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GEESTESWETENSCHAPPEN

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Betreft	Unsolicited advice regarding the university administration's use of diversity arguments		

Dear dean, dear Fred,

By means of this letter the FSR FGw addresses the faculty board, the Philosophy department and the CvB. The FSR FGw sees that the recent decision concerning retired professors (*emeriti professoren*) in light of the P&O memo has brought about major distress within the faculty, specifically in the Philosophy BA and MA. Not only was the memo sent without consulting or talking to the affected professors, but the discussion around the motive of the decision took an undesirable turn when the department head justified the decision as a way to “diversify and renew” the staff and curriculum. This letter will address the argument taken by the department head to make a broader statement about the stance of the university authorities around diversity and decolonization. Additionally, we will shortly address the argument of emeriti professors possibly creating an unsafe and toxic work environment.

Before relaying our points on the matter, the FSR FGw wants to make three general remarks:

1. The professors in question were under a tacit agreement with the university. **Therefore, the CvB and the University did not honour this agreement as the teachers nor the departments were consulted or notified in the early stages of decision-making.** The FSR FGw sees this as disrespectful to the people affected.
2. The decision has been delayed for a year (2022-2023), and a group of teachers and students will oversee alternative ways to keep the courses the retired professors taught. Nevertheless, it is still relevant to denounce the argument used to justify the

decision. **The discourse signals the perception of diversity and inclusion as the means to an end, and not an end in itself.** In other words, diversity is used as an excuse to cover for the lack of consultation and respect when deciding to end emeriti teaching.

3. A decision like this should have considered each course and programme separately. In the case of philosophy there is a longstanding tradition of working with emeriti professors that some other programs do not have. In the future, decisions that **disproportionately affect certain faculties or bachelors should be taken decentrally.**
4. **The FSR FGw affirms its support for the letter sent by the OC Filosofie on May 31st that explains two very plausible ways of dealing with the regularization of emeriti professors in the faculty.** The FSR FGw urges the faculty administration and the P&O department to listen to these suggestions and consider them, as the FSR believes that it is most appropriate for the OCs to decide how to deal with this situation.

The argument of Diversity:

The way this argument has been used to justify the decision is proof of how the subjects of diversity, decolonization and equity are treated at UvA. Using this reasoning gives the impression that the UvA only takes these issues seriously when it wants to achieve a different goal entirely, rather than actually realizing any positive change in the area of diversity, decolonization and equity. These matters, specifically strengthening participation and learning oriented to people from marginalized backgrounds, should be treated as a goal in itself by the university rather than as an attachment to other interests. The FSR FGw believes that the faculty should be capable of offering courses around decolonial thought by giving master's graduates from marginalized backgrounds the opportunity to teach their own research as part of the program. Furthermore, the Faculty could nurture PhD candidates from marginalized backgrounds by offering scholarships to inhouse master's graduates interested in these research areas. This is urgent for studies that need different perspectives to match the demands of our contemporary society. It is insensible to argue that it is unpaid teachers who are stopping the department from including women of colour, working class students, or courses around decolonial thought, black feminism, as well as other current perspectives and forms of criticism.

Finally, it is equally important to the diversification and renewal of the faculty that the university administration pushes for young teachers (especially those from marginalized backgrounds) having better job security than what the precarious flex contracts offer.

In short, the university should be opening its doors to marginalized students and teachers by facilitating access to education and expertise, not by excluding respectable members of the academic community, such as the emeriti professors.

The argument of Social Safety:

It has been said that Social Safety would improve if emeriti professors were not allowed to teach. It is believed due to the influence and reputation they hold as well as the tacit nature of their agreement with the university, which in some cases can create an unsafe or toxic environment for students and less experienced staff.

As for the possibility of abuse, the FSR FGw believes that creating a strong and stable structure that deals with violations of the university's code of conduct, as well as any mental or physical threat to students and staff should ensure that situations like the abuse case of Conservation & Restoration do not happen again.

Regarding the possibility of a toxic environment for new or less experienced staff, the FSR FGw believes that the faculty board should adopt a strong stance against any type of threat within such a power dynamic. This can be achieved by having reliable channels of communication and resolution for victims of abuse of power, not by depriving the faculty of excellent teachers and courses.

Finally, the FSR FGw believes that justifying the P&O decision with concerns around social safety, endangers the effort of creating a safe environment for everyone, everywhere at the University of Amsterdam. Moreover, such justification undermines the recent efforts by the FGw community to improve and ensure social safety. Nevertheless, the faculty should not be powerless in case of any abuse of power.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of the FSR FGw,



Zazie van Dorp

Voorzitter FSR FGw