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Student protest in November 2024 in Utrecht Photo: HOP

... and in November 1990 in The Hague Photo: archive Observant

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editorial

“There’s zero information coming from UM”

“What will the budget cuts at Maastricht University look like? The University of Amsterdam is talking about €29 million in 2025, rising to €100 million by 2028. Leiden is cutting programmes and planning layoffs. Wageningen is talking about €80 million, and Rotterdam and Nijmegen are also tightening their belts. But here in Maastricht? Silence. And when we do hear something, it’s vague.” The *Observant* editorial board, a group of UM staff and students who meet a few times per year to review the website and print newspaper, started off their meeting last Monday in a laid-back manner. Members praised the sex series, background articles and news coverage, as well as the print layout. However, they pointed out that the article leads – opening paragraphs – could be much shorter (true!), and the same goes for headlines that sometimes spill over multiple lines (also true). Every editorial board meeting includes time to discuss new ideas, topics that have not yet been covered (and why) and potentially newsworthy issues. This time, the vagueness – or rather, the silence – surrounding the university’s 2025 budget and financial forecasts was a major source of frustration for several members. “I’m worried. My department is about to hire four PhD candidates. Can we even do that? Or will we have to let them go after a year? If we don’t hire them, we won’t have to fire them. There’s zero information coming from UM. What kind of amateurishness is this?” Another member chimed in, “Which budgets will be affected? And how big is the problem? Do an analysis and be transparent. Let us know what’s looming over our heads, like other universities are doing.” The suggestion that transparency might lead to unrest was quickly dismissed. The members agreed that it’s the uncertainty that’s causing stress. Why not bring in experts from within UM? The School of Business and Economics has plenty of them.

One member wondered if there even is something looming over our heads. “UM has large reserves. Maybe we can cover the funding shortfall but the Executive Board doesn’t want to go public with it.” Someone else put forward a different angle: what if this crisis – whose scale we don’t know – is being used to push through other changes, “like reshuffling programmes, under the motto ‘never waste a good crisis?’”

Observant has been working to get answers, but nearly every door has remained firmly shut. While budget cuts and parts of the budget for 2025 have been on the University Council’s agenda, discussions have so far taken place behind closed doors. No published documents, no public deliberation on what is arguably the most important issue of the year. The budget is set to appear on the U-council’s public agenda this Wednesday, 20 November, after this issue of *Observant* goes to press. But no relevant documents have been made available as of yet. To be continued.

Riki Janssen

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



series everything you want to know about sex



Collage: Simone Golob

“Ask yourself if you’re willing to get in the mood”

Many people mistakenly believe that a difference in sexual desire within a relationship is the problem of the partner with the lower sex drive, says Dewitte. “The assumption is that they should get on the same level as the partner with the higher libido. But often, it’s not an individual problem; it’s a shared one.”

So, what can you do about it? First, it’s important to realise that it’s normal for libido to fluctuate. “Even just from one moment to the next. And the kind of sex you want to have can vary, too. When you think about it, it’s actually quite unlikely that two people will want exactly the same thing at exactly the same time.” Waiting for that moment to happen spontaneously isn’t the solution; trying to find a compromise would be more effective. For this to work, both partners’ attitudes are crucial. The person with the higher sex drive shouldn’t take rejection personally, Dewitte advises. “Ask yourself why your partner isn’t in the mood, and talk about it. How can you rekindle desire in your relationship? You could each make a box of cards with intimate activities you’d like to try, such as ‘I’d like to take a bath together’ or ‘I’d like to use a sex toy.’ Twice a week, take turns picking a card from each other’s box. You don’t have to carry out the activity immediately, but at least talk about it for a bit. This way, you can get to know each other better in a playful way.” Dewitte suggests that the partner with the lower sex drive shouldn’t ask themselves, “Am I in the mood for sex?” but rather, “Am I willing to get in the mood?” “Be open to the

What do you do if you have a much higher sex drive than your partner, and they keep turning you down? Of course, you could take matters into your own hands (literally), but is that really the solution? Won’t that just lead to an even greater mismatch between you? How can you grow closer together? UM sexologist Marieke Dewitte shares her thoughts.

experience. Sexologists talk about the 10-minute rule: spend 10 minutes caressing each other, for example. You might feel like having sex after that – and if not, you’ve still shared a nice moment of intimacy.” She also advises couples to explore what sparks their erotic imagination. “Watch porn, listen to a sexy podcast or read an erotic story together. Afterwards, you can discuss it: what did it do for you? What did it do for me?

