

Dear reader,

Find before you the Annual Report 2003-2004 of the Student Council of Wageningen University, in which you can read what issues the Student Council has addressed in the past year. It has been a year in which the subject of internationalization has been high on the agendas. Wageningen University is a Dutch university, but at the same time an organization in the attention of many outside of the Netherlands. This is expressed in the high number of foreign students that take their education at WU. In the following year this will reflect on the participatory structure, as of the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 3 foreign students will be Student Council members, which is unique in all of the Netherlands! Personally I think this is a good development, as the Student Council meant to represent all students in Wageningen. With the election of the foreign students the Student Council represents the student population in Wageningen even better.

Next to internationalization the Student Council has addressed many more issues. Another one I want to elucidate is education. In the past year the Student Council intensively focused on education; the SC organized debates on academic degradation, put academic formation on the agenda and worked on a vision on ethics in education. Through debates and meetings the Student Council tried to bring attention to the content of the education at this university. After all the turbulence in the past years, with the implementation of the Bachelor-Master structure, the time has come to take a close look at the education at Wageningen University, focusing mainly on it's academic character.

I hope that this year, again, lots of attention will be given to education and to students in general, not only by the Student Council but also by directors and employees of this university. Finally I want to give along the following quote to both departing as arriving members of the Student Council:

*"Do what you can, with what you have, where you are"*  
*Theodore Roosevelt*

Marije Struijk-Ansink  
Chairperson Student Council

SC

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The Student Council (SC)

**Budget Student facilities 2004**

With the approval-request for the budget student facilities there were some bottlenecks:

- The budget of the CAS (Committee Subsidiary Requests) was decreased from 57k€ to 40k€

- The annual deposit in the graduation fund was decreased from 500k€ to 400k€
- The FOS (Student Financial Support) budget remained at 500k€
- The CAID (Committee General Introduction Days) was cut back from 47k€ to 40k€

After the SC insisted the following “demands for change” have all been agreed upon by the Board of Directors:

- The CAS budget has been set at 62k€. To make this possible cutbacks will be made on other costs, like lab coats.
- The deposit in the graduation fund will remain at 400k€ with the guarantee that the FOS budget will be completely available even if the graduation fund is empty.
- The FOS budget will be increased of the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2004, with the same percentage that IBG-scholarships increase. This will happen every year as of now.
- The CAID budget will be set at 45k€ and extra money can be requested for exceptional initiatives.

### **Educational Framework**

In December the educational framework, these are the content-based guidelines for all study programmes of Wageningen University, for the year 2004-2005 were discussed. After some changes the SC approved of these plans. For the Educational framework 2005-2006, that will be thoroughly revised, some preparative work has been done, by discussions in the SC and with the Rector Magnificus on academic degradation, academic shaping and ethics. These guidelines will be placed for approval to the SC in 2004-2005.

### **Competences**

Last year the competences project was finished. The SC has instigated several times to pursue a good follow up of this project. Now that all programmes have been described in competences, it is important to check whether these competences are realised by students. Examination is one of the most important control points for this. The task force Competences has asked for special attention for academic shaping of students. Therefore a workgroup Academic Shaping had been constituted, in which members of the SC are also present.

### **Student Financial Support**

There has been lots of discussion on the regulations regarding FOS. These were not clear as they did not show what the basis for the division of the available months was. The FOS-committee had been working on a new regulation this past year. However this stranded during the year. Then, in conference with Rector Magnificus dhr. Speelman, a new regulation was drawn up. This consists of the weighing of the goals of the organizations, by a selected group of people. To investigate whether this regulation works or not, an experimental trial will be conducted this summer and fall. Afterwards the regulation will be evaluated and implemented for 2005-2006.

