



Minutes of the Overleg Vergadering (2) of the FSR FMG '23 - '24
Faculty Student Council of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences

Date: 28th of November, 2023

Location: On-site

Present executive board FMG:	Agneta Fischer
Present:	Rachel Ham, Varvara Gorbunova, Diana Andreea Burduja, Kianush Monschau, Sonia Batreja, Elisa V Neiva, Samarth Kambli, Clara Ricci Curbastro Ruiz de Arcaute, Serena Song, Julie Nesse Barikmo
Absent:	Vidhi Khandelwal, Annemarie Zand Scholten, Annette Freyberg-Inan, Bas van den Putte, Sterre Minkes
Guests	Aybüke Özbakir, Edwin van Hooft (EvH, GSP), Ingmar Visser (IV, CP), Jessica Piotrowski (JP, GSC), Marija Maric (MM, GSCDE), Alithe van den Akker (AvdA, CCDE)
Technical chair:	Sara Kemper
Minutes:	Kamyab Moteabbed

1. Opening and setting the agenda

Sara opens the meeting at 10:05. The agenda is set without changes.

2. Setting the draft minutes of the OV (1) of October 3rd.

The FSR-FMG has accepted all of the dean's changes to the minutes of the 1st OV of '23 -'24. The minutes have been set.

3. Announcements

Dean

The dean notes that she will have a meeting concerning social safety with A group of Jewish UvA students. One topic in particular concerns the safety of students. The dean considers this issue as a possible agenda point for the upcoming months and spurs the FSR to consider how to approach this.

Student assessor

Aybüke notes that Sterre has accepted the minutes of OV1, and they can be set.

OWI

The Education Directors will be joining the OV from 10:00-11:35.

4. Subject 1: Questions to the Education Directors

FSR

The FSR-FMG takes the opportunity to ask the present OWIs questions concerning the OER and their relationship with the FSR.

The FSR is positive about the contact subcommittees FSR - education directors, communication is pleasant and is helpful for work of the FSR. This way of working, communication, makes it possible to solve smaller matters outside the OV's, allowing for reduced redundancy. The FSR has not yet been able to meet every education director.

In terms of mandatory attendance of tutorials, although the FSR is of course also in favor of mandatory attendance, the FSR questions its flexibility since students are allowed to only miss 2 classes. Students want to attend classes since they pay tuition, but cannot sometimes for complex reasons sometimes. Therefore, it would be too harsh to automatically fail students, and the FSR thus asks for the possibility of online alternative/hybridity.

The FSR also questions the structure of course evaluations, suggesting minor evaluations halfway through the blocks. During class hours, students can write summaries and suggestions to improve the course, allowing for minor changes to be made to the course. The FSR also criticizes the evaluations as being too long.

Dean and OWIs

In terms of any upcoming OER changes:

The dean responds that within the Social Sciences there will be no major changes.

MM notes that for the GSCDE, the OER will change to accommodate the proposition of a selection procedure, due to the growing number of students. In addition, MM maintains a strong commitment to communicate these changes to all involved parties, including the FSR.

JP notes that changes in the GSCS will be content-related, starting in September. Regarding the bachelor's, minor changes involving course name changes and the introduction of the numerus fixus.

EvH noted that for the GSP, there will be minor changes to exit qualifications.

The dean notes that the learning goals need to imply the actual presence of students and therefore should be better specified. The working groups are intended to develop better discussion, listening and debating skills, and it should be made clear that this is the purpose of presence in the working groups. IV adds that this is not necessarily an OER change, but rather a study guide change.

In terms of communication, IV expressed that communication with the FSR is working well and appreciates the low-threshold nature of the meetings. JP notes that in terms of student input to the OER, the PC of communication science will be informed before the FSR. IV and MM note a similar process with their departments.

In terms of the mandatory attendance of tutorials, EvH explains that for the GSP, many tutorials are to prepare students for skills they need in the professional field. These skills are not testable in exams. He adds that students in the past complained about a lack of practical on-site teaching, and states that losing this component means losing the heart of the education. JP too, adds that sitting together in a room debating difficult issues or challenges is incredibly important to teach students.

JP notes that hybrid classes are not an option, since they do not have the technology for it.

EvH adds the impracticality of a hybrid option since group discussions are difficult to facilitate with online students.

Regarding teaching evaluation, JP approves of the FSR's idea for evaluations midway through courses. However, she points to the problem of students decreasingly filling out the evaluations, making it difficult to determine what the data displays and how to affect change. She notes that they do not have ideas on how to improve this.

EvH suggests that students often do not realize the importance of evaluation in improving. at times, the written report was shared on Canvas, but this does not happen consistently.

Dean suggests scheduling a meeting about course evaluations and how to change the courses.

Regarding considering adding other examination formats, EvH explains that starting September 1st all courses require 50% supervised testing. Some exceptions exist, such as theory building. Teachers are asked to change and adapt formats.

JP notes that the move from take-home to open book exam in class is being looked at. Limiting fraud is also a concern.