Would you like to try this or that sometime?” Finally, if the desire discrepancy persists, Dewitte believes solo sex can be a perfectly acceptable solution. “Just don’t keep it a secret – that’s a tendency people have. You don’t have to announce that you’re going to masturbate, but you can tell your partner that you touch yourself sometimes. There’s nothing wrong with that; it doesn’t mean there’s something wrong in your relationship. Masturbation is simply another and equally valid form of sex, satisfying a different need.”

Cleo Freriks

Marieke Dewitte is a clinical psychologist and sexologist at Maastricht University. In this weekly series, she answers questions about sex from students. If you have a question, you can submit it anonymously, scan the code



Criticism on decision to cancel demonstration against cuts

“Excuse to suppress an inconvenient protest”



Meeting at the Vrijthof last Thursday, as an alternative for the cancelled protest in Utrecht Photo: Observant

Last week, the planned national demonstration in Utrecht against cuts in higher education was cancelled at the last minute. It would not be possible to guarantee the safety of the protesters. What does that mean for the right to protest? And was the decision justified?

“We are being faced with an attack on our right to protest,” said Ingrid Robeyns on Thursday, speaking on behalf of WO in Actie in the Thorbeckezaal of the House of Representatives, where she had been invited to speak by various political parties, along with other speakers who should have been demonstrating in Utrecht. “Based on information that none of us has been able to verify, the powers that be in Utrecht decided to issue a de facto ban of the demonstration.”

She refers to the “urgent recommendation” to cancel the demonstration which was sent to the organising unions AOb and FNV by the so-called ‘safety triangle’ of the mayor of Utrecht, the head of the police, and the public prosecutor. A “pro-Palestinian organisation” was said to want to “hijack” the demonstration and would “not eschew violence,” said Mayor Sharon Dijksma in a letter to the city council.

Anti-democratic

The lack of details – what exactly the threats were, how realistic they were – bothers most people. Some even doubt the motives of the authorities in banning the demonstration. “Anti-democratic tactics,” say activists in Utrecht, where some three thousand students and higher education staff members gathered on Thursday anyway for a ‘student protest’ which had been approved. They feel that the unions who organised the demonstration should not have cooperated with the authorities and that it should have come down to an official ban. Mykhaylo, a philosophy student from Maastricht who wishes to remain otherwise anonymous, is not reassured. He was present at an alternative, local protest in Maastricht on Thursday – initially at various locations around the university, later at the Vrijthof. “If the

Mayor of Utrecht says, ‘You can come, but we can’t guarantee your safety’, that sounds like a threat.” His homeland Ukraine has a long history of large-scale protest, he says. “Since 2014 (when Russia invaded Crimea, ed.), they have been increasingly cancelled for vague reasons. It’s also not clear exactly what happened here, we’ve had no details.”

Benefit

What is clear, however, is who benefits from cancelling the demonstration, says Kai Heidemann, assistant professor in Sociology. “The current politicians who want to undermine our community with extreme cuts and a hyper-nationalistic position. Ambiguous threats of potential violence and chaos are a classic tactic to rein in social dissent.” He calls the idea that a pro-Palestinian group would hijack a demonstration about higher education unlikely. “This is one of the few sectors in the Netherlands where pro-Palestinian voices are given a degree of space. I suspect that the government chose to use what happened in Amsterdam (where riots erupted around a football match between an Israeli football club and Ajax, ed.) and suppress an inconvenient protest.”

Christoph Rausch, associate professor at University College Maastricht and deputy member on behalf of AOb in the Local Meeting (between the unions and the Executive

Board), understands that a lack of information is a cause of unease. “Openness and transparency are always a good thing, and in this case I would certainly appreciate it. But I understand that the information may be too sensitive to share for security reasons. I don’t think the ‘safety triangle’ would take a decision on this lightly. Of course, I wasn’t there, but I don’t think for one minute that they would exaggerate the potential danger.” He supports the decision made by the unions. “What else could they have done? You don’t take risks with the safety of your member or their fellow protesters. What if they had held the demonstration and something had happened, who is responsible then? Advice like that is essentially a ban, you can’t argue against it.”

