

observant

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The university and the Maastricht hospital want to go forward under one umbrella.

How to deal with two different cultures?

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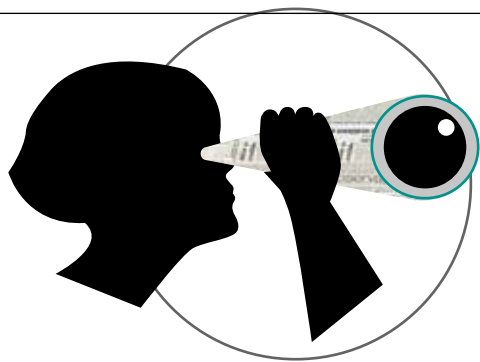
A limit has been reached, says President Rianne Letschert

Demonstrating in the buildings is allowed, as long as you adhere to the house rules. Free Palestine Maastricht recently did not do that. **P. 3**

“Snorting a line or taking a pill is not something that is part of student life”

But of almost two hundred students present at a symposium on the risks of drug use, many appear to have used something. **P. 5**





Riki Janssen

redactioneel

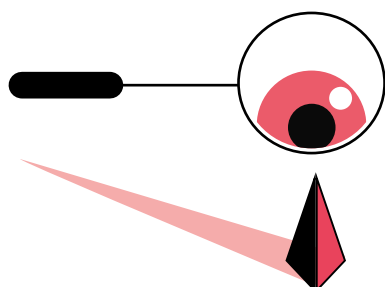
Premature or irrelevant

One of our columnists recently sent us a distress signal: “I can’t think of anything to write about. I have no inspiration.” This leaves us with a blank space in our print newspaper, which isn’t what we want to see. Not at all! That said, I know from experience that good ideas for articles don’t just materialise out of thin air. I often find myself increasingly stressed on Monday afternoons because I still have no idea what to write about in this editorial. “Why don’t you start earlier?” you might ask. Fair point. But I do start early. Each weekend, I scour the newspapers for topics relevant to Observant, paying particular attention to articles written by ombudsmen and editors-in-chief. If this approach fails, I can always brainstorm with my colleagues on Monday.

This week, neither approach yielded a suitable topic. My stress levels rose. Not writing is not an option. Every Tuesday afternoon, I must send an article to our translator to ensure it’s ready to go to print on Wednesday. In moments like these, I recall the advice we offer students and junior journalists struggling to come up with topics: draw on your own experiences. Consider what you’ve been working on and what’s going on in your life. There’s always a lot going on here at Observant. We’re currently looking for an editor and a junior journalist; next Monday, we’ll decide which candidates to invite for interviews. We’re also beginning a search for new student columnists for the upcoming academic year (keep an eye on our social media pages), brainstorming about our special issue for first-

year students in August, and seeing the first applications for our summer school come in. As for my personal life, last Monday I tried to explain in my best French to a city employee in Visé, where I live, that their website refuses to register me. But none of these topics are suitable for an editorial, I realised on my bike ride to work. They’re either too premature or irrelevant. My near-weekly struggle is a topic in itself, though. So here it is.

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: Cleo Freriks, Lotte van de Loo, Simon Wirtz

Bicycle gone, that’s a bummer

Parking your bicycle outside the rack, just for a minute? We previously wrote in this section about the city of Maastricht taking a harder line against it from the beginning of this year: the amount due to retrieve your bicycle from the depot – where wrongly parked bicycles are taken – has been doubled from 25 to 50 euro. Apparently, this in itself wasn’t enough: ‘errant bicycles’ will now also be removed more quickly after wardens have labelled them. Previously, owners had one hour to remove their bicycles, which is now only fifteen minutes. Why this stricter approach? “Wrongly parked bicycles continue to be a problem,” states Stefan Gybels, Maastricht city’s management and communication advisor. “There are still a lot of them, despite the fact that we remove about three thousand every year.” We will carry out targeted actions at various places in the city in the coming weeks. Gybels: “Obviously we will always communicate this beforehand. Also at the university, for example, if we focus on the university library.” In addition, there will also be a ‘clean-up’ shortly, where the city will be cleared of bicycle wrecks and orphaned bicycles. So, avoid a fuss? Tip from the city: park in the racks.



