

observant

INDEPENDENT WEEKLY MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY

VOLUME 44 / FEBRUARY 8, 2024 Nr 18

CARNIVAL IS COMING

Vrouw Wielemösj, the symbol of the Maastricht student carnival, is ready for the party, as are two UM employees who will reign as princesses in the villages of Scheulder and Noorbeek. Together with their princes.

P. 5

Observant's office is closed next week because of the Carnival vacation

Photo: Loraine Bodewes



Photo: Shutterstock

Fake reviews discovered

Peer review is one of the pillars of science, but it is being faked in various ways. "There is a cloud of mistrust hanging over the scientific publication system."

P. 6-7

Not the 'campsite killer' after all

The impact of UM research: thanks to a report by legal psychologist Melanie Sauerland, Frank Vick, wrongly convicted of murder, was acquitted after years. "Rarely does your work have such a profound effect on somebody's life."

P. 4





Riki Janssen

editorial

“The one time I try to go local...”

“*Vrow Wielemösj?* Who or what is that?” Editor PD looked puzzled. What exactly was he being asked to write about? He asked around and learnt that *Vrow Wielemösj*, the patron doll of the UM *studentenvastelaovend*, would be unveiled at the Student Service Centre on Thursday 1 February, by none other than *Roy d’n Ierste – Prince Carnival of Groet Mestreech* – and his entourage. There was nothing for it but to attend the unveiling. When PD arrived, the receptionist told him there were *nonnevotten*. Say what? Despite having lived in North Brabant for twenty years, PD will always be an easterner at heart (he’s from the region in the Netherlands known as the Achterhoek, “which is not the same as Twente”, he admonished me when I mixed them up in my ignorance), far removed from the world and lingo of Lim-

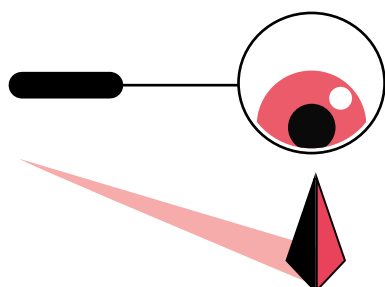
burg Carnival. He decided to forgo the *nonnevotten*, unsure if the doughnut-like pastries were intended for members of the press.

A few weeks earlier, our junior journalist LvdL sent a cheerful message to the *Observant* group chat: would anyone like to join her for *Vriedag veur Vastelaovend UM*? Even though most of us are in fact from Limburg, her invitation received a lukewarm response. The excuses were rather weak, ranging from “That’s the kind of thing I used to do when I was twenty”, “I’m only going to the parade, and only if the weather is good” and “I’m going into town with friends” to “I don’t feel like it”. “Well then”, wrote LvdL, who is from North Brabant, “the one time I try to go local...”

That made us feel a bit guilty – here was our youngest team

member trying to organise a fun outing, only to be met with resistance. “Let’s go bowling after Carnival”, suggested editor WD. The idea was met with approval, although it did cause some bickering about who gets to call themselves an experienced bowler. LvdL agreed it would be fun: “Let’s go boozy bowling!” “Say what?” wondered some of the more senior team members. Ah, alcohol. Right. Let’s not get too carried away. “Count me in, but I can do without alcohol”, said assistant to the editors MJ, voicing the general sentiment. The date has been set.

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.

Contributions: Peter Doorackers, Dennis Vaendel

Finished tweeting

Since the take-over by tech billionaire Elon Musk, more and more Twitter users (the platform now renamed X) are turning their backs on it. The reason given is often the harshening of the platform: hate tweets, disinformation, and fake accounts are flourishing since Musk binned the fake news policy and fired moderators in bulk. Following the example of politicians, businesses, and scientists, University of Twente is now the first Dutch university to bid the platform farewell. Even though the poisonous climate is “not directly” the reason, a UT spokesperson says to daily newspaper *Tubantia*. What is the reason then? “Decreasing relevance, less interaction, and a very limited reach.” On average, the tweets reached only 600 to 700 followers, “too few to continue wasting energy on it. A platform such as LinkedIn is much more important to us.”

