

# observant

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## Just the two of us



Only two students started the Master's programme Imaging Engineering this year. It's nowhere close to problem-based learning, it's more like private tutoring. What's that like? And how viable is a programme like that?

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# Show-offs

“We, philosophers”, my mentors boasted, eager to flaunt the profound wisdom and expertise they had already acquired as second-year philosophy students. It was a hot August day, and the introduction for first years at Nijmegen had begun just a few hours earlier. Along with 54 fellow students (there was no mixing with other study programmes), I was gearing up for a week of partying and an introductory camp. Or so I thought. By mid-afternoon, I’d had enough. Having already completed a higher professional education degree, I wasn’t eighteen anymore, and the older students’ pretentious behaviour irritated me to no end. My brand-new friend felt the same way, so we grabbed our bikes and headed to Café De Plak. We never went back. That was the end of my Nijmegen INKOM. Mentor groups falling apart is nothing new. Here in Maastricht, they’re now trying to prevent it by letting first-year students indicate their preferences through an online decision tree. Are you into sports? Parties? Culture? Tick a box. By the end, you’re left with ten potential groups. After each mentor has made a pitch for their group, the first years get to make the final choice. The idea is that this will increase your chances of ending up with like-minded people, hopefully making for a close-knit group. Although the coming academic year is still a few months away, we too are already deep in preparations. This week, I met with a new columnist and two students who’ll be writing film reviews for us. Ideas for new series are pouring in, and our big editorial meeting is scheduled for Monday. Naturally, one of the items on the agenda is Maastricht University’s fiftieth anniversary. We’ll be giving it plenty of attention, though how I don’t know yet. One last word on INKOM. If I were a first-year student now, I’d probably go for a sports-focused group. That’s what I ended up in back in Nijmegen, thanks to the then wildly popular student workout *Bewegen Op Muziek*, known as *BOMmen*. As for picking a mentor, I doubt I’d be very fussy. I’d just make sure to steer clear of the show-offs.

Riki Janssen

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



Photo: Ellen Oosterhof

## “This was the first place where I felt at home in Maastricht”



**Anneke Müller, a first-year European Studies student, shares her favourite spot in Maastricht: Café Rosé, Limburg’s oldest LGBTQIA+ bar, run by volunteers from COC Netherlands.**

“The first time I visited Maastricht, I thought it was a beautiful city, but also a bit uptight. All those fancy, expensive shops... I wasn’t sure it was really my kind of place. The first time I truly felt at home here was when a friend took me to Café Rosé – which is funny, as I’m not much of a party person. But that’s when I saw a different side of the city. I immediately felt comfortable; it’s a place where people can just be themselves.

“I realised I was queer a bit later than most people, just after finishing high school. I grew up in a small town near Hamburg in Germany. The people there are very accepting, but there’s nothing for the queer community. There’s only one pub in town, and it burned down. So I never really got to explore that side of myself. Here, I can, and it makes my student life feel more complete. Café Rosé is also one of the few alternative bars in Maastricht, and I really vibe with the music they play. My friends, including those who aren’t queer, are always happy to go there with me.

“For a long time, I wasn’t sure what I wanted to study, but I knew I wanted to move to a bigger city. Hamburg seemed like the obvious choice, but the university didn’t offer the kind of international programme I was looking for. It took me a while to get used to Maastricht and living on my own, adjusting to everything new, but I’ve come to really like it here. I’ve joined the UM Choir, made a group of friends, and I find my study programme interesting. At weekends, I love wandering around the city among the tourists and day trippers; hearing all those different languages makes it feel like being on holiday.

The only thing Maastricht is missing is a spot to sit by the Meuse and dip your feet in the water.”