Fascinated by Taylor

Giving birth to the antichrist, leading a lesbian double life and distributing political propaganda for American president Biden. It is keeping pop idol Taylor Swift very busy – if you were to believe the conspiracy theorists. The Rotterdam sister newspaper *Erasmus Magazine* asked Simone Driessen, assistant professor of Media and Popular Culture, why the singer is such a cherished subject for conspiracy theories. The fact that Swift appeared to be conservative for a long time – she started her career in country music and was born into a strict Christian family – but then it turned out she wasn’t, plays a role in all of this, says Driessen. Also, in her songs there are often hidden hints, for example, to the events in her life. “So, maybe also secret political messages, say the conspiracy theorists,” according to Driessen. By the way, it is not just the conspiracy theorists who are fascinated by Swift. Scientists also find her interesting. There is even an international research network for Taylor Swift and her fans, of which Driessen is one of the founders.

World record beer pong

Running a half marathon barefoot through the ice desert of Finland or pulling an entire train only using your teeth: some people are capable of almost unbelievable things, as the Guinness World Records-books show. A group of students from the University of Twente now also wants to make a world record: they plan to have the largest beer pong tournament in the world on June 8, in a sports hall on campus. “We are aiming for 1,500 participants,” the organizers say in sister newspaper *U-Today*. At beer pong, a party game, two teams take turns in throwing a ping-pong-ball into cups filled with beer. In case of a successful throw, they have to be drunk. In Twente, however, water instead of beer will be played with – after all, participants should still be able to walk after a whole day of playing. A problem? “The current world record was also played with water, so that’s not a problem. But for socializing, a beer during the game is of course a must.” Registrations are still open.



“Reached a limit”: pro-Palestinian demonstrators disrupt classes

A recent demonstration by the student group Free Palestine Maastricht (FPM) in the faculty buildings of Maastricht University disrupted education, according to President Rianne Letschert. “With this, a limit was reached.” FPM states that the disruption was “the very objective”.

That the group would demonstrate at the faculties on 21 March was known, says Letschert. That they would also go inside and chant slogans through a megaphone – including the controversial *From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free* – “however, was new”. Was it permitted at all, council members wondered at both the recent meeting of the University Council and that of the Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE). Various Jewish members of staff and students “feel intimidated and threatened” by FPM’s actions, said an FSE student: what can the university do “to protect learning spaces”? In the University Council, it was asked whether there were grounds for keeping demonstrators out of university buildings (public buildings). The latter is not so simple, says Letschert to

Observant: demonstrating inside the buildings is allowed, as long as the rules are abided by, so no disruption of teaching and research (for example in labs). This did occur on 21 March at, among others, the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS), where Letschert herself entered into discussion with the demonstrators and asked them to stop – which is what they did, according to her. Should security guards not have intervened? She hesitates, seems to feel it is too strong a measure. “You don’t need to tolerate students not adhering to the rules.” But, she emphasises, “I was able to achieve the same in a reasonable manner by going to them.” For the time being, she wants “to continue to talk,” but she admits that this is not always a perfect solution. “I am in contact with some of the demonstrators, but some others are not connected to FPM or may not even study at the university.” Dean Jan Smits from the Faculty of Law endorsed in a blog on intranet UMPLOYEE “the great importance that we attach to freedom of speech and dialogue”. But on the 21st, the discussion with the demonstrators was

not possible at all, he feels, and employees and students couldn’t help but be confronted with the protest and teaching was disrupted. For him, “a line was crossed” when the demonstrators chanted the slogan *From the river to the sea*. This is “regarded by many as offensive and as a call for violence” and “it lends itself to antisemitic interpretation”. In the meantime, FPM appeals to students on Instagram to protest against the “genocide in Gaza”, which they believe “is being made to seem normal and invisible”. They also defend the use of the slogan: *From the river to the sea* is not anti-Semitic, they state. The group do call for “the dismantling” of Israel, which they describe as “a settler colonial state that has inflicted brutal crimes against humanity”. FPM says that they understand the concerns about the disruption of education, “but that was the very objective of our protest, to make a statement and to break through the university’s neutrality in light of this barbaric genocide”.

Peter Doorackers



“We will never allow the Maastricht Study to go under”

Photo: Loraine Bodewes

What is going to happen with the Maastricht Study? A large-scale medical screening of the population in Limburg was started in 2010, but now that the province’s subsidy has come to an end at the beginning of this month, university research institute CARIM – responsible for the project – will have to go and look for new funding.

The Maastricht Study is a largescale population screening in the field of type 2 diabetes. Thousands of people from Limburg, with and without diabetes, registered when it started in 2010. Extensive tests followed, including a 24-hour ECG, intestinal examination, echocardiograms, tests in a DEXA scanner (bone density), measuring of blood sugar levels, body weight, blood pressure, the amount of cortisol in the body, et cetera. Following the participants for years gave scientists more insight into the clinical picture, especially the prevention of diabetes. “It is scientifically successful, but also relevant to the improvement of health in our region,” outlines Tilman Hackeng, scientific director of cardiovascular disease institute CARIM at the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, which is in charge of the Maastricht Study.