Is Maastricht University going to follow the example of Twente? “At the moment, we don’t have the intention to do so,” says spokesperson Koen Augustijn. Although UM also sees a decline in interaction and reach, for example among their own scientists, “X is still relevant for us. We know, for example, that the media (still) follow it well.” And the harshening? “As a whole, X has a serious problem, but our own – obviously not harsh – messages do usually not incite ‘rough interaction.’” That doesn’t mean that UM puts all its energy into X: “Two platforms, LinkedIn and Instagram, jump out when it comes to use and (growing) reach. That is what we focus on.”

Preference for women

A familiar phenomenon in Maastricht: study programmes with a majority of female students. A huge difference with TU Delft, where men dominate the lecture halls. At the bachelor’s of Aerospace Engineering, the ratio is lopsided to such an extent (only one in five first-year students is female) that the faculty is now taking action. In the selection procedure for the next academic year, women will receive a preferential treatment: of the 440 available places in first year, 30 per cent will be reserved for them. Just like the male counterparts, however, they still need to survive the first round of selection (in which their knowledge and motivation are tested). The other places will be assigned on the basis of a ranking.

This makes Delft the first Dutch university to introduce such a policy of preference for a study programme. The decision to switch to positive discrimination was taken after ‘long deliberations’, says the university’s website. Previous interventions, such as more role models and a different tone of voice in communication, had insufficient impact. “I hope that this measure is soon no longer necessary, although sufficient diversity continues to be a hard nut to crack,” says education director Joris Melkert to sister newspaper *Delta*.



Professors’ sidelines

Professors who have jobs on the side continue to be a hot topic. Last week, all Dutch universities published new registers – accessible online – in which professors note down their ‘sidelines’. It enhances transparency and therefore also their scientific integrity, says Universities of the Netherlands. A look at UM’s register shows that there are 459 Maastricht professors. Of these, 369 have additional jobs, a total of 1,066, or an average of about 3 per person. They are large shareholders of companies, members of the editorial staff of journals or have board positions in their research field: relevant information. But is that the case with all these ‘side jobs’? Many FHML professors dutifully report that they also work in MUMC+, because their faculty and the hospital are, after all, (still) separate organisations. Then there is that one professor who once ran UM and who reports an ‘additional position’ as rector of another university. Sometimes, it is difficult to suppress a grin: one professor reveals that in her free time – and on a voluntary basis! – she feeds the animals at a care farm. Is it possible that a university is too transparent?

‘Minister’s decision to resort to generic measures for higher education as a whole is questionable’ Fewer new international students across the Netherlands, percentage at UM does rise

Fewer international students have embarked on a bachelor’s programme in the Netherlands than last year. Maastricht University, however, registered more (again). Of all new students, more than two thirds are now from abroad, show the final registration figures published by university association UNL this week.

First the overall figures of both international and Dutch students at UM. Maastricht University has more first-year students than in 2022 (a 6.7 per cent growth). The Maastricht bachelor’s programmes are especially popular; the influx increased by 10 per cent. For the master’s programmes, this was ‘only’ 3.4 per cent. The increase in the bachelor’s phase was due primarily to the new English bachelor’s programme of Computer Science, for which some three hundred students registered.

Internationals

A breakdown according to nationality: of all first-year students in the bachelor’s phase, 72 per cent is international. In the master’s phase, this is 57 per cent. According to UNL, UM has 3,782 new students with a foreign nationality this year compared to 3,182 last year. An

increase of 19 per cent. Contrary to the figures published by UNL, UM uses different ‘definitions’, as a result of which the figures deviate (slightly). For example, UNL does not take into consideration students who switch, going from Amsterdam to Maastricht, or who decide to do Law instead of Psychology, a policy official explains. “For UNL, the influx figures only concern students who ‘enter’ university for the first time”. According to the Maastricht calculations therefore, 68 rather than 72 per cent of the new bachelor’s students comes from abroad. In addition, a substantial part – 41 per cent – comes from the (euro)region, within a 100-kilometre radius. That could be Limburg, Belgium or Germany.