### **Central registration courses**

In February a memo of the Board of Directors was discussed, in which they asked the SC for advice regarding registration for courses on forehand. When all students register for courses teachers can anticipate better on the amount of students taking a certain course. The SC saw the advantage of registration of forehand but had some concerns. Especially the freedom of students to change between courses at the last moment and the freedom to follow more courses than 8 credits, were compromised according to the SC. Furthermore it should lead to taken students by the hand using a planned schedule, compromising academic shaping of students. Finally in May the SC approved the change in the Education- and Exam regulations, obliging students to register 2 weeks before courses start.

### **Towards 1 educational institute (OWI)**

At the end of 2003 an internal survey took place, in which the administration structure of the education was evaluated. From this some organisation problems, problems in communication and unclear responsibility-lines arose. To solve this the Board of Directors has assigned the project team “Towards 1 OWI”. After some pressure from the Joint Meeting it was decided to add a student member to this project team. The team got the assignment to evaluate to advantages and disadvantages of a possible new structure, going from 4 OWIs to 1 OWI, and to put this on paper. Although the final report was not complete yet, it was presented to the Board of Directors due to the large time pressure.

The Board of Directors has already discussed this preliminary report and will propose a new structure by September 2004. Main issues in this new structure are:

- The administration of all programmes of WU is seated in one umbrella-organ, the OWI
- This OWI gives direction to several OWI-directors by means of strategic decisions
- These directors manage, in line with the strategic decisions, the different programme directors (current: study coordinators).
- The study coordinators receive, together with the programme committees, a more responsible task, mainly aimed at management of the content of the programmes.

### **Upgrading English**

The English language skills vary widely among student. This may lead to ineffective participation in the education and slowing down of other students during group assignments. To address this the Committee English wrote a memo that has been proposed to the SC. Some important features from this note are that the admission level should be higher, and that all students should take an additional test after admission. This Oxford Quick Placement Test is used as a second indication as it seems that the TOEFL test is not always watertight. When bad results are obtained at the OQP test the student will be motivated to take a course for improving English language skills. After a technical meeting, in which some bottlenecks were addressed, the SC has approved the memo.

### **Education- and exam regulations (OER)**

This spring the OER was discussed. Some minor issues have been addressed, like the goal of the Bachelors-programmes. These should be self-standing programmes with outflow possibilities to the job market. The OER also stated that BSc students take exams in Dutch, this is however incorrect for Chinese BSc students. Previously an addition was approved of, that states that when graduating from two different programmes, the major thesis studies must be conducted at two different chairs. The new OER also included a part on central registration of courses.

### **Student Council (SC) and Joint Meeting (JM)**

#### **Budget 2004**

In the discussions on the budget it was proposed to raise the minimum score on the TOEFL-test from 550 to 580. The SC asked why 580 was chosen en not another number like 600. In the memo "Upgrading English" the language skills and adjacent problems are discussed in more detail. The SC also wanted student satisfaction to be an accomplishment indicator in the budget. The Board of Directors mentioned that student satisfaction is an issue in the Total Quality policy. In the advice of the SC two additional subjects are pointed out:

- The budget for student recruitment is decreased; the SC has insisted that, at a decrease in the number of BSc students, the budget will be increased again.
- The SC has expressed its dissatisfaction with the goals to reach a high graduation-percentage and a high efficiency number. The SC feels that these actions can only lead to decreased educational quality and more academic degradation. Therefore the SC advised to come to more education related indicators for the Budget Framework 2005.

#### **Framework Budget 2004**

In the framework 2004 the Balanced Score Card was still in development and therefore not complete. The Board of Directors indicated that it was not possible to describe everything in the Balanced Score Card. In the budget framework 2005 the final version of the Score Card should be present.

In the eye of study load and offering a good mix of educational forms the Board of Directors state that when looking at variation not only ICT and PGO are covered but also variation in subjects and scheduling. It also states that implementation of 2 credit courses will be stimulated.

On the use of strategic means for education the Board states that on a central level everything is well organized, and that the decentral organization must not attempt to have grip on everything. Furthermore it was indicated that the OWIs have money left for educational innovation.