Tough times

But the project is having a tough time: it lacks structural funding, state the faculty budget documents. As of 1 April, the Province of Limburg dropped out as one of the financiers (which also include the hospital and the

university). This did not come as a surprise, a spokesperson for the provincial government wrote in an e-mail. The Maastricht Study is a Kennis-As (Knowledge Axis) project, a strategic programme in which UM, together with other education institutes, the hospital and the province invest in the socioeconomic development in Limburg. “The point of departure is that the project would continue after the subsidy period had come to an end. Subsidies can serve as an impulse, but the project or the activity must subsequently be able to continue without such support.”

Storage

The amount of 475 thousand euro per year for the storage of ‘samples’ (such as blood samples) in the MUMC+ Biobank will now be paid for by research institute CARIM, at least for two years. But “should the period be longer” and there are no other funding options to be found, “CARIM will have to restrict its own investment plans,” was the warning in the budget. “In that case, various initiatives can no longer continue.” At the same time, it is clear that CARIM values the study greatly: “CARIM will continue to invest,” state the budget documents. “We will never allow the Maastricht Study to go under,” Hackeng wrote hopefully to *Observant* last February. The question what it meant that some of the institute’s investment plans could possibly not continue, was not answered at the time.

It is unclear whether the discussions about future funding have led to anything. Faculty dean Annemie Schols, who should be informed of such matters, e-mailed *Observant* at the beginning of this week that she didn’t have time to explain. The research facility of the Maastricht Study – which houses the equipment and where participants are tested – has meanwhile been moved from an external location on Randwycksingel to the hospital, to CARIM Clinical Research Unit (CRU).

Stehouwer

When *Observant* asked Miranda Schram, professor of Diabetes Epidemiology and – with professor Coen Stehouwer – co-founder of the Maastricht Study, whether the sudden departure of the latter has anything to do with the problems concerning funding, the question was not answered either. In August, Stehouwer left UM and MUMC+ with immediate effect. He was head of the Internal Medicine department. Neither he nor the board of the hospital explained his departure. Schram forwarded *Observant’s* e-mail to the hospital’s spokespersons. They merely stated that “the recent departure of professor Coen Stehouwer will have no consequences for the present research activities of the Maastricht Study.” Not a word is mentioned about a funding problem.

Wendy Degens



Ubering across borders

“

It’s 2 am on a weekday. I am in an Uber, sliding along a snow-covered Canadian road barely visible through the blizzard outside. My hands grip the seat in front of me, eyes fixed on the road, trying to discern its twists and turns through the snow. Meanwhile, my driver chats on the phone in French, Taylor Swift is playing softly on the radio, and my friend snoozes beside me. I glance down at my snow-drenched cowboy boots, realizing this might have been one of my more foolish ideas.

We took a 20 dollars, 4 am FlixBus from Burlington, Vermont, to Montreal to catch CMAT, my favorite musician, live. The bus ride to Montreal went smoothly, troubles only began when an email popped up on my phone: “Interruption in your FlixBus journey.” The bus scheduled back to our campus was canceled.

“I can’t skip tomorrow’s classes as well” my friend remarks, I agree. Desperate for alternatives, my friend suggests Uber. “Across the border? Is that even allowed?” I wonder. A call to FlixBus confirms they’ll cover the costs, and we deem the problem solved, deciding to enjoy the sunny streets of Montreal until the concert begins.

As we exit the concert venue at 11 pm, euphoric from four hours of music and dancing, we’re greeted by a snowstorm. This explains the cancellation. Next step: Uber. A sleek black Tesla emerges from the blizzard. “Burlington, Vermont?” the driver asks surprised. “In that case, I need my passport and to charge our batteries.” A one-hour detour to his house and a garage for charging, and we’re back on the snow-covered road.

The snow thickens, and the streets become even emptier. Nobody dares to drive in this weather. The car slides more than it drives through the storm. Thankfully, our driver is being careful, but in these conditions, “careful” just means slow. I’m getting really tired, but I can’t sleep, expecting we crash into a tree any moment

At the border, the lone border agent eyes us skeptically but allows us to proceed; our tale is so unbelievable it must be true. At 3 am, we finally arrive at our dorms. “Girls, that was insane, I was scared there for a second” our Uber driver confesses. We offer countless apologies and promise a 5-star rating before heading to bed. As I set my alarm for 8 am, I make a mental note to check the weather report in the future.