Maintain momentum

All three hope that the movement will be able to maintain its momentum. “This will not be a short battle,” says Mykhaylo. Heidemann thinks that UM should start a media campaign and ask the municipal council and the province for explicit support. “BBB campaigned on regional autonomy and policy that matched regional circumstances. Now is the time for that party to put their money where their mouth is. UM is an essential part of our region.”

Cleo Freriks/HOP

New demonstration

Unions AOb and FNV are organising a new demonstration in The Hague on 25 November. That is also the day that the education budget will be discussed in the House of Representatives. Demonstrators will gather at Malieveld at 13:00. UM will refund any train tickets of members of staff who wish to take part. They will also not need to apply for leave. Students are allowed to miss classes, unless there is a test or a practical scheduled, or they are scheduled to work with patients. They will be responsible for catching up on anything they missed in class. Various faculties are also working on organising coaches to travel to and from the demonstration.



Humility & Hubris

“

Earlier this year, I was asked to create a new course on Conflict Prevention & Resolution (CPR). Since then, I’ve been thinking a lot about humility and hubris. The hypothesis that I’m currently exploring is that much of our conflict stems from hubris: How we can arrogantly believe that we are somehow superior to another, that we know something that others might not, or that we are entitled to more than another.

I find this quite troubling because I sometimes fall victim to this toxic mindset as well: For example, I cannot comprehend why some people vote against their own self-interest. I bicker over how I think the kids should be raised. I rant against the nonsensical actions of the government, and so on. In each case, I (mistakenly) believe in the superiority of my views relative to that of another, without even seeing the complete picture. In more academic terms, it’s naïve realism at its finest.

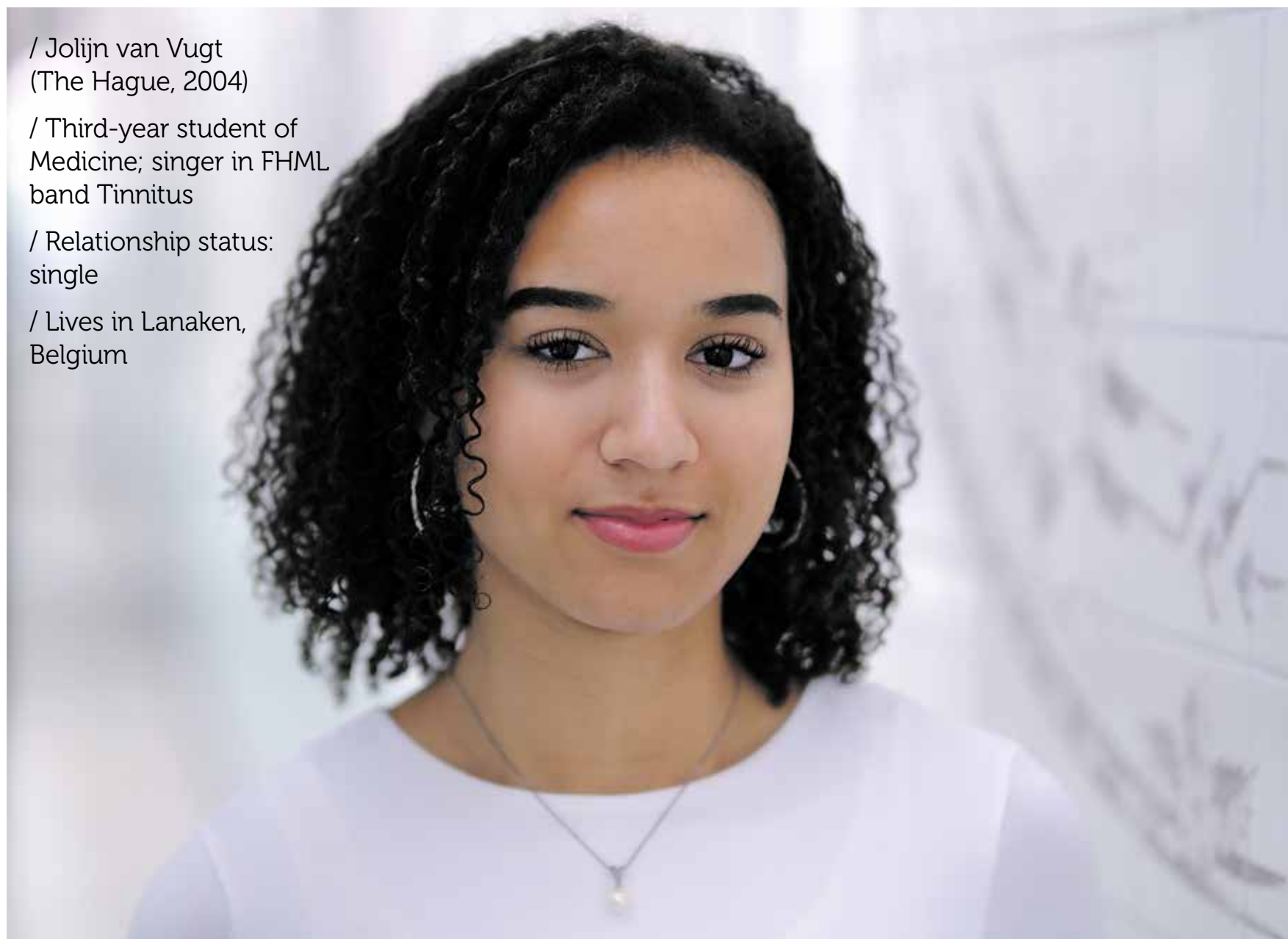
In an era where almost everyone seems to have a strong opinion (and a platform to peddle them on), staying humble has somehow fallen out of fashion. There seems to be an unfortunate assumption that we must be loud (or obnoxious) to be heard, while being sensible gets you buried in the bottom of the bin by the algorithms. As if to prove this assumption, a disturbingly large percentage of people are idolizing charlatans, acting without any shred of humility and praying at the altar of aggressive individualism. Unless someone is salient enough, we process inputs passively and swipe to the next content if we are bored even for a second. Or worse, we can’t stand to open the news for the fear of triggering dismay, so we shut it all out. Steeped in this noxious culture, we are forgetting how to patiently listen to others with the intention and the will to better understand and to connect with one another.