#### Joint Meeting (JM)

### **Van Hall Larenstein (VHL)**

The colleges van Hall (Leeuwarden) and Larenstein (Deventer/Velp) and WU have merged on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January. Meaning a doubling of the amount of students, increasing WU's opportunities to exist as a independent organization. It also increases the ease for VHL BSc students to flow into a WU programme. The SC has, like the previous SC, made some critical remarks regarding this merger. As a result of this clear acceptance criteria will be drawn up for all categories of student for the WU MCs. It also resulted in two student members in de advisory board that will look at possible synergetic points in the cooperation between VHL and WU. Another set of criteria will be made for ensuring academic character of the university programmes, regarding the following of VHL courses by WU BSc students.

### **Brascamp**

A repeated subject of discussion is the financing system at WU (output financing). In February the JM approved with it. Each chair now receives money dependent on the amount of education it delivers. The main point of discussion was the total budget for all personnel costs; according to the JM the amount reserved by the Board is to low. The JM also stated that the current amount of data is insufficient for building a financial framework. This framework has therefore not been approved yet by the JM.

### **New Housing**

In September 2006 the new Forum building will be taken into use. This will be the building where almost all BSc courses will be given. The housing committee of the JM and the task force educational facilities has been actively involved in bringing the students perspective into the plans. The involvement of the SC further increased the input of students. The SC has thought about the interior en division of PGO rooms, lecture rooms and ICT facilities. Furthermore the SC has kept an eye on the new housing processes through the committee Housing Facilities.

### **Persons for matters of confidence scientific integrity**

The persons for matters of confidence regarding scientific integrity are present for among others copyright issues in publications. Following an evaluation of their work, there was a technical meeting. In this meeting it was asked how they deal with problems among students, because students can also encounter problems with scientific integrity. These professionals will now investigate what is the best way to approach students and help them. In order to do so they will have to make themselves more visible, through the WSO-support point, the deans, the study guide and the student chapter.

### **Administration structure**

At the end of this year, the plans for the new administration structure at Wageningen UR were discussed. In short these plans describe the formation of a concern-council that can make concern wide decisions. This also means that, after approval of the JM, decisions now taken by the Expertise Group directors, will move to the central level. This will also have consequences for the Boards of Directors of the Expertise Groups. The director science-position will disappear. Several advisory boards will be constituted on subjects in the field of education and research. After a first meeting in June, the new SC will deal with this issue in September in the new JM.

### SC initiatives

#### **Electronic exams**

In the last years the use of ICT has taken a giant leap, also in education. With the improvement of the electronic learning environment the possibility to take electronic exams has also appeared. The SC thinks that there are some good sides on electronic exams. Like integrating models in the exam. But there are also some major disadvantages. At this moment there is a lack of rules regarding exams. According to the Health and Safety Service (ARBO) there is a maximum of 2 hours non-stop for computer labour, exams are regularly 3 hours. Or how to deal with someone suffering from RSI? The SC has tried to located possible problems and made a plea for good regulations regarding electronic examination. This will be discussed in the exam committees and if necessary rules for electronic examination will be drawn up and incorporated into the education- and exam regulations.

### **Student financial support (FOS) for OWIs/Programme committees**

In 2003-2004 a lot of written objections returned when the FOS-months were divided. One of the objections came from a programme committee, whose request for the support of one student was denied because they had not requested it in advance. Since it is practically impossible for students in these committees to request FOS in advance, the SC wanted to solve this problem.

As the Board of Directors also saw the importance of students in participatory organs, the regulations have been made more flexible with regard to last year's regulation. After a memo of initiative by the SC the Rector Magnificus decided that there was money available for these students. In the new regulation it is possible for active students in participatory organs (Programme committees, employees councils or SC) or administrative organs of WU (OWI) to request financial support afterwards. The dean reviews the requests.