Cleo Freriks

In this new series, Observant asks a student every week about their favorite spot in Maastricht

New student party: Lift the food ban and toilet restrictions during exams

## More candidates standing for university elections in May

*Interest in seats on Maastricht University's representative bodies has surged compared to two years ago. This year, more candidate lists have been submitted (eight) and the number of candidates exceeds the number of available seats more often than before. For several faculty councils, this means there are candidates to choose from.*

From 19 to 22 May, students and staff will have the opportunity to vote for representatives on the faculty councils and the University Council. It's only at the Faculty of Law and the School of Business and Economics (SBE) that academic staff won't need to vote for the faculty councils, as the number of candidates either matches the number of seats (five at Law) or even falls short: at SBE, there are only three candidates for four seats.

Two years ago, when both students and staff last voted (students are elected for one year, staff members for two), the situation was quite dif-

ferent: academic staff elections were held only for the University Council and two of the six faculties.

In 2023, administrative and support staff didn't need to vote for the faculty councils, as there were fewer candidates than seats. They did vote for the University Council. This year, things have much improved: no support staff seats will remain unfilled, although not all faculties will hold elections. At the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS), Health, Medicine and Life Sciences (FHML), Psychology and SBE, the number of candidates matches the number of seats.

What about the students? Student parties Dope, KAN, NovUM and Lex-Motus are once again standing for various councils. However, three new parties have emerged, each with a single candidate: voxis – your voice, our responsibility (University Council and SBE Faculty Council), Reason and Transparency (Law Faculty Council) and Lijst voor Nederland (Law

Faculty Council and University Council). Lijst voor Nederland prioritises Dutch interests, as stated in its manifesto: "The university must prioritise the future of the Netherlands, not its own economic gain. It's time to put the interests of the Netherlands at the heart of every policy decision." But also, "The ban on eating and restrictions on toilet visits during exams must be lifted immediately. Students should be able to concentrate without having to worry about their health."

On Wednesday 7 May, student parties will meet for a live debate at the Minderbroedersberg Auditorium, starting at 7.00 pm. There will be no debate among staff member candidates due to a lack of interest, according to the Central Elections Office.

*Riki Janssen*

*The university elections will take place from 19 to 22 May, with results announced on Friday 23 May*

## INKOM participants to choose their own mentors



*The INKOM, almost a decade ago, when the INKOM' group number was 'just written' on a hand and new students were randomly assigned a mom or dad Photo: Loraine Bodewes*

*The INKOM mentor policy is undergoing a complete overhaul. For years, prospective students were by the organization assigned to a senior student, a 'mum' or 'dad', who would guide them through the introduction week. From now on, new students will decide which mentor they want to spend their time with.*

First years who will be taking part in the next edition of INKOM will have quite a lot of input. Before they start, they can use a digital

decision tree to indicate their preferences. Do you like sports? Parties? Culture? Tick a box. By the end, there are ten different groups. What follows are the mentors' 'sales pitches' (picture plus text), after which the INKOM participant has to make a final choice. Mentors are senior students who volunteer their time. Some are members of a student association, such as Tragos and Saurus, others belong to an independent student society, student drama club, or sports club, and yet

others are completely 'unaffiliated'. For decades, the application process didn't use a decision tree; new students were assigned to a 'mum' or 'dad'. Sometimes it was a good match, sometimes it wasn't, which resulted in groups splitting up very quickly. Not to mention that it was common knowledge that some participants were deliberately ignored by their mentors, simply because they didn't fit

*Read more on page 8*



## Making Happiness Stick!

“

Two weeks ago I had one of the best days of my life: I spent the day getting tattooed! The day itself was perfect not only because I was finally getting my second tattoo—which I had looked forward to for months—but it was wonderful to spend the day with my tattoo artist, in her bright plant-filled studio, beautiful soundtrack music playing in the background. Most importantly, I was extremely happy with the final result. Interestingly, in the days afterward, I found myself feeling sad that this could have been my last tattoo, and my mind wandered to thoughts of a potential *third* tattoo. How quickly my initial elation had begun to be 'clouded' by creeping negative thoughts. Then I remembered that I actually teach about this very topic in the Health and Social Psychology Master. Namely, a central question of our class on positive emotions is: How can we hold on to the boost in happiness that follows from positive life events? According to the *hedonic adaptation prevention (HAP) model*, everyone has their own "set point" of happiness, and positive life events only temporarily increase happiness because people inevitably get used to them and return to their set point. Luckily, this "hedonic adaptation" can be prevented—or at least delayed—if people consciously engage in efforts to "keep the fire fed," through two routes:

First, the bottom-up route requires people to consciously interact with the change in ways that cause positive emotions. In the case of my tattoo, I need to clean it and apply ointment twice a day, which is a good time to stop and appreciate it. Second, the top-down route requires people to resist the temptation to look to the "next best thing" because this diminishes the joy from the original change. Instead, people should make an effort to consciously appreciate and savor the positive change. For example, when taking care of my tattoo, I can remind myself of how grateful I am for it, and that I am lucky to have met a great tattoo artist.

Research shows that happiness is for a large part (50, 60 percent) shaped by factors outside our control (e.g., genetics, circumstances), but 40 percent is in our own hands. So remember, the next time you take a nice holiday, publish an article you are proud of, attend an inspiring conference, or obtain a grant: keep the fire fed.

”

*Jessica Alleva,  
assistant professor at the faculty  
of Psychology and Neuroscience*

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



/ Raymond Spons  
(Eijsden, 1970)

/ Percussionist at the  
PhilZuid Philharmonic  
Orchestra and conductor  
of the University Orchestra  
Maastricht

/ Relationship status:  
married, three children

/ Lives in:  
Maastricht

Photo: Joey Roberts

“

Am I a workaholic? It doesn't feel that way, but I've come close to burnout

”

**As a child, I was...** always busy with music. If I heard a song on the radio, I wanted to play it on the piano. Music was, and still is, my greatest passion. My parents encouraged it, but they weren't keen on me going to music school. My mother said, "If it's your passion, go for it", but my father saw music as a wonderful hobby and wanted me to learn a "trade". I owe a lot to the then-director of the conservatoire, who really wanted me as a student and spoke to my parents. His enthusiasm tipped the scales in my favour. I later joined the National and European Youth Orchestras, which my parents loved. Once my father realised that I was going to make it as a professional musician, it was no longer an issue.

**Conducting or making music?** They say you can't have one foot on the conductor's podium and one foot in the orchestra, but I think conducting is still making music. After all, you're imposing a specific interpretation of a piece on the orchestra. I now spend half my time as a percussionist and the other half teaching and conducting. I've always had a

passion for conducting, have always been a bit of a leader – not that I was bossy, but I like it when someone in a group takes charge. And if no one else does, I will.

**If I wasn't a musician, I'd be...** a mechanical engineer. I'm a science guy; I loved subjects like physics and chemistry in school. I found them easy to understand and didn't have to put a lot of work into them, which gave me time to focus on making music. I probably would've gone into instrument making. There's a large instrument factory here in Limburg that I visit now and then; it's wonderful to see the thinking they put into making the instruments. But honestly, I couldn't imagine a life without music. I'm glad I've never had to answer this question.

**Are you closer to your father or your mother?** [Laughs] My mother would say the latter, but I always loved spending time with my father, too. Not long before he passed away, we had a few really good conversations.

They weren't long, but we said everything that needed to be said. In his final hours, we shared a beer. "It's all right", he said, "I've had a good life." I hope that when the time comes, I can say the same.

**What's the last compliment you received?** A PhilZuid colleague complimented my playing. I immediately downplayed it – I'm a professional, so it should sound good! But it's still nice to hear, and it was nice of him to take the time to say it. I'm the same way; I can be critical if something isn't up to standard, but I'll also give credit where credit is due. If someone deserves a compliment, you have to give it to them.