The Hague

Political circles in The Hague are not exactly keen on internationalisation. The large political parties that were until recently negotiating about a new cabinet want fewer foreign students and more Dutch courses in study programmes. There is also a proposed bill by minister Dijkgraaf – ‘Internationalisering in Balans,’ (Balanced Internationalisation) – containing a number of measures in the fields of

language and influx. The Education Council gave its vision of the proposed bill last week; as far as the Council is concerned, the minister will have to put some more thought into the content. This proposal creates too much uncertainty, says chairperson Edith Hooge. There is actually only one thing in the proposed bill that has the Education Council’s approval: the entry restriction for English-language (or other language) courses. This could improve accessibility of education for Dutch-speaking students, the council reckons. *De Volkskrant* reported that the Council finds it questionable that the minister should resort to a set of generic measures that apply to higher education as a whole. Education institutes that dearly need those non-Dutch students, may suffer from this, says the newspaper. Chairperson Hooge: “Universities and universities of applied sciences differ from one another, and there are also great differences between border regions and large cities.” UM President Rianne Letschert has been persistent about the ‘international DNA’ of UM, the unique location of Maastricht on the border and the university as economic driving force for the region.

Wendy Degens



A Tale of Two Motivations

“

In 1976, three researchers tested the common assumption that payment and competitive awards are effective for fostering performance. They visited a class of schoolchildren who enjoyed drawing, and they asked them to submit pictures to a research assistant in exchange for either payment, the chance to earn an award, or verbal reinforcement. The children in the first two groups produced huge amounts of drawings, often just putting a single line on the paper, whereas the last group produced a decent number of creative and meaningful pictures.

In the following free-play period, children in the first two groups stopped drawing once they were no longer rewarded, but children in the third group reported enjoying drawing even more and continued to produce original work. The researchers concluded: extrinsic motivation kills intrinsic motivation.

I was recently reminded of this study when discussing how the so-called Rewards & Recognition project is likely to be implemented at my faculty. When I went into academia, I found research, teaching, and academic citizenship deeply meaningful and fulfilling. But once on the tenure track, with its 39 performance criteria, my intrinsic motivation declined. Last year, after getting tenured, I rediscovered this original sense of passion and purpose, and my performance actually increased. Then, when R&R got announced, it seemed like intrinsic motivation might be anchored in the way we work: giving professionals autonomy over their profile, fostering competence by letting people experience that they are capable of achieving their goals, and allow them to work with others, to collaborate and to learn from each other. However, I just learned that under R&R, I will need to meet a further 22 performance criteria across seven categories to be eligible for promotion. Immediately, I felt my intrinsic motivation dwindle again. It looks like my faculty is taking a pre-1976 approach to rewarding and recognising. The question is: will we succeed in implementing them?

”

Therese Grohnert,
Assistant Professor SBE



Kai Karos teaches during Teenzcollege. Photo: Joey Roberts

‘Teenzcollege’: getting a feel of the university

Adolf Hitler, Donald Trump, The Joker. Are these people evil? 36 secondary-school pupils ponder this question during Teenzcollege (Teen Lecture). The programme (in English) for fourth- and fifth-year pupils of pre-university education won the Wynand Wijnen education prize during Maastricht University’s (UM) recent Foundation Day Celebrations.

With a folder and a copybook filled with notes, the teenagers are ready and waiting. Why they are participating? “I want to get a taste of what it is like at the university,” says one of them. This is already the third meeting, another seven to go, each time with a different point of view about the same theme: ‘War and Violence.’ Kai Karos from the Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience is teaching about ‘Psychology of Evil’ today. Do evil people exist, he asks. He counts

the hands that are hesitantly raised. “Okay, fifty-fifty.”

After an hour, the pupils collect their belongings. Time for a tutorial group meeting. In groups of eight or nine, together with two student tutors. “They are from different faculties to provide as much colour from the university as possible,” says professor Bert Smeets, leader of the programme. But how do they reach the pupils? “Our mentor came up with the idea,” says a pupil from Heerlen. At the Porta Mosana college in Maastricht, an e-mail was sent around. Whoever wanted, could send in a letter of motivation. It is not just for Dutch people; Aachen is also represented.

That the pupils are ambitious, is a no-brainer. They are visibly well-prepared: the presentations roll off the tongue in fluent English. In answer to the question whether they like Prob-

lem-Based Learning, nine hands are raised enthusiastically. So, do they want to go to UM in a couple of years’ time? The majority says they do. The odd one will have to wait a little longer: “Unfortunately I didn’t pass into next year.”