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Line-Marie Eichhorst is a student at the University College Maastricht

series students on their future plans

A doctor on the moon



Renate Huurman Photo: Ellen Oosterhof

Renate Huurman (25) dreams of becoming a doctor and going on a lunar mission. She's curious to find out what space does to the human body. "A hell of a lot", she suspects. Huurman is currently in her first year of studying Medicine at Maastricht University.

Going from a male-dominated to a female-dominated degree programme was quite a change for Renate Huurman. She wasn't used to being surrounded by so many women. "Before this, I studied aeronautical engineering at Inholland University of Applied Sciences in Delft. Sometimes I was the only woman in the room. And when I was younger, I had only male friends. I used to think that women tended to talk behind people's backs." But her perspective has changed. "I've made female friends here in Maastricht – turns out it's possible!"

Aeronautical engineering

At 25, she's older than the typical first-year student. Her academic journey hasn't been a straight line. Medicine was her first love; in high school, she was already interested in the workings of the human body, with biology being her favourite subject. But her grades didn't reflect her enthusiasm. Her ADHD makes it hard for her to focus on things she doesn't find interesting or challen-

ging enough. "We only got to do the fun extra assignments after completing the boring standard ones. I never made it that far – I'd lose interest." She doubted she would make it through the selection process for a degree in medicine. After looking into Leiden University, which was closest to her hometown of Oegstgeest, she gave up on her dream. But what degree should she do instead? Her older brothers were studying computer science and engineering at Delft University of Technology. Perhaps that was something for her. "But when I attended the open day, it didn't appeal to me at all. Aeronautical engineering did catch my attention." She applied for the programme. Sadly, she didn't get accepted. Unsure of her next move, she decided to take a gap year, travelling to Australia, Thailand and Indonesia at the young age of 19. "Things were tough at home. My parents were getting divorced. I thought, 'I'm managing fine on my own here, so why not on the other side of the world?'" Back from her travels,

Huurman discovered that universities of applied sciences also offer aeronautical engineering programmes. She realised she felt much more drawn to the idea of a less theoretical and more practical approach.

But her passion for medicine never left her. During student orientation week, she stumbled upon an interesting part-time job. "I had a cut on my ankle, so I had to visit the Red Cross a few times. The first time I went, I thought, 'These people are so nice! Their work is so interesting!'" She signed up and attended various training courses. "A specialist once came in to give a presentation, showing us an X-ray. Way too advanced for first aid training, but I found it fascinating."

Iceland

In the summer between her third and fourth years of study, Huurman found herself in a somewhat unusual summer holiday spot: Iceland. She was there to participate in a simulation project by ICEE.Space, a space research start-up.

"The company is run by a friend of mine, who thought the project would be right up my alley." During the mission, "analogue astronauts" simulated living on the moon by spending a week in a lava tube in Iceland, where the terrain closely resembles the lunar surface. Huurman herself stayed outside the tube, serving as a rescue coordinator for medical emergencies. She also provided first aid training, like at the Red Cross. Didn't she want to be inside the lava tube? "It would've required too much preparation and money, about 2000 euros." Part 2 of the project, scheduled for next summer, will involve a two-week stay inside the tube. This time, Huurman has signed up as an analogue astronaut. "I want to see if I can handle the psychological impact of spending two weeks without natural light, in a confined space with a small group of people." She isn't deterred by the fact that the costs have since risen to 3000 euros. "That's a problem for future me." She has already passed the first stage of the selection process.

And she also made it through another selection process: Huurman is currently three quarters through her first year of studying medicine. In Maastricht, not Leiden. "I discovered that UM's selection process suited me better. It emphasises skills over knowledge." She's doing well in her studies. "When I was studying aeronautical engineering, I sometimes had to take Ritalin for exams. Here, I don't need medication to stay focused. I find everything super interesting."

Mars

Back to the lunar mission. How does she plan to make her dream come true? While there's no such thing as a specialisation in space medicine, she could apply for an internship with the European Space Agency (ESA) Space Medicine Team. If that doesn't pan out, plan B is to specialise in emergency medicine. For now, she is busy keeping several balls in the air – her studies, her Red Cross work, her part-time job at the satellite company ISISpace and her upcoming role as a kidney transplant technician at MUMC+.

Wouldn't she like to go to Mars? It's nice and far away. And she managed just fine on her own when she was 19, didn't she? The question is meant as a joke, but Huurman replies earnestly: "In the past, I would've said yes. But I've worked hard on myself, and I've come to better appreciate my relationships with the people around me. So now, I'd say no."

Lotte van de Loo

In this biweekly series *Observant* interviews students about their plans for the future – their hopes, fears and uncertainties.

