) working group at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS) – received the annual Student Prize for their project: a certificate, a statue and an amount of a thousand euro.

The idea came about after a UM survey had shown that very few students reported unacceptable sexual behaviour. A QR code on the toilet door – inspired by an initiative of student rowing association Saurus – should make things easier. “It allows you to scan the QR code without being seen, so you don't have to explain to anyone what you are doing. Moreover, it is a place where people can go after they have had a bad experience, to catch their breath without being interrupted,” said two initiators, Helena Sanvicente and Maaike van Uum, last year to *Observant*. In addition to undesirable behaviour, they also focus on other issues related to well-being, such as (mental) health and financial problems.

Other nominees of the Student Prize this year were the student enterprise Eatly that wants to combat the wasting of food, the MUSTANGH Foundation – which focuses on the improvement of health care in Ghana – and student Sjoerd Maillé for his efforts to improve inclu-

sion of students with a (visual) impairment.

### Impact prize: Effective studying

Felicitas Biber, education psychologist at the department of Education Development and Education Research (FHML) has received the Impact Prize 2022 – three thousand euro and a work of art for research that has the greatest impact on society.

This year's choice fell on Biber because this originally German researcher not only wrote a PhD on effective studying, but has also contributed to training courses at UM.

Three quarters of the students get it wrong. They don't get any further than reading, underlining

and making summaries, and that is not good enough, as appeared two years ago in Biber's thesis: Supporting students to study smart. “It is better to repeat the core after each underlined paragraph and to ask yourself a critical question,” said the education psychologist in an earlier interview with *Observant*.

The difference is in passive and active learning. The latter costs more energy, but the subject matter stays with you longer. That is also the case if you spend four times two hours studying instead of eight hours straight, and you also briefly repeat what you have previously learned. Biber's results have been incorporated in the Study Smart training course, which is now

given to most UM students. But does the training also have effect? “Yes,” says Biber, “students also actually apply the new methods. Those who initially achieved the least, benefit most from it.”

### Hustinx Prize: Psychedelic drugs and cannabis

This year, the Edmond Hustinx Prize for research went to Natasha Mason, assistant professor at the Faculty of Psychology and Neurosciences (FPN). A detailed interview with her will be published in next week's *Observant*.

Maurice Timmermans and Dennis Vaendel



The four winners of the Student prize next to rector Pamela Habibović Photo: Joey Roberts

# Opening of the academic year with keynote speaker Yama Saraj: on mental strength and resilience

# “I would be a coward if I didn't try and make something of my life”

## 5

### tips for students

Yama Saraj doesn't just want to urge the university to reflect, but also the students. “Those who want the university to change, must also make an effort themselves: organise yourself, start new initiatives. Look at TU Eindhoven. It is now known as very innovative, but that partly started with the students who built a car that ran on solar energy and in doing so made world news.”

The five tips that can help you:

- 1 “Realise that your own self-esteem does not depend on your study programme, your grades or what people think of you: you are the hero in your own story.”
- 2 “Believe in that story.”
- 3 “Also do things outside your studies: broaden your development.”
- 4 “Seek your own tribe, a group that you can really feel a part of.”
- 5 “Take up boxing.”

He gets his inspiration from boxing legend Muhammad Ali's life. Yama Saraj was the main speaker during the opening of the academic year on Monday. He fled from Afghanistan and grew up in the Netherlands; he is now an entrepreneur in Paris. He wants to help people believe in themselves. “Your self-esteem does not depend on your grades and success.”

Text: Peter Doorackers Photo: Joey Roberts

Saying that Yama Saraj is bubbly, is a great understatement. The Afghan Dutchman's enthusiasm gushes from the screen during the online interview we had last week. A conversation which he, by the way, starts off by saying “sorry that it is a little later”: he was speaking to an Afghan student from, yes really, Maastricht. He asked him a hundred and one questions about the university and student life. The 37-year-old Saraj is giving the keynote speech today and wants to be well prepared. “Last year, minister Dijkgraaf spoke. So, the

bar is set high,” he says from France.

#### Expectations

In 1998, at twelve years of age, Saraj fled with his mother, brother and sisters from Afghanistan to the Netherlands. The course of his Dutch education went from lower general secondary education and higher general secondary education through to the university of applied sciences in Eindhoven and then on to the Faculty of Economics at Tilburg University. “And now I am speaking at the opening

of the academic year, while in Afghanistan there is not even an academic year for the female section of the population,” he says. “I feel the responsibility to make something of my life, I would be a coward if I didn't do that.”

He is now an entrepreneur in Paris, with support from a fund for start-ups from the prestigious École Polytechnique. He has mixed feelings, he remarks: “In the Netherlands, I was always ‘a refugee’, which made people have low expectations of me. When I said that I wanted to study, people felt I was ‘being

a bit too ambitious’. After the language school, I was sent to lower general secondary education. It was so easy for me that after a year I went to higher general secondary education. In France, they see me very differently: I am an expat, a knowledge worker, and ironically, I am also welcomed because I am from a Dutch region with high-tech study programmes.”

