

# observant

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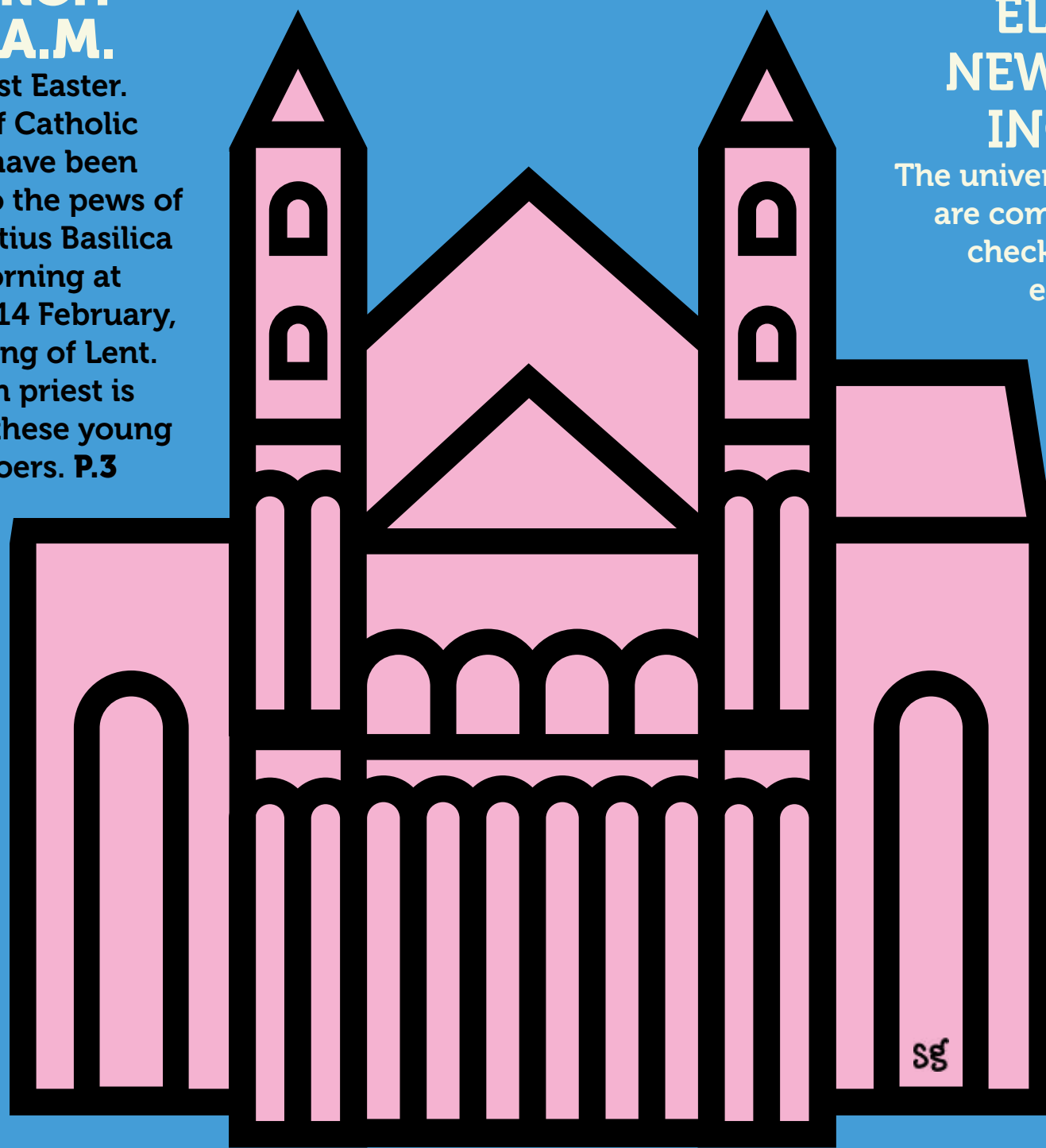
## GOING TO CHURCH AT 7 A.M.

It is almost Easter. A group of Catholic students have been shuffling into the pews of the St. Servatius Basilica every morning at 7 a.m. since 14 February, the beginning of Lent. The parish priest is happy with these young churchgoers. **P.3**



## ELECTION NEWSPAPER INCLUDED

The university elections are coming up again: check the attached election paper.