Symposium for students on the risk of using drugs

“Taking a pill once a year is different to filling your nose every week”

Alcohol, cannabis, MDMA, cocaine, speed, ketamine, 3-MMC, LSD: answers to the question ‘What have you ever taken?’ pour in on the large screen in the Sint Janskerk. Only a handful of the almost two hundred students present fill in ‘nothing’ on their mobile devices. No, the use of drugs is certainly not a taboo among students, as appeared this Thursday evening (4 April), at a symposium about the risks of such use.



Illustration: Shutterstock

An evening initiated by the student associations Circumflex and Amphitryon (connected to the Hotel Management School), aided by the Waar Trek Jij De Lijn (Where Do You Draw The Line) foundation, which devotes itself to creating national awareness about substance use. Participation is voluntary, although first-year students in particular are encouraged to attend, says Circumflex chairwoman Sarah Cox. “We feel it is important especially for them to see that snorting a line or swallowing a pill is not something that is ‘just’ part of student life.” The latter is a danger, says Pauline Heuperman, prevention expert for mental health care organisation Mondriaan, to the students present. “Using drugs has become mainstream and chances of you coming across it in nightlife or at a festival are great. Then you can think: ‘Everyone is doing it, right?’” At the same time, there is a lot of ignorance about the dangers. “These days it is often standard practice to have an emergency helicopter stationed at festivals. With an overdose of XTC, for example, you can become overheated, run the risk of organ failure, and choke on your own vomit due to lockjaw (when you can no longer open your mouth far enough, ed.)” Still, Heuperman doesn’t want to sound like a preacher in the Sint Janskerk today. “Frightening people doesn’t work. Having an open discussion does. Peer pressure often plays a role, so speak about it with each other. Also, be aware of the risks: in principle, safe use does not exist’.

Slippery slope

There is a risk of addiction, says addiction physician Julia Deuss. “I see a lot of youths with a cannabis addiction in my practice. ‘Huh, but surely you don’t get addicted to that’, I often hear people say. Well, you certainly can. The consequences are not as innocent as they seem, it has a great influence on your daily life. Sometimes also physically: I treat youths who will possibly lose their bladder due to a ketamine addiction.”

And no, nobody chooses to become an addict, Deuss remarks. “It is often a slippery slope: going from experimental use, to recreational and eventually to excessive use. Until you are dependent on it: you need it not to feel bad.” Whether someone is susceptible to addiction, depends on many factors: genetic, but also psychological (things like stress) or social (for example, coming in contact with it at a young age). “What if you notice that a friend or fellow student is using more and more?”, a student in the audience wants to know. “Don’t judge. There is often a reason behind it, something is not going right. Talk about it and say: ‘Maybe you need to get help.’ That is also what an ‘expert by experience’, who suffered with an alcohol and drugs addiction for more than forty years after he was abused in his youth, tells the students: “Don’t keep problems to yourself. Don’t spend years drinking and snorting your feelings away.”

Narco-state

‘But the consequences go much further than yourself, says crime reporter Mick van Wely from *De Telegraaf*. “As a country, we have deteriorated over the past ten years. We show many signs of a narco-state.” As an example, he refers to the Dutch figures for 2023: 60,000 kilos of cocaine intercepted, more than 120 drugs labs discovered, 1,600 criminal organisations disbanded, about two hundred cases of drugs waste dumping in nature, hundreds of drug-related bomb attacks and ten wrongly targeted murders. “The wars are carried out in the public domain; you see excesses on the streets.” As all-time lows, he mentions the discovery of a ‘torture container’ in a village in Brabant in 2020 and the murder of his colleague Peter R. de Vries in 2021. The impact on his own life is great too: due to threats from the criminal world he has been living under the strictest form of personal security for years. “My house has been transformed into a bunker and I can no longer go

anywhere spontaneously.”

The causes are partly due to shortages in the police force and politicians who did not take the problem seriously enough, but it certainly also has to do with the enormous demand for drugs in the Netherlands, says Van Wely. Yet, he is not saying: Don’t use it. “I am extremely liberal, do whatever you want. But do think about the consequences. I am absolutely shocked to hear from students that in many homes on a Friday evening there is a line of coke on the table. Taking a pill once a year at a festival is something different to filling your nose every week.”