‘Teenzcollege’ is a programme in English for fourth- and fifth-year pre-university education pupils. During the ten meetings, the theme of ‘War and Violence’ is looked at from various disciplines: historic, legal, genetic, psychological and sociological/economic. In a final ceremony, the pupils will present their results and receive a certificate.

Lotte van de Loo

series the societal impact of um research

“It’s not every day that your work has such a profound impact on a person’s life”



Photo: Ellen Oosterhof

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*. What impact has research conducted at UM had in recent years? This week: how a UM report played a crucial role in exonerating a wrongly convicted man after 28 years.

It is May 2022, and a tremendous weight has just been lifted from Frank Vick’s shoulders. He has been acquitted of murder because of a lack of conclusive evidence. Tears are streaming down his face. “*Danke*”, he says to the judge. Vick was convicted of committing a murder at a campsite in Petten, North Holland. In the summer of 1994, a

German tourist named Peter Teschke was fatally stabbed just outside his tent. Vick, who was on holiday with Teschke and in a relationship with the man’s stepdaughter, confessed to the crime. Although he later recanted his testimony, he was sentenced to five years in prison. While on temporary release, Vick fled to Germany and never

returned to the Netherlands. Germany doesn’t extradite its own nationals to foreign countries.

A person’s life

Years later, after learning of an international warrant for his arrest, Vick set out to clear his name. His lawyer

contacted the Advisory Committee on Closed Criminal Cases (ACAS), which advises the Supreme Court of the Netherlands on requests for revision. The advisory body determined that an expert report should be prepared. In 2019, an ACAS staff member reached out to Melanie Sauerland, asking her to write the report. Sauerland is a forensic psychologist at UM specialising in false confessions, and German is her native language. After analysing the interrogations, Sauerland concluded that Vick had most likely made a false confession. “A major clue is that his confession didn’t square with the facts. Vick claimed to have stabbed his father-in-law once, but the victim had more than one stab wound. Vick kept changing his story after hearing the facts from the detectives.” Sauerland’s expert report prompted the Supreme Court to reopen the case in April 2022. “Reopening a case requires a ‘new fact’, new evidentiary information – typically new DNA traces, new witnesses or the discovery of the murder weapon. This was the first time that an expert report from a forensic psychologist was accepted as a new fact. It was a recognition of the importance of our field. And it was good news for anyone wrongly convicted but unable to present tangible new evidence.” Sauerland says Vick’s exoneration has been the most significant achievement of her career as a forensic psychologist. “It’s not every day that your work has such a profound impact on a person’s life. Justice prevailed – an innocent man’s name was cleared.”

Too emotional

Sauerland has never met or spoken to Vick. “His lawyer did email me after the acquittal. I invited Vick to come to Maastricht, as I think it would be incredibly interesting for our students to get a first-hand account of why our work is so important. The police questioned Vick a total of nineteen times, sometimes for hours and multiple times per day. But Vick declined. His lawyer let me know that he’s still too emotional to talk about it – maybe in a few years. It’s too bad, but I understand. His lawyer agreed to come, but we haven’t got around to it yet.” Several lawyers have since asked Sauerland to prepare expert reports for their clients. “It’s almost always about cases from the 1990s, when the police applied a lot of pressure during interrogations. It wasn’t until later that they realised this could lead to false confessions.”

Heavy drinking

Sauerland is currently examining another potential false confession case, but she has to decline most lawyers’ requests. “It takes a lot of time, and there’s often no budget to pay forensic psychologists for their work.” Why did Vick confess to a crime he didn’t commit? “Apart from the intense interrogations, he felt guilty – the victim was his father-in-law. And they had been heavily drinking the night before, which can affect your memory. On top of that, Vick had a dream that he tripped with a knife in his hand and injured the victim.”

Patroness of student carnival has been put under the care of Koko

Carnival is just around the corner, *Vrouw Wielemösj* unveiled



For those who are wondering where *Vrouw Wielemösj* is hanging out: the symbol of the Maastricht student carnival can be found in the Student Services Centre (SSC) again this year, as always. That is where the more than life-sized doll was unveiled by Maastricht's Prince Carnival last Thursday afternoon.