## SMARTER ACADEMIC YEAR

Four weeks shorter and thus longer Christmas and summer holidays. The Faculty of Science and Engineering will test from September onwards whether a shorter academic year will actually reduce the workload. **P.5**

## EASTER

There will be no paper issue next week due to Easter. The next issue will come out on Thursday 11 April. For the latest news, go to [www.observantonline.nl/english](http://www.observantonline.nl/english)





Riki Janssen

editorial

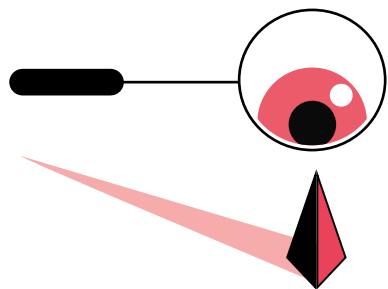
## “We’ll get rid of the printer, but you are irreplaceable”

“Today has been such a heart-warming day that it makes me wonder why I’m even leaving.” However, our soon-to-be-former colleague MT (known as “Mo” to the team) has given the decision a lot of thought. He’s ready to be done with his weekly commute from Amersfoort to Maastricht. After more than 25 years as an editor at *Observant* – limited to two days per week in recent years – he will continue as a freelance journalist. So this week, we took a trip down memory lane. We reminisced about the bike ride to the top of Alpe d’Huez to celebrate *Observant’s* 25th anniversary, where he was the only one – out of nearly a hundred UM employees – to take a wrong turn somewhere and, much to everyone’s amusement, ended up crossing the finish line from the other side. And about the headline of his very first *Observant* article in

March 1998, which read “Employed male bachelors often reach for the bottle”. And his penchant for Q&A articles (with the questions written out), the professor he interviewed most often (Onno van Schayck), his ever-present soft brown briefcase, and the bicycle he left to languish in a university bike park after moving, with its chronically underinflated tyres. And the title of “Chief Printer” he acquired at some point. How? Our constantly malfunctioning printer, an issue we never managed to fix, happened to be near his office. His dry humour also came up. When his future colleague CF called him to ask what it was like to work in a team with a married couple, his deadpan response was, “It’s fine, but they do spend all day kissing.” And we talked about his discerning eye in meetings (“This article needs a much stronger

headline”) and, of course, the countless well-written articles he penned for *Observant*. But the flowers, the envelope for a weekend getaway, the poster with old photos and memories, they all focused on the Kerkrade-born, Nijmegen-educated man who has been our cherished colleague. Or, as editor WD put it, “You’re a great colleague, and we’re sad to see you go. But we’ll survive. And the next time the printer acts up, we’ll just have to get rid of it. You are irreplaceable.” We’re going to miss him.

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



## splinters

Een grappig voorval, een opvallend nieuwtje, iets interessants wat elders in het land gebeurde: het staat in deze rubriek. Met bijdragen van: Cleo Freriks and Dennis Vaendel

### Help with climate anxiety



It would be difficult to find a place in the world where the weather hasn’t been ‘too’ the past few years: too hot, too dry, too wet, too cold, too stormy. Not to mention all those alarming reports about the future of the planet. As a result, more and more people are so worried about the climate that they suffer from what is called climate anxiety or climate depression. At the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU), they found the problem to be so great that they are now the first in the Netherlands to be offering the ‘Geestelijke zorg en Planetaire gezondheid’ (Mental Health Care and Planetary Health) course. It is intended for master’s students who want to do something with the existential questions surrounding the ecological crisis, says the press release. It is part of the master’s of Spiritual Care by the Amsterdam Faculty of Theology. Future mental health carers will not just work with despondent climate activists. “There are also farmers who are dealing with questions about livelihood security,” says lecturer and initiator Hans Alma.



### Few people working on Good Friday

A day off tomorrow? That does not apply to everyone at UM. The university’s collective bargaining agreement allows employees to ‘swap’ Good Friday for another (religious) feast or memorial day. An option that has been emphatically promoted by UM on the employee’s intranet: as an “international employer of a diverse community” UM will deal “generously” with exchange requests. Interest, however, appears to be limited. So far, the HR department has processed a mere six requests, according to policy officer Manon Duchateau. The UM employees concerned will work on Good Friday in order to be off during Eid-al-Fitr (Sugar Feast), Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) or ‘the 11th of the 11th’ (the traditional opening of the carnival season). Whether requests for an exchange have been denied – something that a manager may do in the case of “grave operational interests” (such as shutting down a building) – Duchateau does not know. “But we have not received any signs about that.” Duchateau admits that the number of requests “may at first sight appear low,” but points out that UM already offers “a broad scale of flexible options. Besides, employees who don’t normally work on Friday are not eligible, while others have sufficient holidays or compensation hours to have a free day on the feast or memorial day that they want to celebrate.” An extension of the ‘flexible holiday policy’ to other ‘free’ days (a subject on the collective bargaining agreement negotiation table) is something she would therefore “welcome. We will continue to strive to offer flexible options.”

### Police pursuit

The average Maastricht citizen won’t look twice if they saw a camera crew following policemen. After all, eighteen seasons of the popular police series *Flikken Maastricht* have been filmed in the city. In the coming months, however, it won’t be actors who are at the other end of the camera lens, but real policemen. Starting this week, presenter Ewout Genemans will follow six police duos during their daily duties for *Bureau Maastricht*. Previously, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague were among the cities that formed the setting for the popular reality series. That the choice for the sixth season fell on Maastricht, is not surprising, Genemans explained on *Instagram*. “Close

to the border, with a vibrant nightlife, a university and football city, home to many expats and an international ambience.” According to mayor Wim Hillenaar, the series will also show “the raw edges”, because “not everything is *Sjiek en Sjoen*” (local dialect for nice and tidy) in the city, he says to *De Limburger*. “That is good, because it will ensure that the police can reckon on more support.” Law breakers are therefore forewarned: until September they can expect – in addition to policemen – to also have a camera confronting them. The series can be watched from October on RTL4 and streaming service Videoland.