C.S. Lewis once said that “humility is not thinking less of yourself, it’s thinking of yourself less”, but when people feel unsafe or unheard, we tend to think more about ourselves. We start portraying conflicts in terms of me-versus-them, when what we need instead is to adopt a “we-and-us” mentality, because we are not fundamentally superior to any another. How we can get there, is by exercising our humility and listening better. I would advocate my CPR course as a potential catalyst as well, but instead, I’ll try to keep my hubris in check.

”

Mark Kawakami,
assistant professor
at the Faculty of Law

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



/ Jolijn van Vugt
(The Hague, 2004)

/ Third-year student of
Medicine; singer in FHML
band Tinnitus

/ Relationship status:
single

/ Lives in Lanaken,
Belgium

Photo: Joey Roberts

“

Sometimes I think, yeah, I look good.
And sometimes, after working out, I think, meh

”

What's your greatest talent? It's either singing or dancing. My grandmother got me a tutu for my first birthday. [Laughs] My parents enrolled me in classical ballet when I was four. They're really into classical music. My family is generally very musical: my mother and sister love to sing, my grandmother plays the piano in church, my father is a trumpet player in a jazz combo and my younger brother is training as a high baritone at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague. In addition to ballet, I do urban dance, like hip-hop. They're complete opposites: classical ballet is all about precise technique and discipline, while hip-hop focuses on grooves and freestyle. I'm still finding my feet with hip-hop freestyle, but I continue to learn and grow.

When I moved from The Hague to Maastricht to study Medicine, I stopped dancing for a while and really missed it. I now live in Lanaken, just across the border, where I teach dance to children. I've also taught hip-hop at MSDV Let's Dance. I take lessons at the Oxygen Academy of Dance in Maastricht, training to become an all-round performing dancer. I'll be competing soon.