"There are *nonnevotten* as well," the receptionist says. Only to quickly answer after a confused question from the reporter who is not from Limburg: "A type of donut. Very sweet." The backdrop behind her had the red-yellow-green carnival colours, the speakers in the SCC are blaring out carnivalesque sounds. It is clear: *vastelaovend* (as carnival is called) is around the corner – in the weekend of 10 February the festivities will officially erupt.

Just like carnival is a tradition in Maastricht, so is the unveiling of *Vrouw Wielemösj*. The doll is already perched on the stage at the back of SCC when *Roy d'n Ierste*, (*Roy the First*) – city Prince of *Groet Mestreech* – and his entourage make their entrance just after three o'clock. Fifty or so association students and SSC staff members greet him with applause, after carefully singing along with *In Mestreech*, the recently rehearsed official carnival song.

However, before the unveiling can take place, the chairpersons of the student associations present take the oath, the '11 commandments' where they promise to take good care of *Vrouw Wielemösj*. This is done, just like the entire ceremony, in Maastricht dialect, which is audibly easier for some chairpersons than for others.

The honour of taking special care of the doll falls upon student association Koko this year, who will carry *Vrouw Wielemösj* "with the utmost respect" in the carnival parade on Sunday. Not that she is handed over immediately, by the way: the doll will be at SSC until 9 February and will be officially passed on to the students in the SSC that evening.



Photos: Joey Roberts

Peter Doorackers

Modern princesses



Princess Astrid Somers and her prince Photo: Anne van der Heul



Princess Caroline van Loo and her prince Photo: private archive

Caroline van Loo and Astrid Somers (both Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience) have been looking forward to the coming weekend for months, when the highlight of Carnival will be celebrated not only in Maastricht, but also in the surrounding towns and villages. "Well, carnival actually starts before November 11th," says Van Loo with

a wink. "I sit together with other women from my village Scheulder beforehand and we start thinking about the costume theme for the year. This time we are going as old horse riders, 'ouwe ruiters'. Often, we also sew something: just find a few scraps of fabric from the storage and get started. It's really fun."

Only once

A few kilometers away, in Noorbeek, people also have been in a party mood for some time. Here the wives of the 'Raad van Elf', in which Somers' husband is active since years, are preparing in their own group. Not only needle and thread in the weeks before carnival are used here, but also butter, bread rolls and knives just before the start of the parade. Both women are particularly looking forward to leading the polonaise – because that job is only reserved for the princess, who presides over the carnival in the village together with her husband as the prince couple. And Somers and Van Loo are the respective princesses of Noorbeek and Scheulder this year.

Somers: "A very special position, because you only become a prince or princess once." Did the two of them also have to walk along doors and ask for votes? "No, it wasn't that spectacular," they both laugh. Their husbands have been carnivalists through and through for years, and at some point they agreed to participate as prince couple, they say. Somers: "Me and my husband specifically waited for it, because until seven years ago only a man could become prince in Noorbeek. We wanted to do it together."

Social function

In addition to the numerous meetings, shows and trains that are on the prince couple's program, both women think that carnival is not just about partying - they also see the social function of the festivity. Somers: "As the royal couple, we are not only represented in the polonaise, but also come to retirement homes and schools. Carnival brings people together." Van Loo agrees. The following Tuesday evening it will be all over at midnight. The crown comes off, the music goes out. Suddenly the celebratory mood is gone. Van Loo: "People then say 'verdorrie', and 'see you next year!'"