# Pilot project 'Personal Study Advice' at Law failed

*With a new curriculum in the bachelor's programmes Dutch Law and Tax Law in September 2020, the Binding Study Advice (BSA) was also suspended there. Instead, a Personal Study Advice (PSA) should ensure more student satisfaction. After four years, the pilot project is about to be buried.*

"We wanted to move away from the BSA-system in which a sword hangs above students, that they hear on a certain moment that they are not allowed to continue their studies, while they don't understand where this decision comes from," said Sjoerd Claessens, vice dean for education at the Faculty of Law, during one of the latest committee meetings of the University Council. The members are asked to give the Executive Board (EB) advice on the proposed decision of the reintroduction of the BSA, although the EB already approved. "With the revised bachelor's programmes Dutch Law and Tax Law we also wanted to get away from the idea that everything revolves around the exams. A study is more than jump-

ing through hoops." That's why the so-called Personal Study Advice (PSA) was introduced in 2020. The alternative to the BSA is claimed to be more personal: "We desired to have a dialogue with the students about how they are doing and whether the bachelor is something for them", Claessens explains. Above all, however, students under the PSA ultimately have to decide for themselves – with some advice of their mentor – whether they want to continue their studies. A binding decision about it, as under the BSA, is no longer given. At the same time, the lawsuits against the Law Faculty that were coming yearly as a reaction towards the negative BSA decisions were reduced to zero. After almost four years on the testing bench, the faculty board, has now pulled the ripcord – the pilot project has failed. From September onwards, both bachelor's degree courses will return to the BSA. The reasons for this are twofold: "After a total of four years in the pilot phase, we still cannot say whether the PSA is better. This is troubled by Covid, as we can't measure if students fail because of

the pandemic (after effects) or not," answers Joost Sillen, director of studies of Dutch Law bachelor programmes, to questions of *Observant*. They also see that some students that complete only a limited number of courses successfully remain enrolled for years. Claessens, in the U-Council meeting: "We couldn't convince enough students (who showed too little progress) that it would be better for them to stop."

What exactly is changing now the BSA returns? Apart from the fact that no legally binding decision is made under the PSA, there is actually little difference between the two approaches. Just as under the PSA, personal meetings with mentors and, if necessary, the study advisors are also planned in, explains Sillen. But, as Claessens points out in the U-council meeting: "Although the meetings will still focus on the personal development of the student, mentors will also explain (legal) procedures after a negative BSA."

Simon Wirtz



## Tax Season



In January 2024, I started a little personal experiment - I wanted to learn more about the sources of my own work stress. As it turns out, on the average working day in 2024 so far, I spent 1.34 hours on emails (ranging between 10 minutes and 3.5 hours), participated in 4.93 meetings (1-12), and dealt with 8.8 different projects/tasks per day (4-28). Knowing what I know about information processing, attention, and concentration, this is not great.

Last week, I learned about a concept that explains why my work feels as straining as it is rewarding. It is called 'overhead tax' and describes the admin work that comes with each project or task. This includes information you need to get started on a new task, the coordination with others, as well as forms and procedures required. Currently, the overhead tax I 'pay' for doing my work is around 60 per cent. Only 40 per cent of my time each day is actually spent on tasks themselves.

To reduce this overhead tax, coined by author Cal Newport, you're supposed to limit the number of projects you work on at a time, collect the inputs of colleagues as efficiently as possible, and block the same amount of time for meetings as for getting work done (Cal handles a 1:5 ratio). However, these suggestions are individual fixes to a systemic issue. We work in a culture where working to exhaustion is the norm, rather than an occasional necessity. A culture in which many feel guilty when they do not work as much as possible, so as not to let down students and colleagues. So now that blue envelopes are flooding our mailboxes again, I encourage you to tally not only your state taxes, but also your overhead tax. We can only reduce this tax together – like prioritising a small number of tasks at a time, putting limits on when to schedule meetings, discussing how to use email most efficiently, and exploring how shared processes can be streamlined. Do you think together we could get to the familiar tax rate 36.97 per cent?



Therese Grohnert,  
assistant professor SBE

## An early mass in preparation for Easter Students pray while the city is still asleep



Photo: Joey Roberts

*Outside you can hear the sound of the road sweepers that clean the streets of Maastricht before daybreak. Inside, in a small chapel in the Sint Servaas Basilica, is the sound of Latin and English prayers. Getting up out of bed before seven in the morning to go to church? A group of catholic students – on average about twenty to 25, it varies with each day – has been doing so since 14 February.*

Besides it being Valentines Day, it was also the start of lent, the preparation period for Easter. This prompted some students to ask parish priest John Dautzenberg to say an early mass every morning. He likes to rise on time for this:

he finds it encouraging to see young people in his church.