My siblings are my best friends. When I couldn't find accommodation in Maastricht, I moved in with my sister and her fiancé in Lanaken. I've been living with them for two years. She's eleven years older than me. It felt like a big gap when we were younger, but it doesn't anymore. My younger brother still lives in The Hague; he and I are only a year and a half apart. We're all involved in health care: my

brother and I study medicine – yes, he does that in addition to studying at the conservatoire –, and my sister already works in a hospital as a radiology lab technician. Our family is very close, we see each other a lot, even though some relatives live in France and Italy. My mother is from Congo-Brazzaville and my father is Dutch.

The highlight of this year... was our first performance as the band Tinnitus. [Laughs] Yes, that name – we're Medicine students, after all. I'd always dreamt of singing in a band, but I wasn't sure if I'd be able to pull it off. I used to do classical and ensemble singing, like with the National Choirs in The Hague. Last year, I decided to just give it a go. I auditioned with Pulse, the study association for Medicine students, and now we perform regularly, like at Muziekgieterij or on Open Mic Night at University College Maastricht. We have two singers; sometimes we take turns performing. I'm a soprano, but I sing pop songs in a lower register. I don't have that typical piercing singing voice. It's such a joy to make music together and completely lose yourself in it.

Love? I'm open to meeting someone, but I'm not actively looking for a relationship. No dating apps for me. Everyone's busy, me included. But you make time for what really matters.

What do you see when you look in the mirror? It depends on my mood. Sometimes I think, "Yeah, I look good." Other times, like after working out, I

think, "Meh." As a teenager, I was self-conscious about my hair. My natural curls never looked the way I wanted. But I'm over that now. It's OK not to look amazing all the time; you can't always feel 100% confident.

My biggest inspiration... as a dancer was Michaela DePrince, an African American ballerina. She was a wonderful dancer and spoke openly about what it's like to live in a white world, which really resonated with me. When I was eight, I got to perform in a production by the Dutch Don't Dance Division, where she was also performing. After she passed away unexpectedly last September, I was invited to share my own experiences on Eva Jinek's talk show. That was very special. Sometimes I feel different too, especially with things like hair – it's harder for me to put it in a bun – and makeup, which is often geared towards lighter skin tones.

The best advice I ever received was: stay true to yourself. When you do, you make yourself happy and attract the right people into your life. I've experienced this in dance and music as well. Sometimes you have to step out of your comfort zone, like when I took up hip-hop alongside classical ballet. It'll all work out in the end.

Who doesn't like you? Hmm, hard to say. But I've had friendships end in the past, and it hurt. It's sad when you run into someone and there's nothing left of the connection you once shared. It happened when two friends of mine were fighting, and I got caught in the middle. I tried to stay neutral, but it was impossible.

Security or passion? It's difficult to make a full-time career out of dance and singing. You need a backup plan. One injury could end it all. That's why I combine my hobbies with my other passion, medicine. I did an internship at a care centre, which was incredibly inspiring, especially working in the dementia ward. I discovered that I'm good at connecting with patients. Sometimes, all they need is someone to listen. For me, it's all about inspiring people, whether through music – which speaks to everyone – or health care.

Lena Reichel

Weekly personal interview with a student or employee

Panel discussion about academic freedom and universities' moral compass

"As universities, we failed by boycotting Russia too quickly"

When does academic freedom clash with the societal responsibility of universities - for example, referring to partnerships with Israeli institutions? That was the central question of a Studium Generale meeting last Wednesday.



Kyiv, after a Russian missile attack in Januari 2024 Photo: Shutterstock

What does academic freedom actually entail? The fifty-odd people in the auditorium of the School of Business and Economics fills out an online questionnaire. 'Protest' is the most common answer to the question. It's not that surprising: there are a number of pro-Palestinian students listening to the panel discussion. Among them are participants of the demonstrations that have been held in Maastricht since the start of the war in Gaza.

It is entirely logical that students take to the streets, says Markha Valenta, a researcher at University College Utrecht. She has been invited to this evening of discussing dilemmas surrounding academic freedom and societal responsibility, for example, around the war in Gaza.

Universities, says Valenta, may say that they consider democracy, international law and human rights important, but the reality is different: according to her, they "suppress" any discussions about them when Israel is the one violating those principles. The subsequent anger then manifests in demonstrations. "There is a documented genocide happening in front of our very eyes" and so universities should cut all ties with Israeli institutes.