**Everyone should know this composer.** Do I have to pick just one? Oh dear... [Thinks] Richard Strauss. He's incredible at capturing atmosphere in music. His *An Alpine Symphony* is the musical embodiment of a mountain hike. The sunrise, reaching the summit, the glacier... you can picture it so vividly. I enjoy conducting his work, though I don't do it often – it's difficult for amateurs to perform. The most challenging piece I've ever done with the University Orchestra was Brahms's *Symphony No. 2* earlier this year. We worked on it for six months, and just before Christmas, I thought, "We're going to pull this off." And we did, which was a wonderful feeling.

**In ten years...** I'll still be a percussionist with PhilZuid, but probably no longer conducting the University Orchestra. I've been with them for twenty years, and I'll be 65 by then – too old to work with a new generation of students. Maybe I'll pass the baton to my son. He's 17 now, has a good ear, and he also wants to be a conductor. I think it's great, but I do worry, given the pressure the arts are under in the Netherlands. [Laughs] Yes, the same concern my father once had about me.

**I still want to learn...** how to set boundaries. I find it difficult to say no. I once had to list my work activities for the Tax Administration and realised I'd been working seven days per week. Am I a workaholic? It doesn't feel that way, but I've come close to burnout. I've learnt the hard way that I need to carve out time for rest in busy periods. If I don't, I become irritable and snap at the people around me, and I want to prevent that from happening. It's the downside of my drive.

Peter Doorakkers

Weekly personal interview with a student or employee

Money will go to fund for students and scholars at risk

# After five years, UM gets cyber hack ransom back, including 'profit'

Five years after Maastricht University paid almost €200,000 in ransom to the cyber criminals who had hacked into its systems, the money has been returned to the university – plus another three hundred thousand euros in 'profit'. The money will go to a new fund for students and researchers at risk, including a project that relocates scholars in war zones to the Netherlands.



The laptop on which the cyber-hack started, 'Patient Zero', is on display in the administrative building Photo: Observant

The hack on 23 December 2019 completely paralysed the university. UM was faced with a "devilish dilemma", in the words of Nick Bos, then member of the Executive Board. Eventually, after a few days, UM decided to give in to the hackers' demands and pay the ransom (in bitcoin). In 2022, Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant* revealed that the police and the Public Prosecutor were very quickly able to track part of the money. In February 2020, they managed to freeze a so-called 'wallet' containing crypto currency worth €40,000. In the two years it took to transfer the money to the Netherlands, the value had risen to half a million euros. UM then had to wait almost a further two years before they were finally able to receive the money. "The Public Prosecution Service first had to carry out a thorough legal investigation to make sure that the whole amount belonged to UM, and that none of the money belonged to any other victims of these criminals," said UM spokesperson Koen Augustijn. That investigation has since been completed: at the end of 2024, the total sum of €561,976 was paid into the university's bank account. That is over €350,000 more than the university paid in 2019, although UM doesn't consider it profit. "After all, the total damages were significantly higher than the

money that has now been returned," said Augustijn. In fact, the costs of the hack and the subsequent fallout – including stricter digital security – are "dozens of times higher, more than a million euros a year", Jacques Beursgens, head of the ICT service centre, told *Observant* last January. Nevertheless, the money won't be used to compensate those costs. "We see this as an unexpected bonus," said Augustijn. "So, we have decided, let's use this money to help people who are struggling." The Executive Board had previously announced a plan to deposit the money in a fund for students and scholars at risk. That is currently being set up, said Augustijn, who called it "an administrative action, but one that still needs to happen". The exact details of the fund are still to be decided, but it is clear that €120,000 will go to the Safe Haven Fellowship Programme of the NIAS research institute in Amsterdam (part of KNAW, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences). Since 2023, this institute has offered safe workplaces in the Netherlands to scholars, artists, journalists and more

*"The Public Prosecution Service first had to carry out a thorough legal investigation to make sure that none of the money belonged to any other victims of these criminal"*

who are stuck in war zones. For example, at the start of the year, six researchers from Ukraine and Gaza came to Amsterdam. "Our contribution is equivalent to the cost of bringing a researcher to the Netherlands to do scientific work for a year, including cost of living and the like," said Margriet Schreuders, head of the Student Service Centre, and as of recently, also the coordinator of the UM Refugee policy. That makes UM an official partner of the programme for this year, just like the University of Amsterdam. Although this doesn't mean that the researchers will be working in Maastricht. "They spend four days a week at NIAS in Amsterdam. On the fifth day, they head out into the rest of the country, which could also include Maastricht. For example, two researchers will soon give a lecture at Studium Generale. And we are currently looking at whether there are any opportunities to work together with Maastricht students or researchers."