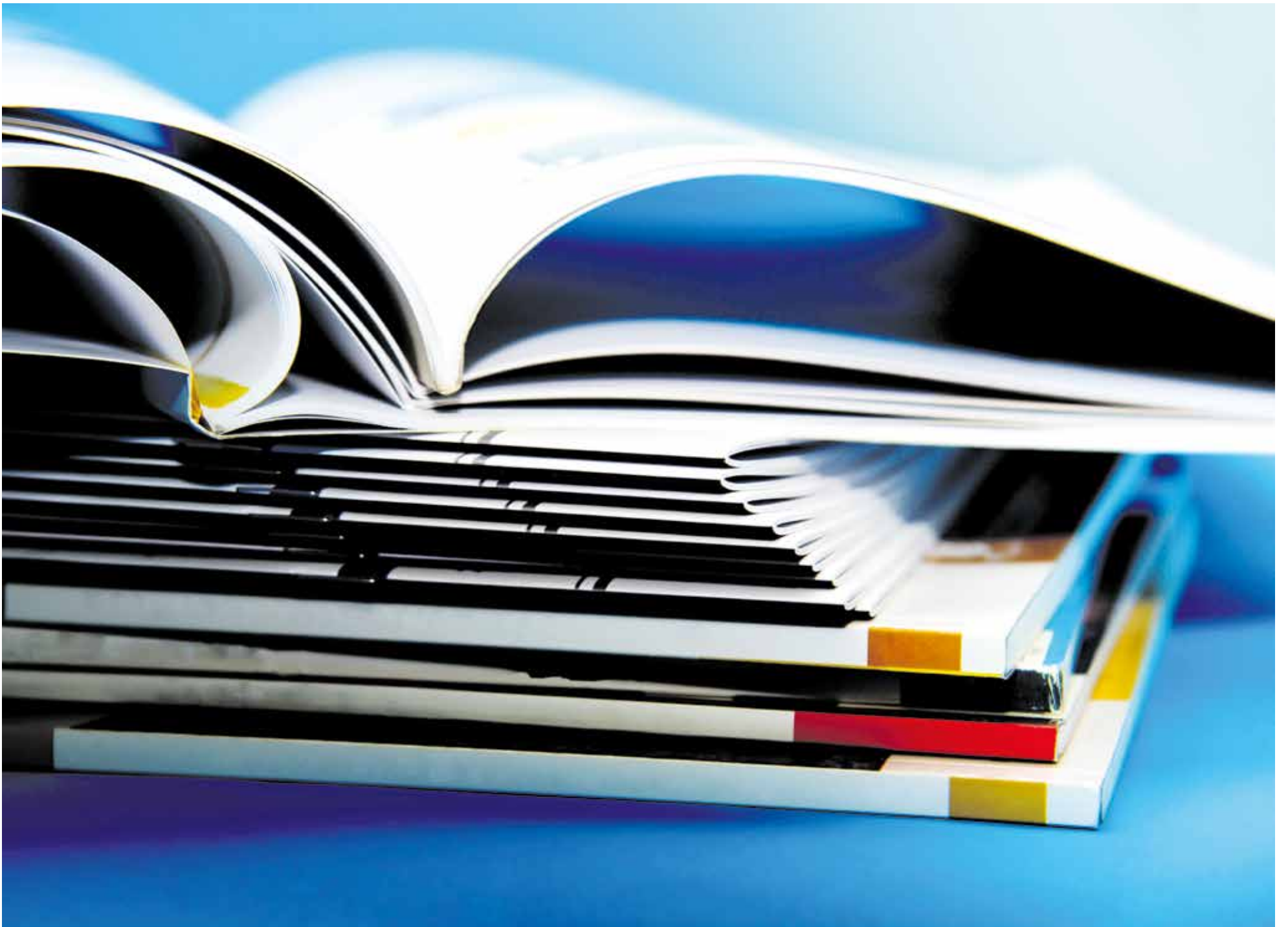


Photo: Shutterstock

Before publication in journals, researchers review each other's articles. This so-called peer review is one of the cornerstones of science, but it is used to commit fraud in several ways. Recently, 85 fake reviews were discovered in 23 journals.

FAKE REVIEWS OF SCIENTIFIC ARTICLES DISCOVERED

The fake reviews didn't surface after a large-scale investigation, but only after a professor at the University of Sevilla had suspicions, took a closer look at journals and sounded the alarm bell in a blog. "It is merely a blog," says Lex Bouter, retired professor of Methodology and Integrity at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. But the abuse that the professor exposes, is convincing," says Bouter, who shared the case on social media.

But first, what is peer review? It is customary for scientists in the same field to assess each other's articles before publication in a journal. Two or three (often anonymous) reviewers read the manuscript and write a review, and give advice to either publish or not. In the case of a go-ahead, the author adapts the text on the basis of the tips for improvements. After which, publication follows in the journal.

For journals, who set up the peer reviews, it is not easy to find reviewers. It takes time and many scientists would prefer to work on their own research than assessing other people's articles. That is why journals often ask the author to come up with suitable candidates.