But is that as easy as it sounds? Professor Raf Geenens (KU Leuven) doubts it. He is a member of the ethics committee that has been carefully examining all of Leuven's international partnerships and making bind-

ing decisions on them since 2019. The fundamental question is "whether there is enough evidence to show that a university is complicit in violating human rights". If so, then the (planned) partnership is terminated. For example, the committee ruled that the Israeli government "was likely involved in serious human rights violations". This meant that a halt was called to new partnerships with the government and associated institutes and hospitals.

One student would like to know why the website for KU Leuven still lists a number of new partnerships with Israeli universities who would deny access to Palestinians. Geenens says that is because overwhelming evidence is needed before terminating a partnership - after all, it is about decisions that could limit the freedom of researchers. If the evidence isn't there, "then we give a green

light but issue a warning: this is not the time for such partnerships". The relevant researcher then makes the final decision. Geenens understand

that this doesn't satisfy the activists, "but from an international perspective, this is significant. No other university of a similar size goes as far".

Not even Maastricht University - yet. Ties with Israeli institutes were "frozen" shortly before the summer, in the meantime, work is being carried out on the so-called Human Rights Due Diligence tool. It will be used to determine whether the hands of partners in war zones are clean. In December, a concept will be sent to the University Council for discussion, President Rianne Letschert said this evening.

"There is a documented genocide happening in front of our very eyes"

But why does it all have to take so long, says Valenta, voicing the feelings of the pro-Palestinian students. After all, when Russia invaded Ukraine in

2022, the Dutch government very quickly requested a boycott by the universities, who quickly complied. "Too quickly," Rotterdam professor Ruard Ganzevoort admits. "We have learnt our lesson." Moreover, says Letschert: "As Dutch universities, we really failed there." It was "a violation of our autonomy. We should have said: this is going too far". That is why they are so much more careful now; imposing a document from above and without input "is dangerous".

Observant takes a look at the finances of three generations: **1986, 2003, 2024**

Student household budgets: from a free room in the attic to working hard for a beer



University – until the sixties, it was a privilege reserved for the upper crust, nowadays vast swathes of the population have a Bachelor's or Master's degree. But where one has to take out every loan possible, the other has no trouble making ends meet. No, the history of student finances is never boring – and never has been. *Observant* looks at what has changed in the world of student finance over the last forty years.

Text: Deborah Blekkenhorst **Illustrations:** Simone Golob

End of October 1986.

Nineteen-year-old economics student Desiree de Roo has to admit, it's a nice bonus. She has just received the first instalment for her basic grant, 293 guilders (about 130 euros in today's money), thanks to the new law on student loans which was rolled out earlier this month. It means that students who live on their own as well as students still living at home will receive a fixed amount, something that will come in very handy for this student. "I have just paid my tuition fees (1604 guilders, about 710 euros), and every little that comes in now helps." She is not the only who thinks that, although some people did protest heavily against the new measures. "They say it's not fair that people with rich parents get the same amount as those from families who are not as well off." A few of De Roo's fellow students demonstrated at the Binnenhof in the nude, as a way of saying they felt Minister Deetman of Education was robbing the shirts off their backs. Unflattering rhyming slogans accusing Deetman of not having a clue can frequently be heard around the university.

De Roo prefers to concentrate on her degree, which she wants to finish in four years, so as to avoid any penalties. "The new law says that any student who takes longer than six years to complete their degree has to pay higher tuition fees. It's an increase of 40 percent, which I'd rather avoid."

She's careful with her money. Among other things, she has to bear in mind an

HOW IT STARTED...

The first Dutch university opened its doors in Leiden in 1575 and at the time, cost 200 guilders a year. In 1815, King William I introduced a scholarship for a select group of students – often from working or middle class families – in Leiden, Utrecht and Groningen, which covered about a third of their tuition fees per year. In 1956, the education allowance was introduced: increased child benefits for parents of students. The height of the allowance partly depended on the parents' income. Children from poorer families were eligible for a grant. Thirty years later, the Study Finance Act means that all students, regardless of their parents' income, will receive a basic monthly grant: 600 guilders per month for those living on their own and 300 guilders for those who live at home. Students from poorer families can apply for a supplementary grant up to 380 guilders (about 169 euros). About 40 percent applies for that. Neither the basic grant nor the supplementary grant have to be repaid.

annual cost of about 800 guilders (356 euros) for books and school supplies. "Thankfully, my parents have offered to

pay for my health insurance this year. That's 450 guilders (about 200 euros), so it's a huge relief that I don't have to worry about that."