Dark side of Maastricht

Those who think that crime is mainly elsewhere in the country: Maastricht also has a dark side, says a public prosecutor (she does not divulge her name) from the Limburg Public Prosecutor. “Students sometimes also get caught up in this, for example, by making their room available as storage location for dealers. They are vulnerable for this because they may need money or are themselves users.” Also, just being in possession of drugs (more than an amount for personal use) can lead to a criminal record. “Which can have major consequences: sometimes you are no longer eligible for a Certificate of Conduct (Verklaring Omtrent het Gedrag, or VOG), which you need for certain professions. Or you are denied entrance into certain countries, such as the US or Australia. A pity for that internship abroad or that trip you planned with friends.”

There is a chat afterwards with (non-alcoholic) drinks. There were a few shocking examples to be seen this evening, a group of students concludes. “It is not like I am going to stop with everything immediately, but I will think more about it,” says one of them. Another decides: “I think the first time I do a line of coke has just been pushed forward.”

Interview with Rianne Letschert and Helen Mertens about intended integration

University and hospital: an engagement that mustn't last "until 2030"

The puzzle is not quite complete yet, but when the go-ahead is given the university and the Maastricht hospital will go forward under one umbrella. There are staff members who look forward with curiousness and anticipation, but there are also concerns. Some people fear for their academic freedom. Also, will there not be an awful lot of bureaucracy in such a large organisation; will the university's informal atmosphere find itself on a slippery slope?

Text: **Wendy Degens**
Illustration: **Simone Golob**

"A challenging exercise," is what Rianne Letschert, President of Maastricht University, calls the route they are currently taking. Towards a merger? She prefers the term 'integration'. "Going deeper with each dig, you come across new questions." But Letschert and her colleague Helen Mertens from MUMC+ are mainly very delighted, seeing "opportunities", more "power", and an attempt to enable the institutes to play "greater academic and social roles". Letschert: "It is not the organisational interests that are leading; the university and the hospital are not here 'for themselves, but for students, patients and other citizens."

Before Mertens and Letschert were in charge, there were also all kinds of integration attempts. Hospital with faculty, hospital with the entire university, but they failed. It was toilsome at the negotiation table, with the characters of the then chairs of the executive boards, their interests and prospects. Who took the initiative this time? Mertens? It is said that it is particularly in the Maastricht hospital's interest, because a marriage with the university would make the institute more robust and with that become a more important player in the health care field. There is a fuss about the concentration of academic (very specialist) care in the Netherlands. This can no longer be provided across the board in every UMC. The distribution is a very sensitive matter and logically every health care institute wants to maintain its 'own territory' (and preferably expand it). But no, they said during the interview, this time there was nobody who took the lead. According to Letschert both came together at some stage and said to each other: 'Shouldn't we pick this up again?' "We have a Joint Policy Body (GBO, or gemeenschappelijk beleidsorgaan, a regulation in the law regarding the coordination of mutual tasks of a university hospital and a university, ed.), which is just planned into your schedule and it is certainly not every week, and that is when you notice with some themes: 'Gosh, we should have aligned this sooner', or 'That is a pity, why are we facing this now?' If we had worked together in a more focused and intensive way, we would have shared those obstacles with each other sooner."

The Maastricht Study

But do you have to merge to achieve good things together? Take The Maastricht Study, which focuses on the prevention, research and treatment of diabetes, in which the university and the hospital are involved and in which thousands of people from Limburg participate. This unique research has been running since 2010, it didn't need a merger. Letschert: "No, but what you see, is that there are various parties involved, such as the hospital and the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life sciences, which – when things get difficult, (the province's subsidy period expired at the end of March, ed.) – each congregate in their own boardrooms and

take decisions based on their own strategies and investment frameworks. These do not always run parallel and that can make such a project vulnerable." Mertens also repeats the added value of "one boardroom. At the moment, each party makes a comparative assessment based on their own interests." As an example, she does not only mention The Maastricht Study, but also the four Brightlands campuses, the animal testing facilities (Biomedical Centre) and the Scannexus scanning facility. "One partner's commitment is directly dependent on the commitment of the other." In other words, if one does see the value of something and the other less so, then things could come to an end. Mertens: "As long as you have two different people with two different interests at the table, it is rather difficult to align matters properly."

Social domain

Eyes have to be looking in the same direction. According to Mertens and Letschert that will certainly be the case on two themes: 'healthy society', including prevention, and 'technological innovations'. The fact that a faculty such as Science and Engineering with computer and data science is joining in, seems like a logical step, just like the Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience where human behaviour is looked at closely. But why would you want to involve legal specialists, economists, political scientists and historians, so the whole university? That is unique in the Netherlands. As far as Mertens is concerned, this is not just about health care, but also about the family, the economy, all circumstances in the social domain. "That is exactly where we need the expertise from the city centre faculties." She also refers to examples elsewhere in the country – such as Leiden and Rotterdam – where an integrated UMC (so a medical faculty and a hospital) "has veered off" and has come to be at too great a distance from the rest of the university. Both feel that this is undesirable.

