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GEESTESWETENSCHAPPEN

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Datum	25 juni 2021	Ons kenmerk	21fgw008
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Bijlage(n)	0		
Betreft	Ongevraagd advies m.b.t. digitaal onderwijs Unsolicited advice regarding digital education		

Dear Dean, dear Fred,

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the closing of the University of Amsterdam in March 2020, UvA students have experienced fully or partly digital education. Within days the university changed from a didactical program taught on location to a fully digitalized curriculum. As a result, teachers had to develop alternative teaching methods increasing the intensity of their work. Students adapted to working from small spaces at home, rather than the lecture and seminar rooms of the faculty. After more than a year, we have reached a point where digital learning has become the new normal. The FSR FGw would like to stress its support for a university where on-site education serves as the norm whenever possible. As the pandemic situation has since improved, making on-campus education the norm again for the coming academic year, the FSR FGw would like to share its thoughts on the future of digital learning at the FGw, even in a post lockdown situation, with this Unsolicited Advice.

Visietraject Campusuniversiteit van de Toekomst: Digitalisering van Onderwijs

In March and May 2021, the FSR FGw attended two meetings centred around discussing digitalisation in education after the Covid-19 pandemic, hosted by the *Team Onderwijs (Academische Zaken)*. At the meeting 'Discussing digitalisation in education' on March 31st we discussed, as students on a personal title, how we could use digital tools and platforms within online education to improve education as a whole. The main question was: what elements of online education should we leave behind after the pandemic has come to an end, and what elements can we use to further improve our education? We

felt like the opinion of the *Team Onderwijs (Academische Zaken)* was that online education during the pandemic has been more positive than negative, and that online education should play a larger role in university life when government measures will permit fully on-campus education again.

The FSR FGw is of the opinion that the *Traject Digitale Campusuniversiteit van de Toekomst* mostly focuses on the possibilities of online education, but we as a student body believe that any step towards digitalising in a post-Covid curriculum should be done with the utmost caution. We attended the *rondetafelbijeenkomst* of May 4th on an FSR title, where we discussed the findings of the first meeting. The FSR FGw is of the opinion that the University of Amsterdam should continue to remain a full on-campus university, where digitalisation should be implemented with caution and in moderation, and solely to advance the quality of education. Therefore, we agreed with the stance of the Daily Board and the Dean in this meeting that digitalisation should serve only as an addition to but not as a replacement of face-to-face contact.

Access to education

The FSR FGw is of the opinion that quality of education should at no point be tied to or depend on personal means. By 'means' the FSR among other things refers to the quality of laptops (or lack thereof), Wi-Fi connections and at-home situations. Not all students have equal access to the most comfortable and efficient learning environment at home. The possibility to study from home is inherently linked to the way one lives. Considering students residing in Amsterdam overwhelmingly live in small spaces, this will have a large effect on the way they are able to complete their studies. If online education stays at the forefront, or plays a significantly larger role in education than in the pre-Covid situation, we believe that it could hinder some students in reaping the benefits our faculty has to offer.

The University of Amsterdam, including the Faculty of Humanities, should promote equality, including socio-economic equality among its students. This includes providing equal quality of education for everyone. If online education were to continue, the UvA would indirectly discriminate against students who have less means. A possible way to overcome this would be to actively provide the means for equal education. This could be done by providing laptops and Wi-Fi routers for students who do not have the financial capacity to buy one for themselves, and/or allocating individual spaces where students can access a computer with an internet connection, where they can also attend online classes. This would also entail opening up individual study rooms where students can talk freely. With the current amount of study spaces offered and lack of space related to the growth of students at the UvA, this possibility does not seem realistic, as the spots offered are mostly in quiet zones where actively participating in an online tutorial is impossible. We would therefore like to stress that if this situation arises, the UvA does so with the utmost consideration of how to tackle this issue.

Digital education causes an increase in work pressure for students. In addition to stress and mental health issues related to the pandemic, students have experienced more study related forms of stress. This can be related to the form of online education they have received, such as an increase in deadlines. A fully digitalised class also leads to an increase in screen time, which can intensify stress.

The FSR urges the faculty to abandon their reactive approach and consider a more proactive approach when looking at online education and its burdens. A more proactive approach includes shaping the future towards more equality by giving students equal opportunities. On the other hand, The FSR FGw notes that for students with disabilities, online education has created positive reactions and new possibilities. We would like the Daily Board to look at ways to ensure these students can take improvements from this period (i.e., the continuation of recorded lectures for students with disabilities or other impediments) with them in their future education.

Incoming changes to contact hours

The FSR FGw has also learned of upcoming changes concerning students' contact hours from the academic year 2021-22 onwards, as discussed in the UCO of April 22nd, 2021. These would permit 1 hour of digital contact for every 5 hours of physical contact creating a ratio of 5:1. The FSR FGw is of the opinion that digital forms of contact should only serve as an addition to on-site education and should not serve to replace on-campus education. The need for students' education on campus for the coming academic year after almost a year and a half of distanced learning is a necessity. The faculty should do everything within its power to ensure seminars and lectures are given on an on-site basis, with digital means serving as an alternative in exceptional circumstances.

The situation with distanced learning has also led to a debate on the role of lectures. At other Faculties (e.g., *Faculteit der Economie en Bedrijfskunde (FEB)* and *Faculteit der Rechtsgeleerdheid (FdR)*) a debate about the possibility of scrapping lectures and replacing these with *kennisclips* or hybrid lectures has come up. Because of the overwhelmingly small size of some BA programs at FGw, lectures are small-scale and more interactive. Extremely large lectures (>300 students) are an exception. Therefore, scrapping these or replacing them through digital means is undesirable, and the discussion concerning large scale lectures is not applicable to our faculty. The FSR FGw believes the decision regarding recorded lectures should be kept up to each programme, however the FSR FGw would like the guideline to be that recorded lectures are available as a backup for students. The exact form of this can differ per programme, but the FSR FGw would like the options to take into account issues of accessibility (by looking at opportunities for closed captions etc.). The FSR FGw furthermore believes recorded lectures should not count as contact hours, ensuring lectures will continue to be given on an on-campus basis. This also prevents pre-recorded lectures from previous years from being reused for new students.

Conclusion

Though a return to the 'old normal' might not yet be fully possible, taking into account limitations and measures that can be in place in September 2021, the FSR FGw believes we should strive for a situation where digitalisation only serves as an addition to on-campus contact, rather than as a replacement. We believe that one of the foremost lessons to be taken from this period of distanced learning is that face-to-face interaction is integral to education. Therefore, when measures permit, face-to-face education should return to being the sole form of contact within university education.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of the FSR FGw,



Zazie van Dorp

Voorzitter FSR FGw