Another bonus is that De Roo can still live at home for the time being. She would have liked to move into student housing, but despite the extensive search and multiple evenings spent applying to join accommodation, she has yet to find a suitable living space. That does mean that she has to cycle to university from her hometown every day. "Half an hour each way. It's doable, especially when you consider it doesn't cost me anything."

The same doesn't apply to De Roo's friend. As a student living on her own, she receives a higher grant (626 guilders, about 278 euros), half of which – about 330 guilders (147 euros) – is spent on renting a small room in the city centre. "She has to share the kitchen and the bathroom with two others. In that case, I'd rather have my room in the attic."

When she's not at university, or at home, De Roo works in the local café, where she tries to work as many extra hours as possible. That nets her an average of 160 guilders (71 euros) extra a month. "And don't forget the tips," she adds. "They are always welcome."

Summer 2003. Pieter de Wit managed to find accommodation in the nick of time. "It was a hellish search, but I managed to move in two days before the start of the academic year," says the



21-year-old, second-year cultural studies student. “My little brother was unlucky, so he’s still living at home and gets a lower grant.” De Wit receives a basic grant of 220 euros a month, his brother has to make do with about 70 euros. “I also have a student loan and a supplementary grant, as my parents don’t earn much, so all in all, I get about 700 euros a month. And I need it, too,” says De Wit. He’s not the only one: figures released by *Informatie Beheer Groep*, the body responsible for distributing student grants, show that last year, in 2002, loans totalled 478 million euros. That is significantly more than five years ago, when students racked up loans worth 249 million euros. A few months ago, De Wit was one of some eight thousand students on the Malieveld demonstrating against doubling the tuition fees and lowering students grants. “It was all very civilised, a protest march past the Binnenhof and the cuts were off the table,” says De Wit, beaming. De Wit uses his income to pay his tuition fees (1445 euros), buy books and other school supplies, and pay his rent. He lives just outside the centre of Maastricht and pays 360 euros a month for 21 square metres. That is higher than the average rent per square metre in the city, 15.70 euros, but still lower than average rents in Amsterdam, where rents are nearly 27 euro per square metre. He works at Makro – a large wholesaler’s – every Saturday and two evenings a week, which earns him another 330 euros. “I might be able to earn more elsewhere, but that’s often paid under the table and irregular hours. It is hard work, but my parents taught me to write down exactly what’s coming in and going out.” That list also includes his gym membership and his health insurance, for example, which cost him about 50 euros per month. And the

shopping? “I do that twice a week, I buy normal stuff, like bread, some toppings, fruit, milk, soft drinks. I’m careful, but I do still buy beer.”

... AND WHAT CHANGED

In 1991, the student public transport card was introduced, which allowed students to travel for free. Over the years, many changes were made and in 2001, this card became a loan. In 1993, the progress-related grant was introduced, and the basic grant and any potential supplementary grants were turned into provisional gifts. Whoever managed to accrue enough credits each year was allowed to keep the money, otherwise the grant had to be repaid. In order to prevent students not finishing their degrees, or taking more than ten years to graduate, the government introduced the performance-related grant in 1996. The money received is not confirmed as a gift until after a timely graduation. In 2015, the basic grant came to an end and a new system of student loans was introduced: a maximum of 1034.85 euros a month, including a tuition fee loan, and a repayment term of 35 years. In 2023, the basic grant was reintroduced and the interest on student loan debts increased to 0.46 percent. As of 1 January 2024, it is 2.56 percent. The conditions for the supplementary grant were also relaxed at the start of this year: the income limit for parents increased to 70 thousand euros, meaning more students are now eligible for the grant.

De Wit reckons his trips to the supermarket cost him about 30 euros each. Whatever is left is spent on his mobile phone contract, going out in the evenings, and the occasional new outfit or pair of shoes. “I’m less likely to splash out on a hundred-euro pair of trousers.”

September 2024.