## background

Only two students on the Imaging Engineering Master's

# "Problem-based learning is rather a challenge"



**I**maging Engineering (MIE) is a two-year, English-language Master's programme at the Faculty of Science and Engineering, which is now in its third year. Although the programme managed to attract seven students in September 2023, the new cohort consists of only two: one from Iran and one from America. Programme director Gavin Hazell: "Initially, we were expecting six students, but because of various visa issues, four dropped out."

Can it still be called problem-based learning if it's such a small group? Normally, that involves discussions between ten to fifteen students. "We did try it, with the help of a tutor, but it often felt forced," said 28-year-old American student, Chance Everett Charles. Hazell recognised the struggle: "PBL is rather a challenge and requires flexibility from our course coordinators, sometimes they have to change the way a process is implemented. You can't stick rigidly to the standard method, sometimes you are forced to choose a more practical approach, such as a computer assignment to analyse an image."

The sessions are also shorter, sometimes more informal, such as meeting in the tutor's office. The students are given questions about the assigned reading, then discuss them, either with each other or with the teacher, or are expected to write a paper. As the two students are taking different elective courses (only for MIE students) in this and the next

Imaging Engineering is a Master's programme with only two first-year students. It's nowhere close to problem-based learning, it's more like private tutoring; what's that like? And how viable is a programme like that? "These types of Master's programmes aren't particularly lucrative, but that isn't the point. You have them for strategic reasons, or because you think it is an important subject."

period, they also have to work 'solo' a lot. For example, where one is taking Advanced Image Processing & AI, the other has chosen Advanced Optical Microscopy. It would not have been strange, if the programme board had said that there would be no elective options this year due to the lack of students, but Charles is glad that didn't happen. "That's what they used to recruit students, it's something you look forward to as a prospective student, so it's nice that they said: 'We think it's fair to offer them to you.'"

## CHALLENGES

The degree is aimed at producing interdisciplinary specialists who are both able to work with the technical side of imaging, and have the necessary scientific knowledge. An example of a modern imaging system is mass spectrometry, a technique that allows for the imaging of molecules. This is a key area of the Maastricht research institute M4I, run by distinguished university professor Ron Heeren, so he is involved with the degree programme. And yet, MIE is by no means focused solely on the biomedical field. For example, the students were tasked with designing a platform holding a camera that scans art works in the Bonnefanten Museum.

But what do the students themselves think of the small-scale programme? Charles is an electro-technician, who spent a number of years working for the American army as a specialist in unmanned aerial systems, such as drones. He came across UM during a trip around the world after leaving the army. He was not familiar with problem-based learning, so the fact that he is missing out on it now, is no skin off his nose. Nor is the fact that he has only one fellow student, "I prefer to study by myself". Not so, the 28-year-old Iranian student Niyousha Mirza-

ghavam. Once in Maastricht – she really wanted to study in Europe – she was shocked to discover there were only two students, including herself. Very different to her time at the Islamic Azad University in Teheran, where she had been one of five hundred students taking the Bachelor's in Biomedical Engineering. She said MIE is a tough degree, content-wise, but especially because of the English terminology. Her mother tongue is Farsi and her Bachelor's degree was also in that language. Mirzaghavam has experienced "the necessary challenges", something that might have been easier if there had been more students around her, she said, people she could have become friends with, had discussions with, could have learned from. Now, she is mostly reliant on herself.