But still: at seven o'clock? "It is early," Italian student of Business Engineering Mattia Valente admits during breakfast, which they have together in the sacristy afterwards. But: "Going to mass brings me closer to God." So far, Louis de Boissieu has been here every day. It was tough for him in the beginning. "I am used to getting up late. But I go to help out". The French student of European Studies at Zuyd hogeschool is actually an altar server. "It is important to me. It is a good thing to start your day with Christ and to take the time to pray for other people."

De Boissieu is looking forward to Easter, which

will be celebrated this weekend: "That is the feast of the Resurrection of Christ, the foundation of my religion." He will celebrate it at home with his family in France. Visiting family is not possible for Valente: "I have an exam two days after Easter."

The early trip to the church has reaped practical rewards as well, the two have noticed. "I have the whole day ahead of me," says Valente. "When I go to the library in a little while to study, I am fully awake." Now that he has to rise early, De Boissieu also has more time to study. Smiling: "I am now on time and prepared for my lesson."

Peter Doorackers

series the societal impact of UM research

# A new degree programme? Maastricht research determines in part whether there will be one



Didier Fouarge 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 labour market forecasts by UM researchers are shaping the landscape of Dutch higher education.

Towards the end of last year, the Dutch Ministry of Education turned down a proposal for three new degree programmes at Maastricht University – two bachelor's programmes and one master's. There is currently no demand for young graduates in Responsible Data Science, Sustainable Bioscience or Crop Biotechnology and Engineering, reasoned the Committee for the Efficiency of Higher Education (CDHO), which advises the Minister of Education on approving new degree programmes. And for the past ten years, its recommendations have been

based partly on labour market forecasts by the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA) of the School of Business and Economics. ROA has been issuing these forecasts since 1986. Didier Fouarge, originally from Belgium, is director and professor at the centre.

### The irony

UM research getting in the way of new programmes being introduced at UM – Fouarge appreciates the irony, he admits over Zoom. In any case, it illustrates the importance attached to

ROA forecasts beyond the walls of the university. "How will the labour market evolve over the next five or six years? Which directions seem promising? Our information serves to help companies, governments and prospective students make informed policies and decisions." "Help", he stresses, is the operative word here. "We do our research as best we can, but we don't have all the answers." Fouarge says the CDHO recognises this, too. "Our forecasts inform their decisions. That's real impact", he says proudly. "At the same time, the committee is open to listening to input from

institutions wanting to launch new programmes. They've become more flexible about this over the years."

However, Fouarge believes the question of whether ROA research has a social impact should be interpreted more broadly. "We ask ourselves this question every year, along with the question of how to measure impact. We currently use three indicators: how often we speak at companies and other organisations, how often the press refers to us, and how often our research gets mentioned in the House of Representatives." And Fouarge argues that it could be interpreted even more broadly. "The other day, a contact of mine at the Ministry of Education asked if I could help answer a few parliamentary questions. I sent him a long email. If you ask me, that's impact, too – helping policymakers formulate good answers."

He acknowledges that these things take time, and time is a limited resource. "Look, of course my colleagues and I want to publish our research in top-tier journals. But you can't do that ten times in a row if you also want to disseminate your findings to society. No, I don't find that painful. It even says in our vision document that ROA aims to inform and inspire policy through high-quality research. It would be painful if our work was never cited in key policy documents, or if external parties never commissioned our research. I accept that this means I don't publish as much as other economists. I enjoy doing research that informs policy, whether at the national legislative level or in the field of education."

### Unintended impact

There's also such a thing as *unintended* impact, Fouarge notes with some irritation. ROA research also gets referenced in discussions about discontinuing existing programmes and debates about allocating funds across different education sectors. "That's not what our forecasts are intended for", he says firmly. "They aren't Soviet-type planning tools, or a means of determining how to allocate funds." Fouarge, an avid cyclist, prefers to liken them to the weather radar he checks before heading out on his bike. "It gives me an idea of what to expect on the road and whether I'll face headwinds on my way back. But even the best forecasters get the weather wrong sometimes. Our forecasts are like a 'labour market radar' for policymakers – they provide direction for the future, but we don't always get it right either."