Unwise

"Say, you only had the FHML merge with the hospital, because it was easier", says Letschert, "then we would make our university vulnerable. A very large part of our health cluster, which we are very proud



of and in which we have invested a great deal, we would be placing in the hands of another administrative body. And of course, we are more than FHML, we have become much bigger over the past ten years, but even still, in order to keep the university in balance, that would be an unwise choice.”

The fact that the university does not want to lose FHML, by the way, was never the reason to say ‘let’s then’ drag the whole UM along, she emphasises. “This really is about content, about the challenges we face, things like staff shortages, ageing society, disadvantages on the socioeconomic ladder, chronic health issues. To deal with these, we will have to innovate, we have no other choice but to involve other disciplines as well as the traditional health care.”

Autonomy

No matter how enthusiastically they present their story, about how good the merger will also be a solution for the everyday awkward issues such as two e-mail addresses and different access passes, there is also doubt, anxiety, even resistance among employees. Letschert already mentioned one: the fear that UM will become a health university. “There was a lot of discussion about that in the beginning, but it is not going to happen.” Europe and circularity (topics such as the reuse of raw materials and plastic recycling) are also important themes that Maastricht scientists can continue to concentrate on, she says. “A lot of our budgets go to the faculties; that won’t change. Besides, their scientific autonomy is legally anchored.” This is also guaranteed if we get a new administrative model and MUMC+ is another decision-maker, says Letschert.

A second point of concern: what about academic freedom? “Of course this will continue to be guaranteed; that goes without saying, doesn’t it? We would be the last board to come up with something that would undo that,” says Letschert. Still, this won’t put everybody’s mind at rest. A fictitious example: a group of researchers want to take a closer look at post-Covid care in Limburg hospitals. No matter how you look at it, the researchers will (in the case of a merger) be associated with azM. And hospitals in a region are also each other’s competitors. What does it say with regard to their independence or possible conflict of interest? “Scientists can position themselves independently in the future structure, also based on the code of scientific integrity which provides a very clear framework for this. The names ‘university’ and ‘university hospital’ will continue to exist, so you can still position yourself as an employee of the university,” says Letschert.



Helen Mertens and Rianne Letschert
Photo: Appie Derks, MUMC+

Researchers and physicians from Randwyck meeting with scientists from the city centre, and vice versa: interdisciplinarity is already welcomed. But it rarely occurs. Will a merger change this? If the initiative doesn’t come from the people themselves, it won’t happen, will it? Letschert: “Yes, but we can stimulate such co-operation, provide incentives. That is why a number of faculties are expanding rapidly on the Brightlands campuses. If we hadn’t invested in those campuses ten years ago, the university and the region wouldn’t have benefited so much. We have amply proven that impact.”

To continue in terms of Letschert and Mertens, a single board-room is more attractive for businesses and organisations. TNO (Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research), Philips, Medtronic, and RWTH Aachen, “have already contacted us. When there is a meeting, they always ask us how far we are,” says Mertens.

Culture

The question remains whether we are not just creating a large organisation where two very different cultures are coming together: the much more hierarchical hospital, managed as an enterprise and with a much less open culture, compared to the more easy-going model of the university, an open and informal atmosphere, with a journalistically independent university medium? Letschert: “We should not create the illusion that there is just one culture, one tradition at this university. The culture at the Faculty of Science and Engineering is not the same as, for example, the one at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. There can even be

diversity within a faculty. We cherish that diversity of cultures.”

Ping-pong

The ‘best’ management model will be presented to the community in June. The decision-making process will start after the summer: faculty boards, faculty councils, the University Council, the works council and other bodies in the hospital, all get to have a say. Letschert already said last September during an online interview, initiated by UM, that she wants to keep the “pressure” on. “Otherwise you can end up in a really long process.” She now also expresses her hope that they will “not be ping-ponging until 2030. Imagine that one faculty council decides: ‘We would like to have one change. Then it would once again have to go before all the other bodies. It should not take that long, people will lose the interest in putting their energy into the idea. At the same time, all stakeholders must be heard and be able to use their powers.’”