The dean informs that she has been talking to exam board chairs, and explains that every domain deals with it differently. Of course, dealing with issues such as ChatGPT are shared. In general, transparency is the goal. Alithe adds that it is always clearly communicated beforehand.

5. Subject 2: 774

FSR

The FSR-FMG recently found out about *project smarter academic year*, and thus wants to collect any information from the attendants, since information was scarce. The FSR also wants to know what alternatives have already been looked at to reduce stress and pressure on both students and staff members. Further, Since workloads are a crucial factor in the successful implementation of a 774 system and vary between programmes, the FSR wants to know if the domains considered implementing a softer start, and/or making the first or the last week of the learning block non-mandatory.

For the former, examples such as the Sociology bachelor's and the VU demonstrate that although it may have possible downsides, it allows international students time to see their families.

For the latter, this does not necessarily mean letting go of certain learning goals, since the exam material remains unchanged, incentivizing students to attend, whilst allowing for flexibility. The FSR is concerned here about burnout—for example in the stressful period between January and June—which is detrimental to the quality of education, and suggests a pilot in different domains, one that is clearly communicated to students and collects student opinion. Such a change would not be a compromise the education and is not advocating for cutting a week randomly.

Lastly, the FSR poses the possibility of sending surveys to see what the biggest hurdles are for students within different programmes and to assess possible structural changes students want to see.

Dean and OWIs

In terms of *project smarter academic year*, the dean notes that there are no measures already being taken. Discussions, however, are ongoing. A complication arises because of the nationally mandated number of contact hours, which means that shortening the year, is working harder during the year. Hence, the discussion revolves around how to deal with this problem.

AvdA informs that the 774 is applied to some courses to spread the workload. Teachers appreciate this measure too. However, she stresses the subjectivity of the issue, since workloads are increased.

In terms of examined alternatives, IV expresses uncertainty about its effectiveness. He suspects the placement of that break could be more optimal for students, yet expresses uncertainty about how hard it is to change it.

The dean adds that the break being placed in May was a practical decision, based on other holidays. She recommends seeing the opinions of different programmes.

Marije notes that the implementation on the bachelor level is an agenda point that is yet to be discussed, but there is no definitive plan.

EvH expresses concern about losing content in the masters of psychology.

JP notes that the GSCS piloted a 774 system. However, students found that it was too much work and stress. Instead, students responded more positively when the first week was more gentle than these breakpoints, though these results may differ for the college. Bas wishes to meet with the FSR about implementing the 774 at the college level.

In terms of implementing a softer start, IV prefers a UvA-wide policy over individual programme measures. The dean suggests first examining the causes of students' stress in each programme.

Regarding the suggestion to make some weeks of non-mandatory, EvH notes the success of the already implemented non-mandatory week within the psychology research master. IV and JP note however that it does increase intensity and struggle and the dean points out that, due to the subjective nature of this issue, any proposed solution could be experienced by different students as both an improvement and a setback. JP agrees with the FSR's approach to address specifics rather than the whole structure. AvdA adds that stress levels have notably increased in the past few years.

The OWIs and the dean approve of the FSRs suggestion to send out surveys about what causes most students' stress.

6. Subject 3: Numerus Fixus

FSR

The FSR-FMG specifies that this issue relates only to psychology. The FSR has already discussed the procedure with IV. The FSR understands that the grades of the entrance exams are difficult to assess the value of the students since the grades are unanimously high, and the use of a lottery system is understandable. However, since the tests will be conducted online, the FSR is unsure how Proctorio in these tests will be monitored to assure fair tests. The FSR would therefore like a contact person to get information about Proctorio. Finally, the FSR asks to be kept in the loop about any updates or changes to the numerus fixus, such as any

reconvening with the psychology programme committee. Overall, the FSR is happy about the procedure and would like to keep being involved.

OWIs

EvH and IV thank the FSR, and will put the FSR in contact with someone involved with Proctorio. The system will result in more diversity in the classroom, and he informs that any changes will be brought up in the PC.

The technical chair adds that the FSR will thus be updated either directly or through the programme committee.

7. Subject 4: House Rules

FSR

FSR-FMG notes that there is ambiguity around these rules, which has resulted in a lot of stress and anxiety among students and staff. The general consensus seems that all forms of protest are prohibited, yet, when comparing the university's response to the invasion of Ukraine with that of Gaza, an attitude and enforcement gap becomes apparent. This policy is clearly opposed to the democratic standard. If the university posts problematic or hurtful statements, or no statement at all, that hurts students in a context where protests are forbidden, students will naturally feel unsafe. Combined with student ignorance of university politics and representation, this leads to further feelings of marginalization and unsafety. Protests on university grounds are not random, they specifically target the university and its actions, and the FSR wonders why the university feels comfortable barring these protests on campus grounds, in addition to the unequal application of the policy. The university is comprised of academics who have made a career in discussing politics, and barring political discussion is baffling.

Due to the university's house rules as well as its recent remarks on the Gaza invasion, Palestinian supporters may feel unsafe or disincentivised to speak out through institutional pathways to the university's administration, whereas Jewish and Israeli students could do so more. In short, the FSR wants to use their privileged position to ask the dean for clarification; and to provide institutional answers.