Peter Doorackers

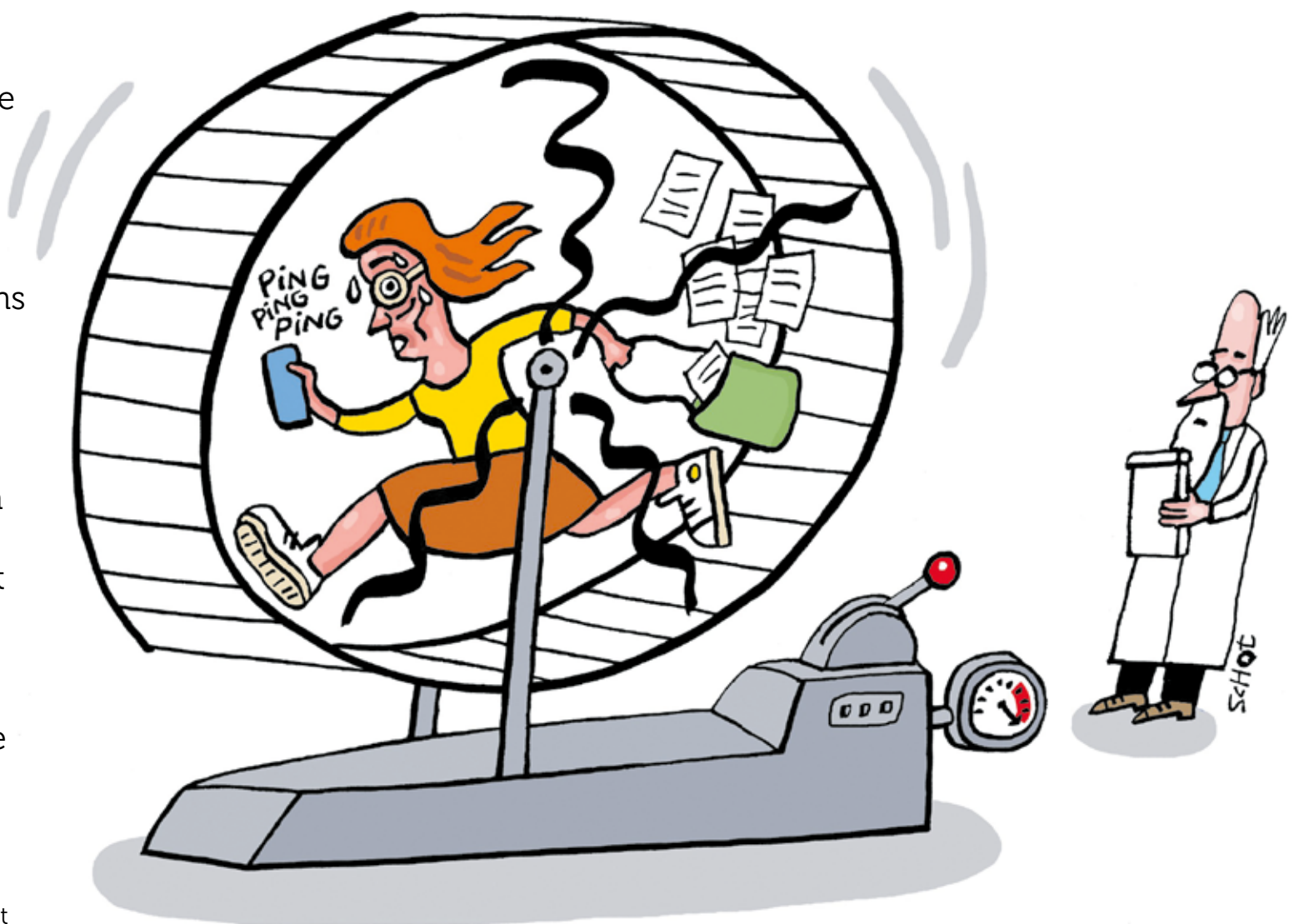
U-Council: “Will lecturers not get even busier, because all the material has to be dealt with in a shorter period?”

# Shorter year for the Faculty of Science and Engineering from September

The Faculty of Science and Engineering is going to shorten the academic year by four weeks from September. This means longer summer and Christmas holidays. Dean Thomas Cleij: “It may not seem like a huge step, but it is a radical change to our university system that works with blocks of eight and four weeks. We are the first in the Netherlands who take such a drastic step.”

Text: Wendy Degens

Illustration: Bas van der Schot



*“The summer holidays will be certainly two but maybe three weeks longer for most students”*

The ‘Smarter Academic Year’ dossier has been on the university’s desk for some time. And although Maastricht University is currently investigating what works best and what is feasible for the *entire* organisation – with the ultimate goal of lowering the workload – the Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE) is going to start a three-year experiment after the summer. The academic year will be shortened by four weeks for all FSE programmes by breaking with the university system of blocks of eight and four weeks. These will become periods of seven and three weeks. The fact that the faculty in Randwyck is already embarking on this project, has to do with money from the Ministry of Education. Last year, minister Dijkgraaf gave fifteen educational institutes, including UM, the freedom to experiment on a small scale with a smarter academic year. Dijkgraaf wants to discover by experiment what works and what does not.

“We have removed a week between periods 1 and 2, and between 4 and 5. We will turn them into weeks without scheduled education, as is the case at the University Colleges. There will be certain activities for students, but there won’t be any lessons,” dean Thomas Cleij recently explained in a University Council committee meeting about the pilot. In doing so, the Christmas holidays will be lengthened by a week and the faculty would like to close the year by the middle of June. “Maybe there will still be resits, but the summer holidays will be certainly two but maybe three weeks longer for most students.”