## 19 THOUSAND EUROS

Regardless of the lack of 'international classroom' – it's more like private tutoring – the question arises as to how viable such a degree programme even is. FSE currently has five Master's programmes and this is the only one that has "fewer than ten students", explained director Bakir Bulić. Because the other Master's programmes have "excellent student numbers", MIE can "easily piggy-back off the support we offer the larger programmes, such as applications and scheduling. That helps spread the fixed costs. It need not be said that while it isn't a super lucrative programme in a financial sense, it also isn't a financial 'bleeder' that damages the faculty." Dean Thomas Cleij referenced other Master's programmes such as Biobased Materials and System Biology, which also had very few students in their first years. "That intake is now much improved, so you just need to be patient." He also pointed out that the engineering side of the faculty is slowly growing. "We still

have very few alumni, our Bachelor's programmes in engineering are still fairly new." Finally, the anti-internationalisation plans of the government haven't helped either, said the dean. Universities chose to make their own decisions and in 2024, jointly agreed not to recruit internationally any more. (Although, UM has recently chosen to ignore that decision by recruiting in the Euregion.) For students outside the European Union, such as Charles and Mirzaghavam, this degree costs over 19 thousand euros (institutional tuition fees). As a former soldier, Charles is taking advantage of a scheme by the US military, 'compensation' to help veterans work on a civilian career. This scheme also covers studying abroad. Mirzaghavam saved up the money needed, aided financially by her parents.

Illustration: Simone Golob

## How the Shells of the world thwart efforts to tackle the climate crisis

# "WHEN YOU'RE THE ROOT CAUSE OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS, OF COURSE, SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES ARE SCARY"

Denying until it's impossible to deny any longer, sowing seeds of doubt, shifting responsibility to governments and consumers, smoke screens, lobbying, proclaiming half-truths: for over half a century, oil companies have been stubbornly trying to counteract the transition to truly sustainable energy sources, says Giuliana Gentile, researcher at the Maastricht Sustainability Institute (part of the School of Business and Economics). "I almost started to pity them."

"You don't have to prove that the facts are wrong, you just have to call them into question. Then they shift from the scientific to the public debate. Instead of asking 'What are we going to do about this established problem?', the question becomes whether the problem exists at all." An accurate description of covid scepticism? It could be, but that is not what Giuliana Gentile is talking about. In a room in Tapijn 11, we spoke to the Italian PhD candidate about how oil and gas companies have been influencing the climate debate and climate policy for decades.

For a long time, their strategy was to deny that the use of fossil fuels (and the resulting CO<sub>2</sub> emissions) causes climate change – despite the fact that those same companies had been aware of that fact for at least fifty years, says Gentile. "The oil industry commissioned some of the research itself and is well

aware of the consequences of its action. But people simply chose to deliberately ignore it, in favour of profits." Until by the turn of the century, evidence of climate change was so strong, that there was no use denying it any longer. The solution? Readily admitting that climate change does exist, while in the meantime, doing everything they can to slow down the transition to sustainable energy, says Gentile. "That's how they try to remain relevant."

### MISLEADING

Earlier this year, she published an article in the journal *Renewable & Sustainable Energy Reviews* together with Amsterdam professor of sustainability Joyeeta Gupta. It involved a literature review and careful analysis of all the sustainability reports published by Shell since 2005. It's practically a how-to guide of underhand tactics: lobbying governments, spreading misinformation, employing people who work for the very institutions which are supposed to audit you. And calling the science itself into question.

Oil companies like to present themselves as greener and more sustainable than they actually are. And that, says Gentile, is sometimes done in very subtle ways. "BP changed its name from 'British Petroleum' to 'Beyond Petroleum', which gives a very different impression. In its annual reports, Shell has started replacing the word 'oil' with the much more neutral-sounding word 'energy'. Or take their Instagram account, it's full of wind turbines and solar panels, which might lead you to think that Shell is heavily investing in renewable energy. Meanwhile it only makes up a very small percentage of their investments. That is misleading."