Bouter: "That may sound strange, but researchers know their own field of specialisation best. They also know who is knowledgeable in their subject field. At the same time, a lot can go wrong."

Empty suggestions

It is true that some authors give the names of colleagues – sometimes heavyweights – but they don't always add their real e-mail addresses, but made-up ones. The review request from the journal never reaches the colleague, but appears in the author's inbox.

Who subsequently writes a glowing assessment of his own work. It also happens that researchers write fake reviews in which they emphatically advise the author to include in the manuscript references to articles written by the reviewer. That appears to be the case in the abuse exposed by the Spanish professor Angeles Oviedo-Garcia. She discovered a total of 85 articles in which a group of ten scientists (from five universities) reviewed manuscripts in order to inflate the number of references to their own works. The more references to your publications, the greater your prestige as a scientist.

The reviews themselves carried little weight and were filled with standard texts, in which reviewers (and possibly also ChatGPT) make empty suggestions about paragraphs being too long or too detailed. Bouter: "It reminds me of something we have known for quite some time: citation cartels. Here too, scientists agreed to refer to each other's articles. Except that this was not always accompanied by fake reviews."

Credits for reviews

However, fake reviews are not a new phenomenon. Back in 2020, six-hundred articles were withdrawn because the reviews had been invented. This appeared from data from the Retraction Watch Database.

Some journals check all reviews (and reviewers) for authenticity, others do not, says Bouter. "What none of them do, as far

as I know, is run the reviews through a plagiarism scanner, as they often do with scientists' manuscripts. In that case, you would fish the fake reviews out in no time, because a lot of text that has been used before is repeated."

Something that would also make a difference, says the retired professor, is if scientists were given points or academic credits for reviewing manuscripts. "If scientists take their job as reviewers more seriously because of this, the cheaters will have less opportunity."

Paid per publication

Mark Spigt, researcher at GP Medicine, finds the cheating by the group of ten scientists a peculiar case. Together with his colleague Ilja Arts, Spigt wrote a handbook about peer reviewing and wonders what interest the ten academics had in writing fake reviews. "It may generate two or three extra references for one's own work, but that is in stark contrast to the risks they are running, especially

Writing
glowing
assessments
of their
own work



Photo: Wikimedia

as they were writing fake reviews under their own names. They are mainly from Asian countries, maybe there is more pressure there to publish than here in the West."

There are also countries where matters are organised differently, says Bouter. "There are, for example, universities where researchers are paid per publication."

Cloud of mistrust

The fake reviews by the 'ten' were detected in 23 different journals, all managed by MDPI. Bouter: "That is a gigantic publishing company that manages a considerable part of the scientific journals market. Many researchers view MDPI as one of the so-called *predatory publishers*, publishers that regard a high turnover more important than providing quality. Although this does not mean that all publications by MDPI are no good, it does mean that their quality control has occasional shortcomings."

Very worrying, says Spigt, this trend of dubious journals and fake reviews. "Reviewing constitutes the backbone of science. Twenty years ago, the scientific publication system was still reliable, but now there is a cloud of mistrust hanging over it. Every scientific article has to be checked for reliability these days. It is becoming more and more difficult to differentiate between real and fake."

news

Ask me Anything about: 'Internationalisation and language at UM. What are we in for?'

Foreign staff members fear dismissal due to attack from The Hague on internationalisation

Remarkable: the first questions at an 'Ask Me Anything' session about the threats from politicians in The Hague for the UM as an international university are from foreign staff members. Apparently, they are seriously worried: "Will there be dismissals?" Also remarkable: UM wants to recruit more Dutch students again.

That the shadow cast by criticism from the Hague on the internationalisation of higher education falls heavily over Maastricht University is no longer news. This was the reason for an Ask Me Anything session this week with the theme: 'Internationalisation and language at UM. What are we in for?' About 270 employees took part online. President Rianne Letschert summarised the issues again: the large influx of foreign students, the possible displacement of Dutch students, the shortage on the housing market, the Englishisation of education, and the loss of Dutch as an academic language, all of these are the subject of discussion. The political parties VVD, BBB, NSC and PVV who

have tried to form a government (last Tuesday, NSC quit), want to reduce migration of not only asylum seekers, but also foreign students and employees, and to have the Dutch language play an important role in education again.