Finding a balance between the autonomy of faculties and hospital departments on the one hand and the “integral responsibility” of one co-ordinating board on the other hand, is another huge challenge, according to Mertens. And that is probably putting it mildly. Lastly? What will change for the ‘ordinary’ person on the work floor? Will we notice anything about the merger? “Not everyone,” says Mertens. “And there is no need either,” Letschert adds. “Scientists or administrative and support staff who say: ‘I want to participate in this, because I see new opportunities,’ fine, you are very welcome, but again, there will be no forcing.”

news

Universities: 35 Bachelor's programmes to get Dutch-taught variant

Universities have promised to introduce a Dutch-language track into all 35 major Bachelor's programmes. Another four programmes will be taught entirely in Dutch. At Maastricht University, the faculties will also "develop the possibilities within their study programmes," says an internal message on UMPLOYEE.

The introduction of a Dutch-taught variant will affect many Bachelor's programmes in Economics as well as Science and Technology in particular, according to details of the plans published by university association UNL on its website.

Anticipation

Universities want to decide for themselves what is the appropriate action to take when it comes to internationalisation and the influx of international students. This is in anticipation of a bill that Education Minister Robbert Dijkgraaf is currently drafting and which will shortly go to the House of Representatives.

Separate plans for each university have yet to be finalised, despite being requested by the House of Representatives. In addition, UNL is keen to exercise caution, given the fact that the

universities' representative advisory bodies have yet to signal their agreement.

Nonetheless, if all goes well, 12 Bachelor's programmes in Economics that are currently taught entirely in English will get a Dutch-taught track, alongside the English-taught variant. Only seven of them will remain entirely English-taught.

Of the Bachelor's programmes in Science and Technology, 13 have plans to introduce Dutch-taught tracks, leaving 16 Bachelor's programmes being taught entirely in English.

Advantage

Bachelor's programmes that are taught in two languages will enjoy a significant advantage in that they will be able to limit the influx of international students into the English-taught track, while accessibility to the Dutch-taught variant is ensured at all times.

The universities do indeed intend to introduce an enrolment quota of this type for the English-language track of 27 Bachelor's programmes, of which 14 are in Behavioural & Social Sciences and 6 in Economics.

Hoger Onderwijs Persbureau



Illustration: Simone Golob

Agenda academic ceremonies Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6

11-4, 10.00 h	Milan Kovačević	17-4, 16.00 h	Carlos Julio Peniche Silva
11-4, 13.00 h	Svenja Cremer	18-4, 10.00 h	Laurien Marie Jeanne Nagels-Coune
11-4, 16.00 h	Geertruida Petronella Bijvoet	19-4, 10.00 h	Ignazio Condello
12-4, 10.00 h	Floris Stefanus Verheij	19-4, 13.00 h	Sonja Zaar
12-4, 13.00 h	Mirjam van den Brink	19-4, 16.30 h	Dr. Anna Wilbik inauguratie
12-4, 16.30 h	Dr. Loes van Bokhoven inauguratie	22-4, 10.00 h	Pascal Heß
15-4, 10.00 h	Najim el Khababi	22-4, 13.00 h	Eveline E. Schippers
15-4, 13.00 h	Sabine Rosalie de Wild	22-4, 16.00 h	Valentina Golunova
15-4, 16.00 h	Tim Alexander Reissner	23-4, 16.00 h	Suvarnalata Xanthate Duggirala
16-4, 10.00 h	Rawia Abdalla	24-4, 13.00 h	Muriël Reudink
16-4, 13.00 h	Adriana Maeve (Jenna) Barrett	24-4, 16.00 h	Alice Todaro
16-4, 16.00 h	Andrés Horacio Cáceres-Solari	25-4, 13.00 h	Antonio Criscuolo
17-4, 10.00 h	Alejandro Pallares Robles	25-4, 16.00 h	Kuni Vergauwen
	Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University-Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz		Double Doctoral Degree Universiteit Maastricht en Universiteit Antwerpen
17-4, 13.00 h	Matthew Anthony Davies	26-4, 10.00 h	Nicky Adinda Beelen
	Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University and University of Birmingham	26-4, 13.00 h	Doris Lijsbeth van Abbema
		26-4, 16.00 h	Prof. dr. Michael Jacobs inauguratie

 Maastricht University

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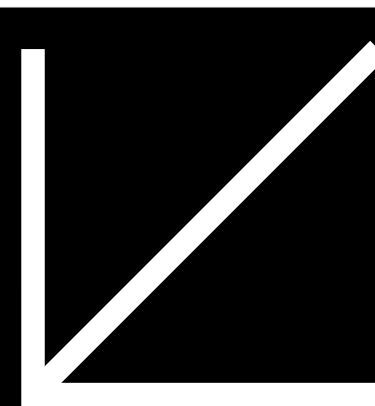
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*Medewerkers van UM kunnen een volledig overzicht van interne- en externe vacatures vinden door in te loggen op SuccessFactors via UMPLOYEE.



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