Equally misleading is what she calls "techno-optimism". "That is the almost fanatical belief that we don't have to tackle the climate crisis, because eventually, there will be a technological solution. In the meantime, we can just carry on producing fossil fuels and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions." But surely, technological climate measures could be valuable? "Absolutely," she agrees, "but thinking technology can help us is not the same as making 'technology' wholly responsible for tackling climate change, as if there is nothing else we might need to change."

### SHIFT RESPONSIBILITY

Essentially, she says, oil companies are trying to shift their responsibilities to governments and consumers. "The headline becomes 'Our customers emit more CO<sub>2</sub> emissions when using our products than we do when making them'. Or, 'The International Energy Agency says that governments must change their policies to prevent more CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the future'. In other words, someone else has to do the hard work. Consumers often all too easily fall into that trap, too: 'If the government isn't going to do anything, then neither am I.' That is a natural reaction, it's scary to face the reality of the climate crisis. But for a company, it's a deliberate decision, and that is much worse, because they have a much greater impact."

The question of why the delay tactics remains. Profit, she says, and fear. "Climate measures threaten the companies that caused the crisis. These strategies are how they try to remain relevant." So, evil intentions? Gentile laughs. "When I started examining the Shell reports, I was completely focused on proving the bad intentions of companies that sought to delay climate measures. But the more I looked into it, the more I realised that they were trying so hard to justify the continued existence of an inherently outdated industry. I almost started to pity them. The reality of the climate crisis is distressing for everyone. But when you are part of the root cause, any measures to combat it are naturally scarier. Don't get me wrong, oil companies are not on the brink, they're still incredibly profitable. But they know that things are changing, and the fact that they're manipulating their public image proves that. They are more vulnerable than ever."



Photo: Shutterstock

news

# INKOM is slowly being 'revamped'

Continuation from page 3

the bill (i.e., didn't want to become a member of their student association or society).

**Up front**

"We feel that the current mentor policy no longer matches the needs of the participants," explained Jeroen Custers, INKOM project leader. The application system and "group forming process" have been examined closely and the policy has been revised for the coming academic year – the introduction period starting 18 August. As for Master's students: "Last year we allowed them to choose whether they wanted a mentor or not." That worked well and they will be offering that choice again this year. But what if friends fill in the decision tree together and choose the same 'safe friend group'? Surely that negates the idea that students should be meeting new people? Custers: "If participants wanted to stay together, they would change anyway. It is better to assign them together up front."

**Scaling up**

INKOM is slowly being 'revamped'. Last September, the Workgroup INKOM (WGI) was reduced from five to four students, and two professionals were added, university employ-



INKOM in Maastricht Photo: Joey Roberts

ees – Custers being one. According to Birgitte Hendrickx, deputy head of the Student Service Centre, that had to do with scaling up: "Things like permits, procurement and security could no longer be left up to the students," she told *Observant* at the time.

The cantus also disappeared, a student party that centred around beer and Dutch music. The official reason: they didn't want three identical evenings with the same music. A logical explanation would seem that Maastricht University – at which half the students are international and who might be less interested in Dutch student parties – felt this tradition no longer suited an introduction.

Whether the cantus will be missing again in August is still unclear.

**Hazing**

Custers denies that the new mentor policy is related to the negative reporting about misconduct in student associations. Tragos was punished in 2023 – UM imposed sanctions on the association as a result of misconduct during its hazing. Earlier, a former member of Circumflex spoke out in *Observant* about hazing at that student association. He called on the university to change INKOM. "It's the 'fun' associations and societies who get to provide the mentors and are thereby given

free rein to recruit the newbies." According to Custers, the INKOM team thinks there "is room for improvement". He hopes everybody who wants to become a mentor signs up. "Because only if there are enough applicants, can we match the participants correctly." However, this doesn't mean that the committee will just accept any and all comers. "We will be looking critically at the quality." He hopes to match international students to more internationally minded mentors. There are still too few of the latter.

Wendy Degens

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

**Agenda academic ceremonies**  
 Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6



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

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