### **Internet connections for student houses**

Since ICT is a fixed aspect of the current educational landscape, good Internet connections in the housing facilities of students become more and more common. A good (i.e. fast) connection is essential for making good applications possible. In most SSHW buildings this is arranged centrally and to the satisfaction of all, but for the building on the Walstraat and other student houses a fast connection is not always present. Taking this into account the ICT committee has written a proposal for subsidising fast Internet in student houses, which was presented in the SC meeting of January. Now houses that accommodate students of Wageningen University are able to get a subsidy, meant for installation costs, to a maximum of 200€. In this way the SC and WU try to lower the barrier for student houses to get a fast connection to the www. Now over 150 applications have been processed and acknowledged.

### **Internationalising participation**

A subject that plays for a long time is the question if the SC should be open to foreign students. This year the discussion started again, guided by a note by the ISP (International Students Panel) on the translation of policy documents. A translation of these documents would make it possible for the ISP to be more involved with the policy of WU and it would also clear the way for foreign SC members. Within the SC it was mutually agreed upon that it a representation of foreign students would be a positive signal. However some major issues were also signalised. Like the fact that many old documents are not available in English, and the question if foreign students are willing to break-up their study for a whole year.

The Board of Directors promised to deliver all documents in English from now on, and has resolved all financial issues, among others regarding visas for foreign students.

There was plenty of interest among foreign students to take place in the SC. During the elections 4 foreign students were chosen and officially became members of the SC. With this the internationalisation of the SC was a fact.

### **Academic Degradation**

With academic degradation this SC means: unnecessary obligatory elements in the programmes like lectures, obstruction of making free choices and obligatory studying by means of home assignments.

In the first half of the year the SC made an inventory if Programme Committee students had encountered this phenomenon. We also asked teachers why these things happen. Finally three lunch-debates were organised. As a result of this the SC wrote a booklet on this subject and everything that we found, and it was taken up with the Board of Directors. The Rector fully supported our ideas and committed himself to make effort to reduce the occurrence of this phenomenon at Wageningen University. Some minor adjustments to the student chapter are only the beginning; no obliged lectures or work-lectures; self-study week will be free for studying and no evening classes.

### **PGO (Problem Driven Education)**

In 2003 the PSF did a survey on PGO. Approximately 450 students filled in the survey, 10% of the student population. The results were finalised in 2004 (see [www.wu.nl/psf](http://www.wu.nl/psf)). From the results some major recommendations for improvement of PGO could be extracted. A problem, mentioned many times, is so-called hitchhikers in workgroups. Students consider PGO to be useful, but more attention for the implementation in the programmes, supervision and marking could improve PGO. The recommendations have been put in a memo of

initiative and the SC has sent this to the Board of Directors. In September 2004 concrete measures will be discussed with the Board.

### Other subjects

#### **Promotion Committee**

This committee takes care promoting the SC among students in Wageningen. This year a flyer was made with information on the SC; who we are and what we do? During the elections a card was made that informed students on the possibility to place a vote. This committee also organised the famous New Years Drink, in the largest lecture hall of Wageningen, the Mathematics Building. It started with a short video on the SC, followed by a speech by Marije Struijk, chairperson of the SC, and a speech by Rector dhr. Speelman. There was also music by a string quartet of the WSKOV. Instead of the usual comedian, this year the WUF Leermeeester-award was presented. For this award all students could vote for teacher of the year. The 5 nominees have been celebrated during the drink and the winner was announced. After this official part there was time for drinks and snacks. About 700 students visited the event.

#### **Elections**

Between 27<sup>th</sup> of May and 6<sup>th</sup> of June the SC-elections took place. After the positive experiences of last year's elections, the voting took place electronically again. The voting percentage was 39,2 percent, a slight decrease from last year, but again the highest rise in the Netherlands. The new division of the 12 available seats is: PSF 6, VeSte 4 and CSF 2 seats.