Hundreds of models were reviewed by the faculty, but as FSE “is a miniature version of the university,” Cleij said, – referring to the various (interfaculty) programmes – the consequences were sometimes undesirable. For example, the original idea to scrap period 3 (after Christmas) would lead to friction with the so-called February influx. Dropping the last short period then? “That is not handy either, because that is the time of the year when many biologists [e.g. in the Maastricht Science Program, ed.] do fieldwork,” Cleij explains.

## More questions

University Council committee members wonder how the experiment at FSE will relate to the rest of the university, which is still working with a ‘traditional’ calendar. “You are limited in what you want and can do,” Cleij admits, but interfaculty education is still possible, he says. Although, the later it is in the year (certainly in period 5), the more difficult it will become for students and staff to attend classes and teach, because the weeks will be less and less synchronised. The University Council has more questions, such as what about credits, will they remain the same? (Yes) And will lecturers not get even busier, because all the material has to be dealt with in a shorter period? Cleij emphasises that it is not the idea to squash things together, “we have to be smarter about

how we shape a course. And no, it won’t necessarily lead to a lower workload with so many students and subjects, because in that respect nothing will change, but we hope to compensate that with longer periods of rest.”

## Turner

If the experiment is successful, will the whole university change over, the University Council wants to know. According to rector Pamela Habibović, UM is focusing on a “more integral approach”, so not just a cut in the calendar. Although the latter was the original idea, UM changed course after a report from independent consultancy Turner (which was shared with the rector and all the deans last summer). According to Turner, simply shortening the year by a number of weeks was not a sustainable solution for the workload problems. Attention should also be paid to aspects such as the standard hours, more staff and less administrative rigmarole for lecturers. At the moment, UM is taking a look at the different actions it can take, the main question being: what and when does it really benefit the staff? When will they have more rest? The pilot project at FSE will be evaluated annually; at the end of the experiment, it will have to be clear whether the cut in the calendar provides more breathing space or not, as the Turner agency predicts if you only push one button.

## science

**M**aastricht and marl are intimately connected: the light-coloured limestone adorns many facades in the Limburg capital. Beautiful, but it also requires a lot of maintenance: marl is soft, not resistant to acid rain, discolours easily, and cracks develop quickly. Methods do exist to counteract this, but they are not ideal, say Floor Vervuren and Fien Eickmans. Some actually lead to unwanted discolouration; others are “very labour-intensive, because they involve replacing a whole block of stone”.

### DNA origami

There should be an easier way for that, thought Vervuren, Eickmans, and nine other students from the Faculty of Science and Engineering, who were supervised by associate professor of synthetic biology Erik Steen Redeker. As ‘Team SublimeStone’ (a play on the word ‘limestone’), the eleven participated in iGEM last year, an international competition for research projects at the interface of biology and technology. Their solution for the marl problem? A genetically modified bacterium. Or actually two, Vervuren and Eickmans explain: the one is adapted in such a way that it creates “DNA origami”: a strand of DNA that spontaneously forms a kind of spider web in the crack. The second one had an enzyme added to it that uses CO<sub>2</sub> from the ambient air to form bicarbonate. “Combine this with calcium, and it creates calcium bicarbonate, or limestone,” says Vervuren. “We did that by adding both bacteria to a gel that also contained calcium ions.” The calcium then attaches to the ‘spider web’ and fills in the crack. There is a photograph on Team SublimeStone’s website of a bottle containing small white lumps: the first bacterial limestone created by the team. “It was really cool to see that it actually worked,” says Vervuren. More so, Eickmans adds: “There was a party.” Apart from the party, their work was worth a golden medal and a top-10 classification in the iGEM competition. On top of all that, they received the public award last week at the award ceremony for the annual Prins Friso Engineering Prize. “So cool, we did not expect that,” they say, even though compared to last year, celebrations were more modest. “Princess Beatrix and princess Mabel were sitting in the first row,” Eickmans clarifies. “So you don’t scream when you win.”

### More research needed

And now? Will the gel soon find its way onto the shelves of your local DIY shop? The two laugh: we are not there yet, for



Two prizes for Maastricht students

# Intestinal bacterium repairs marl walls

Maastricht students were able to take a bacterium that is normally found in the intestines and use it to repair cracks in marl. They were recently awarded for this [again]. “The first time that the bacterium created limestone, we held a party.”

**Text:** Peter Doorakkers **Photo:** Team SublimeStone

sure. Team SublimeStone is proud that in such a short time – “we had four months’ time for the lab work” – it was proven that the idea works. “But for practical applications, there is still a lot of research to do,” says Vervuren. For that, more equipment than is currently available at FSE is needed, says Eickmans, in order to test how strong the newly created marl actually is. More

research, and also more time, which is very scarce now that many team members are in the final stages of their bachelor’s programmes and have to write their theses.