It is a debate that cannot be ignored: if those parties get what they want, UM is in for some stormy weather. But Letschert and her two assistants at the session, the deans Harald Merckelbach (Psychology and Neurosciences) and Christine Neuhold (Arts and Social Sciences), are not pessimistic. They refer to the major economic role of UM in the region. Because the very parties that are threatening the internationalisation of higher education are, at the same time, in favour of strengthening regions that are having a difficult time, said Letschert. UM has become an important economic driving force in Limburg. They reckon that damaging UM means damaging the region.

It is not that people are standing still in the meantime; the critical signals have been too strong for that. The universities must do something, UM must do something. Next Thursday,

the fourteen universities, UNL as a collective, will publish a series of proposals – on the 'chances of staying' for graduates, Dutch in the bachelor's phase, student housing – which by the way does not need to be fulfilled by every institute in the same way.

They want to provide more facilities for foreign students to learn Dutch. For UM, this means not just the *Social Dutch* course, but also language courses tailored to their own field. The Language Centre, together with faculties, will look at what is needed. One of the objectives is to get more foreign graduates to find a job here and settle. That is what a rapidly ageing region like South Limburg needs, said the panel. Merckelbach pointed out that drastic government measures could have an adverse effect. In Denmark, the decision to substantially limit the number of study programmes in English was overturned after two years because the international graduates appeared to be indispensable for the Danish labour market.

Furthermore, UM wants to recruit more Dutch students. Last September, two third of the

first-year bachelor's had a foreign nationality. The portion of Dutch students could grow, by (also) using Dutch during the open days and by making the website bilingual – which is in English at the moment. Letschert: "For pupils from pre-university education who visit an open day, the English language could constitute a higher threshold. Such pupils might think: I am not ready for this yet."

Does UM still want to grow, was a question from the online audience. Not in Maastricht, Letschert said decisively. "We only have ambitions to grow in Venlo and Heerlen, but even there, we have to constantly look at our capacity and the housing market."

Back to the concerns of the international staff who fear that there will be dismissals if the critics in The Hague get their way. No, that is really not under discussion, was the reassuring answer. The panel does not expect a worst-case scenario in which all bachelor's programmes will have to be run in Dutch.

Riki Janssen

 Maastricht University



Want a voice
in the university?

Run for election in the
Faculty, University and
Service Council.

More info:
www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/elections



THE ANNOUNCEMENTS
OF THE UNIVERSITY,
FACULTIES, SERVICE
CENTRES AND STUDENT
ORGANISATIONS CAN BE
FOUND ON **WWW.
OBSERVANTONLINE.NL**

Take a
look
at our
socials

Facebook:
[facebook.com/
ObservantUM](https://facebook.com/ObservantUM)
Instagram:
[observant_um](https://instagram.com/observant_um)
Twitter:
[observantUM](https://twitter.com/observantUM)

Agenda academic ceremonies Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6

08-02, 10.00h Anita Bhandari	23-02, 16.00h Prof. dr. Bela Kubat
08-02, 16.00h Janine Ziemons	Afscheidscollege
19-02, 13.00h Martine Else Bol	26-02, 16.00h Esther Karen Pijl
20-02, 10.00h Mirella J.J. Haartmans	27-02, 16.00h Elisabeth Jorinde Marie De
21-02, 13.00h Shivesh Anand	Neubourg
22-02, 13.00h Job Stoks	28-02, 13.00h Xingzhen Zhang
Double Doctoral Degree	29-02, 13.00h Marie Rickert
Maastricht University and	Double degree Maastricht
University of Hasselt	University and University of
22-02, 16.00h Katinka E. Pani-Harreman	Münster
23-02, 10.00h Ilaria Amodeo	29-02, 16.00h Anouk Rijken
23-02, 13.00h Maurice J.L. Huizing	



Maastricht University

Vacatures

Werken voor de meest internationale universiteit van Nederland? Scan de QR-code voor ons actuele vacature overzicht*.

Voor meer informatie over werken bij de Universiteit Maastricht, ga naar <https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/nl/werken-bij-de-um>

*Medewerkers van UM kunnen een volledig overzicht van interne- en externe vacatures vinden door in te loggen op SuccessFactors via Umployee.



www.maastrichtuniversity.nl