“Summer has flown by,” sighs 20-year-old law student Marieke Witmaker. She’s getting ready for her third year, with a student grant, which was reintroduced a year ago. “I am still eligible for the basic and supplementary grants for another two years, the rest of my degree, which is nice,” says the student, who also applied for the tuition fee loan and a loan with DUO this year. “When I started my degree, they were all still loans, so I’m used to borrowing money,” she laughs. “But it’s not great.” All in all, Witmaker has calculated that she receives 1264.49 euros a month. She lives in student housing and gets an initial 302.39 euros. On top of that, she has a supplementary grant for 457.60 euros, because her parents are unable to contribute much. “And then there are the loans, one of which I use to cover my tuition fees worth 2530 euros. I also have to pay my rent, I live on the outskirts of Maastricht

and pay 515 euros.” That still leaves the third year below the national average. Her boyfriend, who ended up in Amsterdam, pays 900 euros a month for what Witmaker can only describe as a “broom cupboard”. “There’s no other word for it, he hardly has any room.” Aside from those two main ones, there’s a whole range of other expenses. “I saw one of those calculations recently, it was pretty accurate.” Witmaker is referring to the household budget produced by the National Institute for Budgeting, the Nibud. It’s an overview of all the different expenses, such as shopping (244 euros a month), books and supplies (41 euros), telephone, television and internet contracts (71 euros), and insurances, such as health and liability insurance. “Basic health insurance now costs 134 euros, with an additional 24 euros for the supplementary policy. I’ve applied for healthcare allowance, which thankfully means the costs is ultimately lower.” In order to have money to spend on the occasional treat, Witmaker works at the local supermarket. She works 16 hours a week on the tills, earning 10.94 euros an hour. “I really wouldn’t mind working more, but I’d rather graduate sooner, before I’m faced with a penalty for taking too long.” She’s trying to get ahead of the

plans of the government: in 2026, students who have built up a delay of more than a year will be expected to pay an extra 3000 euros in tuition fees. Witmaker would prefer to avoid that; she has more than enough financial ‘challenges’, having already racked up a student loan debt. And she’s not alone. Recent figures from the Central Bureau of Statistics reveal that the average student loan debt for current and former students is now 18 thousand euros, with some outliers owing as much as 50 thousand or even over 100 thousand euros. “I prefer not to think about it,” says Witmaker. “It hasn’t become any easier. When I look at what my parents received in grants and what I get now, I don’t see much of a difference. And in my opinion, life back then was definitely a bit cheaper. I might go out to a movie tonight just to take my mind off it.” She does have room in her budget for that, she adds. “I set aside a little each month to cover things like the gym, relaxation, and going out. And I will continue to.”

BALANCING

Nibud has been investigating the financial position of students since 2009. The latest findings, from September of this year, reveal that thanks to the reintroduction of the basic grant, students are better off than a few years ago. “They’re better able to make ends meet,” says spokesperson Karin Radstaak. “During the loan system, parents would often jump in more, meaning students were more financially dependent and less independent. That’s not what you want for young adults. That’s much better now.”

It should be noted, however, that students in the academic year 2023/2024 received 164.30 euros a month to compensate for the increase in prices. “That was stopped at the start of this academic year, so we need to wait and see what that does to their finances.” Radstaak points out that it has become easier to get a supplementary loan, something that is also very necessary in most cases. “It’s good that everybody has the opportunity to study and that there are so many resources available, but it is always essentially accruing a debt. On the other hand, the government is a fairly lenient lender, with a relatively low interest. Moreover, you know it is a temporary situation and that you are ultimately working towards a good job and financial independence. It’s a constant balance between the pros and cons.”



Change is in the bag for Maastricht

Download the MilieuApp
to see what's changing in your street.



Major changes to waste services in 2025

From 1 January, pmd (plastics, metal packaging, and drink cartons) will be collected in many areas of the city. Residual waste bags will gradually be replaced by underground containers in most districts. *Milieuparken* (recycling centres) will be free to use for all residents as of 1 January, with charges only for residual and bulky waste. These changes make waste disposal easier and will help make Maastricht cleaner and greener. Ultimately, Maastricht aims to eliminate waste altogether and turn it into resources for new products.

gemeentemaastricht.nl/en/waste-management