### New bacterium

The work hasn’t come to a complete standstill though. Until now, the team used *E. coli*, a bacterium found in the

large intestine in humans. However, it is not very resistant to heat, which prompted them to check if a different bacterium, *Bacillus Subtilis*, could be used. This also forms spores, small ‘dormant’ particles that can survive in a stone, Eickmans explains: “If a crack occurs and water seeps in, the spore ‘wakes up’. The idea is that it then repairs the crack by itself.”

Moot court competition in international law

# Maastricht law students go to Washington



“All rise”, it sounds in the ‘Feestzaal’ of the law faculty on Friday morning, 15 March. No, it wasn’t a real court case, it was the ‘dress-rehearsal’ for a moot court competition in international law. Four Maastricht students will be travelling to Washington for this at the end of the month.

**Text:** Lotte van Loo **Photo:** Joey Roberts

**S**adie Kinnersley (21 years of age) is one of them. But this ‘moot court’ is not her first. During her bachelor’s at the European Law School, the American had also participated in a moot court competition in the field of human rights, in the building of the European Court in Strasbourg. She was successful, her team won and

was allowed to do a month-long work placement there. She wanted more, so the (by now) master’s student of Globalisation and Law is participating in the Philip C. Jessup International Moot Court Competition. “It is a field that I don’t usually have much to do with. That makes it even more interesting.”

This time she is on the other side of the table, as a respondent. As a two-strong team they will be going against the applicant, which now consists of two fellow students. Both parties have collected a pile of preparatory paperwork. But there is hardly any sneaky consultation. Kinnersley: “We learn everything off by

heart. A real court doesn’t even do that, but that is the best way for them to test our pleading skills. Besides, they ask all kinds of questions, also unrelated to the case, so we have to be well-prepared.” Across from the students there are three members of staff from the Faculty of Law, the imaginary ‘International Court of Justice’ who fire questions at the students during the 45-minute proceedings. The latter, by the way, almost always have their answers ready. And what if they don’t immediately know what to say? Then they sometimes just bluff a little. “As long as you do it with confidence,” she says.

The real International Court of Law deals with disputes between countries, but in ‘the Jessup’ it is all about a fictitious dispute between fictitious countries. “The names always start with an A and an R, for applicant and respondent. This year the plaintiff is from the republic of Antrano and the defence is from the kingdom of Remisia” Kinnersley explains. That sounds more childish than it is. It concerns complicated legal problems: the case is described in about twenty pages. Core concepts include statelessness, consular protection and the binding power of decisions by the UN Security Council.

At the moment the four students from Maastricht oppose one another, but in the actual competition the opposing party will be from another university. During the national round in Amsterdam these were Dutch universities, now they will have international opponents.

With participants from more than seven hundred universities, this moot court competition is the largest worldwide. This is another reason for Kinnersley to participate. In the future, she wants to work abroad, preferably as a human rights lawyer. Now she gets to practice, especially to speak more slowly. Because even though her enthusiasm may be contagious, she does need to be understood, she was told afterwards. Is that nerves? “Not at the moment, I was nervous in Amsterdam, but also determined to win.” At the end of March, the students and their two coaches will fly to Washington for the competition. On 6 April they will know whether they have won that one too.

## news

# Pressing letters for politicians in the Hague from across Limburg 'Drastically limiting the influx of foreign students will be disastrous for Limburg'

*If politicians in The Hague decide to drastically limit the influx of foreign students, that won't just have disastrous consequences for Maastricht University, but for the whole province. That message, presented in two pressing letters, was sent to politicians in The Hague last week by UM, other Limburg education institutes, the Province of Limburg, cities from Maastricht to Venlo, trade unions, MKB and the Brightlands campuses.*

Forty per cent fewer students at UM (from 22,900 to 13,500), 16 per cent fewer at Zuyd hogeschool, a permanent loss of 4,500 jobs in the Euregio and a drop in the Limburg economy of almost 1 billion euro in the next cabinet period (four years). Commissioned by the university and the university of applied sciences, research agency Panteia calculated the "economic footprint" of the two institutes for the city of Maastricht, the province and the Euregio. They also looked at the consequences of the government deciding to opt for Dutch as the official language in the bachelor's education programmes. The fact that these letters have landed in The Hague last Friday, has everything to do with the four parties (PVV, VVD, NSC and BBB) that are currently taking serious steps towards creating a new coalition. None of those four is in favour of far-reaching internationalisation of higher education, but they do support the idea of strong regions. Striking while the iron is hot seems to be the Limburg strategy.