#### Smart punching bag

Under the company name SenSai Technologies – Japanese for ‘master’ – Saraj combines his two loves in the French



capital city: boxing and modern technology, such as artificial intelligence. “We develop sensors and AI technology for a ‘smart punching bag’”, he says. “It can be used to coach people remotely and make them part of an online community. This way, we want to help people improve their mental health and resilience.” He knows from experience that boxing may contribute to that. “Having fled Afghanistan, we ended up in Nederweert-Eind in Limburg. I felt unsafe there: swastikas were written on our windows and I ended up in fights with racist youths on the way to school. I wanted to protect myself, so I started boxing. The sport gave me a sense of self-esteem and self-confidence. Boxing taught me how to deal with fear, setbacks and uncer-

tainty and to remain controlled, disciplined and motivated. Those are important soft skills that will make you resilient and tough.” He emphasises how important those skills are for the development of students, too. He agrees that student well-being has received more focus the past few years, but he thinks it could be better. “Universities are still too quick to think that students have learned how to deal with uncertainty, workload and stress while they were still at home. There is still a lot of emphasis on the transfer of knowledge, while these days you don’t even need to go to a faculty for that, it can also be done online. Students should also be taught cognitive and emotional skills, which they can use to develop their personality.”

### Who am I?

It literally took him a long time to figure that out, he says. “I have been asking questions about my identity my whole life. When I was a student in 2005, right-wing populism was on the rise and that put me into a kind of existential crisis: who am I actually and where do I belong? For Afghan people, I was too western, while Dutch people continually asked: ‘Where are you really from?’ In 2010, I made a road trip to my native country, in search of my roots. Along the way, I began to realise that you have to find your identity within yourself. I don’t need to choose between my different backgrounds, I can take the best of everything and build bridges between different worlds.”

In Saraj’s ideal world, a university will also build bridges, “between faculties and towards society”. He visited the faculties of Science and Engineering, Law and the School of Business and Economics in Maastricht. “That is an interesting mix. I think you could easily stimulate social entrepreneurship in Maastricht. It is great that UM has a Center for Entrepreneurship. You have to teach young idealistic people who want to change the world, how to start a business and how to transform an idea into a product.”

### Opening doors

“Look, I am 37 and could wonder: ‘Did I not take the wrong path in life? Would I not have been better off working for Philips, ASML, or McKinsey?’

That would have been easier: a good job with a good salary and security. But ultimately, that is not what it is about. Contributing something towards society is what gives meaning to your life. I personally get a great deal of satisfaction from the boxing lessons I give to children here in Paris. Also, by continuing to be an entrepreneur, I have learned a lot and built a network, which I can now use to open doors for others.”

Where does he get his apparently inexhaustible drive from? “From the life of American boxer Muhammad Ali. As a teenager, I read more or less all of the books about him, he is a true role model. His fight against discrimination... wow! Just like him, I want to continue to fight for glory.”

## news

## Record number of INKOM participants, including a handful of MBO- students

The Maastricht introduction week again achieved record figures: 3,600 first-year students registered, an increase of three hundred compared to 2022. A novelty was the participation – by way of a pilot – of intermediate vocational education students: four of them joined in. A very small number, but vice-chairperson Bo Goedhart from the Inkom Working Group was nevertheless glad with the four who registered, who formed their own group. The groups of new students were supervised by a total of six hundred mentors. A fixed number was supplied by the various student associations.

Normally, student association Tragos would supply dozens of mentors, but did not participate in Inkom after they became discredited last year. “We were able fill those vacancies after consultation with the other associations,” says Goedhart. A highlight was the Cantus in the MECC on Thursday evening, in which, according to the organisers about 5,000 people participated.



INKOM Photo: Joey Roberts

## Situation on the Maastricht student accommodation market is back to ‘normal’

After a number of turbulent Covid years – with the serious accommodation shortage in 2021 – everything seems to indicate that the situation is back to ‘normal’, said Maurice Evers, head of Maastricht Housing, two weeks ago. This means that the situation is more favourable than they thought before the summer. Delays in the construction of the new student

complex Muse – 506 homes on the grounds of the former post office on the Duboisdomein – were a considerable set-back, says Evers. But shortages now seem to have been averted, due to some good fortune. One hundred and twelve student rooms became available on the Parkweg, which were originally not expected until next year. The ‘container homes’ on the Sorbonnelaan helped as well: partly due to the late completion last year, there were still some hundred vacant studios of the total of 850 units. “Both locations are now completely full.” Furthermore, the region is playing an increasingly important role, with student accommodation in Sittard and Heerlen. Students can also avail of about 150 rooms in the Apart Hotel in Randwyck until the end of this year.

The latter location was previously owned by the Maastricht School of Management, before it merged with UM last year, but it has since then been sold. “Fortunately, the new owner was prepared to rent the rooms to students for another couple of months,” said Evers.