FSR asks if the dean was aware of the house rules in full; why the house rules have surfaced only recently, despite the numerous protests the university has seen; to clarify what is meant by 'expressions of a cultural, political and/or religious nature;' how 'allowed' and 'not-allowed' forms of expression are distinguished by the university; why support for Ukraine was not only tolerated, but was engaged by the UvA itself, including the dean's own statement condemning the war; how the UvA enforces the rules and what are the consequences of breaking them and if strikes staff-organized strikes are treated the same way;

and whether protests are permitted to happen after discussions with the university or the dean through institutional pathways have taken place.

Lastly, the FSR informs the dean that CvB member P.P.C.C Verbeek noted that the slogan “from the river to the sea,” as well as flags, are will not be tolerated. The FSR asks the dean if she can confirm whether expressing this slogan on university is banned, in addition to the flag?

Dean

The dean consents to the topic, and notes that she was aware of the house rules in full and can thus speak for the CvB who wrote them. She informs the FSR that the house rules have always been protected; in some cases more than others. The goals are to: 1) preventing protests in the public space, which interferes with teaching and leads to polarization, and 2) protect feelings of social safety among the silent majority.

Regarding clarification on ‘expressions of a cultural, political and/or religious nature,’ the dean responds that they mainly relate to political views, which can sometimes be cultural or religious expressions; loud expression in terms of demonstrations or calls for public prayers. Religious symbols such as head scarfs are allowed to be worn of course.

In distinguishing between ‘allowed’ and ‘not-allowed’ forms of expression, there is of course a grey area, but the university is not here to promote certain views. If the university allows certain political views, then everything would be allowed, which is demonstration. Discussions are allowed and are at the core of an academic environment.

In terms of examples of cultural expression that are or have been banned on campus, or examples of any prior troubles, the dean could not think of anything on the spot. Regarding political expressions, the dean responds that all political statements are banned, including flags, banners etc. There are likely exceptions, for instance protests about Shell, which are based on a scientific body of evidence proving climate change. Although, the dean later went back on this, noting that we can have discussions about the necessity to boycott Shell, which is different from occupying parts of the building with that demand. The protests for Gaza, for example, lack such scientific backing. This is what a university should do: arguing, providing arguments, analysing, considering other perspectives, but that is different from a demonstration where you say “free Palestine,” which for her are one-sided, because other students interpret this slogan differently. You can do that outside campus grounds.

The dean agrees with the FSR’s observation of unequal treatment of Ukraine versus Palestine, noting that the UvA should not have posted Ukrainian flags on the windows, since that is the same as saying “free Palestine.” The CvB has equal sympathy for people who have ties to Israel and Palestine, noting that the CvB letter was worded “unfortunately.”

In terms of enforcing the house rules whenever possible, the UvA is in touch with organizers to ensure events include moderators and represent multiple viewpoints, in line with academic values. In addition, the events must not be held in halls or other public spaces, because it

interferes with teaching and learning. If this rule is breached, then measures are taken: they will be asked to leave, and if they do not comply and leave, the police will be called.

EvH adds that the UvA first talks with the organizers, and the dean agrees.

Staff-organized strikes, however, are not considered ‘political,’ when they are related to their own employment conditions. If everyone is angry about their labor contract, one can expect the protests to be here. But that does not mean that it will be allowed, since the same house rules apply.

Responding to the FSR’s suggestion that banning protesting violates and exacerbates social safety, the dean notes that if this logic is followed, anything that is forbidden can lead to social unsafety; including mandatory tutorials. She reiterates that the university is not a political organization, and that students’ political beliefs and opinions should be discussed rather than exclaimed. You can voice your concerns, just through institutional routes, and the dean is happy to talk to students about how to improve their safety. All the Directors and Chairs agree with this point of view.

Regarding P.P.C.C Verbeek’s statement, the dean notes that the issue is that the slogan has many interpretations, but that she does not know whether this specific slogan is banned. The call is to be cautious with political slogans, as not everyone agrees with them and some people may feel very hurt.

Responding to the query of protests being allowed after institutional routes have been sought, the dean reiterates that demonstrations on campus are forbidden, and that disagreement with this policy is fine and in line with the democratic nature of the institution, adding that you don’t need to demonstrate.

8. Subject 5: Language Accessibility

FSR

The FSR-FMG wants an official guarantee to have the DeepL subscription for the current and future FSR-FMGs, as well as a confirmation or rejection of the FSR’s budget proposal for an in-person translator.

Dean

The dean guarantees the DeepL subscription for the current and any future FSR-FMG.

The dean rejects the proposal for budget extension to hire translators and suggests the FSR to use their current budget for translators.

9. Any other business

No other business.

10. Questions and closing

Diana asks for sources to get more information about *project smarter academic year*.

Dean notes that it is a pilot by the ministry.

The dean notes that she would like to hear more from FSR-FMG concerning the issue of house rules, as well as the students who take issue with the policy.

Sara closes the meeting at 11:59.