## Worst-case scenario

This worst-case scenario – Dutch as the official language – won't happen, states the pressing letter from UM and other education institutes: "It has become clear that a rigorous halt to the influx of international students is



The Limburg flag Photo: Shutterstock

totally undesirable." But there is still a lot of uncertainty. For months, Minister Dijkgraaf has been working on his bill 'Internationalisering in balans' (Balanced Internationalisation). The things he wants include protection of Dutch in higher education and helping universities that can no longer manage the influx of foreign students because of, for example, housing problems or overfull lecture halls. The universities themselves also acknowledge those bottlenecks, but they don't want one generic measure (changing all English bachelor's programmes to Dutch at all universities), but a 'tailor-made' solution. After all, the institutes are located in different regions, each with its own needs and problems. UM, as President Rianne Letschert has emphasised time and again, is situated in a border region where the population is ageing and shrinking,

and for which the university is an important economic driver. At the same time, Maastricht University – just like its sister institutes – has put a stop to the introduction of new English bachelor's programmes, and Dutch fluency for students and employees is receiving more attention.

## Erosion

The ageing population, state the pressing letters, will cause a considerable drop in the influx of secondary vocational education, universities of applied sciences and universities. International students could fill this gap and thus prevent "erosion" (the disappearance of study programmes). Aside from that, people from abroad are of "crucial importance to counter the shortage on the labour market" and to support the development of the four Brightlands

campuses, as well as the Einstein Telescope. And no, the regional authorities write, "the quality of education is not under pressure because of the arrival of international students, youths in Limburg are not being elbowed out. International students in our region are just our students." And what about the housing problem? We can solve that together, they write. And the high workload for lecturers? A lot of attention is being given to that too, it states.

## Dutch language

As far as the future is concerned, the various parties will make a joint effort, "even more so than is the case at the moment, to keep foreign students in our region after graduation". How this can be done, the letter does not say. Things like research, work placements or graduation assignments for businesses or the semi-public sector, says the UM spokesperson in answer to questions. Or a UM project such as 'Knowledge Engineering at Work', where students work part-time for two years for SME businesses to help with the applications of artificial intelligence.

The letter continues: "We like to stress that while we are convinced that the English language is necessary in education, we will also make great efforts to let our students become acquainted with Dutch." At UM this is done with free basic courses of Social Dutch for first- and second-year bachelor's and master's students, and a Dutch language course at B2 level for those who speak another language. Since 2018 the university has also had a language policy for employees; they are expected to have a certain degree of fluency in both languages, depending on their position. The introduction of this is still ongoing.

Riki Janssen

## Agenda academic ceremonies Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6

28-3, 10.00 h Sorina Ruth Simon	15-4, 16.00 h Tim Alexander Reissner
28-3, 16.00 h Robert Josephus Johannes van Gassel	16-4, 10.00 h Rawia Abdalla
02-4, 10.00 h Ricardo Morel Berendsen	16-4, 13.00 h Adriana Maeve (Jenna) Barrett
02-4, 13.00 h Pascal Hildebrand	16-4, 16.00 h Andrés Horacio Cáceres-Solari
02-4, 16.00 h Kenny Antonius Geert Theodorus van Kampen	17-4, 10.00 h Alejandro Pallares Robles
03-4, 13.00 h Lex Marinus Greeven	Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University-Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz
03-4, 16.00 h Mirna Andelić	17-4, 13.00 h Matthew Anthony Davies
04-4, 10.00 h Ayatri Singha	Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University and University of Birmingham
04-4, 13.00 h Yil Severijns	17-4, 16.00 h Carlos Julio Peniche Silva
05-4, 10.00 h Johanna Monika Kreutz-van Best	18-4, 10.00 h Laurien Marie Jeanne Nagels-Coune
05-4, 13.00 h Freek Urbaan Verstraelen	19-4, 10.00 h Ignazio Condello
08-4, 16.00 h Lena Schnitzler	19-4, 13.00 h Sonja Zaar
Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University and University of Birmingham	19-4, 16.30 h Dr. Anna Wilbik inauguratie
10-4, 10.00 h Marta Nazzari	22-4, 10.00 h Pascal Heß
10-4, 13.00 h Maud Theresia Anna Strous	22-4, 13.00 h Eveline E. Schippers
10-4, 16.00 h Philippe Johannus Maria Pincakers	22-4, 16.00 h Valentina Golunova
11-4, 10.00 h Milan Kovačević	23-4, 16.00 h Suvarnalata Xanthate Duggirala
11-4, 13.00 h Svenja Cremer	24-4, 13.00 h Muriël Reudink
11-4, 16.00 h Geertruida Petronella Bijvoet	24-4, 16.00 h Alice Todaro
12-4, 10.00 h Floris Stefanus Verheij	25-4, 13.00 h Antonio Criscuolo
12-4, 13.00 h Mirjam van den Brink	25-4, 16.00 h Kuni Vergauwen
12-4, 16.30 h Dr. Loes van Bokhoven inauguratie	Double Doctoral Degree Universiteit Maastricht en Universiteit Antwerpen
15-4, 10.00 h Najim el Khababi	26-4, 10.00 h Nicky Adinda Beelen
15-4, 13.00 h Sabine Rosalie de Wild	26-4, 13.00 h Doris Lijsbeth van Abbema
	26-4, 16.00 h Prof. dr. Michael Jacobs inauguratie

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

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