## Run on basic grant exceeds expectations

Almost 442 thousand students have applied for a basic grant so far. That is a few thousand more than expected. Study financing agency DUO doesn’t know the reason for this yet.

According to its spokesperson, the originally expected figure of 435 thousand was only a prognosis, based on the registrations in previous years as well as a calculation of the number of students eligible for a basic grant. It is possible that more students are applying for student financing who did not do so in previous years, because they were only able to borrow and did not need, for example, a public transport pass. The basic grant was abolished as of September 2015 for new students. Now it is returning for upcoming first-year students and some senior year students. These senior year students have a right to it as long as they have not used up their ‘performance grant’ yet. Normally, one receives the performance grant for as long as a study programme lasts.

## Agenda academic ceremonies Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6

### Promoties september 2023

04-9, 15.30 h Opening Academisch Jaar, Theater aan het Vrijthof  
 05-9, 10.00 h Patrick van Zalm  
 05-9, 13.00 h Maurice Halder  
 05-9, 16.00 h Mohamed Mohamed Rahouma Ahmed  
 06-9, 10.00 h Dexon Pasaribu  
 06-9, 13.00 h Ghazi Al Jowf  
 06-9, 16.00 h Susan Elizabeth Green  
 07-9, 13.00 h Robin Morris Wim Colpaert  
 08-9, 10.00 h Manon P.L. Beuque  
 08-9, 13.00 h Carlos Andrés García Velásquez  
 08-9, 16.00 h Anneke Terneusen  
 11-9, 13.00 h Georgios Mikellides  
 11-9, 16.00 h Rumbidzai Ndro  
 12-9, 10.00 h Nannan Li  
 12-9, 13.00 h Robert Dzhanayev, Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University and RWTH Aachen University  
 12-9, 16.00 h Steven van de Put  
 13-9, 10.00 h Julia Nadine Doetsch  
 13-9, 13.00 h Suryan Leif Dunker  
 13-9, 16.00 h Pere Català Quilis  
 14-9, 10.00 h Min Wu  
 14-9, 13.00 h Kian Navid  
 14-9, 16.30 h Dr. Lars van Vliet, Inauguratie  
 15-9, 10.00 h Kyra Theunissen, Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University and Hasselt University  
 15-9, 13.00 h Matteo Nardin  
 15-9, 16.30 h Dr. Renaud B. Jolivet, Inauguratie

18-9, 10.00 h Haang Jeung-Maarse  
 18-9, 13.00 h Yuliya A. Veselova  
 18-9, 16.00 h Mieke C.E. Hooijschuur  
 19-9, 10.00 h Williane Fernanda Siqueira, Double doctoral degree Maastricht University and Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais  
 19-9, 13.00 h Atia Mahmoud Ahmed Attaky  
 20-9, 13.00 h Annick W.M. van Ool  
 20-9, 16.00 h Rocio Arreguin Campos  
 21-9, 10.00 h Samantha-Lisa Crans  
 21-9, 13.00 h Floris Kees Hendriks  
 21-9, 16.00 h Clara Ducimetière  
 22-9, 10.00 h Eveline Johanna Maria Vandewal  
 22-9, 13.00 h Lidewij M.F.H. Neeter  
 22-9, 16.30 h Dr. Pieter Jelle Visser, Inauguratie  
 25-9, 13.00 h Casty Njoroge  
 26-9, 10.00 h Anika Schumacher  
 26-9, 13.00 h Samuel Yaw Lissah  
 27-9, 13.00 h Yam Fung Hilaire Cheung, Double Doctoral Degree University of Birmingham and Maastricht University  
 27-9, 16.00 h Johanna Schmitz-Peiffer  
 28-9, 10.00 h Johan Martijn Nobel  
 28-9, 13.00 h Marieke van der Gaag  
 28-9, 16.00 h Cintia Denise Granja, Double Doctoral Degree University of Campinas and Maastricht University  
 29-9, 10.00 h Maite Machteld Schroor  
 29-9, 13.00 h Babette J.A. Verkouteren  
 29-9, 16.30 h Mr. drs. Joost Sillen, Inauguratie



**Maastricht University**

### Interne vacatures

Voor uitgebreide informatie, raadpleeg de website [www.maastrichtuniversity.nl](http://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl). Klik op de link “Werken bij de UM” en vervolgens op “Vacatures”. Schriftelijke sollicitaties o.v.v. vacaturenummer op brief en envelop (of elektronisch solliciteren via de vacaturewebsite) richten aan de afdeling HRM van de betreffende faculteit of beheerseenheid (Postbus 616, 6200 MD Maastricht).

[www.maastrichtuniversity.nl](http://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl)

THE ANNOUNCEMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY, FACULTIES, SERVICE CENTRES AND STUDENT ORGANISATIONS CAN BE FOUND ON [WWW.OBSERVANTONLINE.NL](http://WWW.OBSERVANTONLINE.NL)