Policy Plan
2019-2020

‘Accessible and future-proof’

Version 1.1 | English (September 2019)
Dear reader,

The Faculty of Social Sciences Student Council 2019-2020 proudly presents you with this policy plan. In this document, the council outlined what it wants to achieve for students this year.

Our 6 council members will face the year full of dedication and ambition to realize our plans. We invite you to take a look at the goals that we hope to achieve in the coming year. We are naturally open to new ideas and suggestions, so don’t hesitate to talk to us in the coming year. We look forward to a pleasant cooperation.

On behalf of the Faculty of Social Sciences Student Council,

Kata Rakić
Council Chair
Faculty Student Council 2019-2020

The quality of education is our top priority. We believe that all our students are entitled to the best education that they can receive. Moreover, the accessibility of that education is something that needs to be monitored. Students have many different backgrounds and no student may be disadvantaged by a certain background. Equal opportunities must always be recognised. The future is sometimes forgotten at university but is not entirely unimportant.

As a student there is also a life after university and you need to be ready for the labor market. We would like to put more awareness around professional orientation within the faculty.
**Members**

**Loes Mik**  
Vice-Chair | Council Secretary
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I am Loes Mik, last year I completed my bachelor’s in Political Science. This year I started the Master studies in Public Administration. Last year I was also a member of the FSS council, back then I held the position of Bachelor Education Officer.

This year I will hold both the position of Vice Council Chair and Council Secretary. In my role as Vice Chair, I am responsible for internal affairs concerning the council. I also support our Council Chair. As Secretary I am responsible for all administrative tasks, for example taking minutes of meetings.

I have full confidence in my fellow council members that we will have a successful and enjoyable year!

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**Kata Rakić**  
Council Chair
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My name is Kata Rakic, Public Administration and Organisation Sciences student. This will be my third year of active student representation at the VU.

As a delegate of the Social Sciences Faculty, I was a member of the University Student Council. Now I have had this experience, and I have been involved at the VU as an organisation on all levels, it is time to return to the Faculty of Social Sciences.

As a university we have been through quite some developments in the last year, this year these will take shape at our faculty. In my position as Chair of the faculty student council I want to make an effort to monitor the implementation of the decisions made last year.

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**Boyd Pander**  
Bachelor Education Officer
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I am Boyd Pander, second-year Political Science student. This year I will take on the role of Bachelor Education Officer. The new international bachelor’s programs in particular will be of interest to us as education officers. It is important to us to look at the quality of education at the faculty, especially now that there are so many developments.

In addition to bachelor education, I am also responsible for overseeing internationalisation within the Faculty of Social Sciences.
Sanne Veeneman  
**Master Education Officer**  
My name is Sanne Veeneman, I have a bachelor's degree in Political Science and I am working towards my master's degree in Public Administration. Last academic year I also had a seat on the student council as Master Education Officer. This year I will fulfill this role again.

I will concern myself with everything that has to do with the quality of education. An example of this is the monitoring of the new Research Master and the new bachelor tracks in Political Science and Communication Sciences.

I look forward to the new year with great enthusiasm!

Thomas Mojet  
**Treasurer | Research Officer**  
My name is Thomas Mojet. I am a third-year student in the bachelor's Political Science and Economics. I am also a member of the student rowing association Skøll. This year I will focus on the research portfolios and treasurer for the FSC.

With regard to research, I think it would be interesting to conduct exploratory research into student attendance at lectures - why have half-empty lecture halls become the norm? With regard to the tasks of the treasurer I would like to take a critical look at the finances of the faculty. For example, where do the promised quality investments go that we receive as compensation for abolishing the student grants? Also, I will monitor the implementation of the conclusions of last year's research, concerning studying with a disability.

Ward Coenen  
**Project Officer | Communication Officer**  
I'm Ward Coenen, 19 years old. I study Public Administration & Organisational Sciences and am an active member of the EOS Faculty Association. This year I will fill two positions for the student council.

First of all, I am the Communication Officer. The name suits the position since I am responsible for the communication of the council towards students. I want to focus on this. I hope to achieve this by, among other things, maintaining good ties with the EOS Faculty Association this year, so that together we can help students with their problems. Additionally, I will take care of our social media.

My other position this year is Project Officer. This means that I will organise a number of events to, for example, promote community-building among social science students.

All in all, I am excited to get started!

Sanne Veeneman  
**Master Education Officer**  
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Organization

Student Representation
Employee and student representation within the faculty is divided into various components. One of the key components is the Faculty Joint Assembly (FJA). Part of the FJA are the Faculty Board, Faculty Student Council (FSC) and the Faculty Works Council. The FSC is the student counterpart to the Faculty Works Council (FWC). The FWC consists of delegate lecturers who are committed to looking out for the interests of all teaching staff at the faculty. The Faculty Board, the FWC and the FSC meet in the Faculty Joint Assembly to discuss important faculty-wide topics. An example of this is when the faculty budget is established, or another example is the Education and Examination Regulation (EER) which must also be approved in the joint meeting.

Rights
By law the FSC has seven types of rights: right of consent; advisory right; right of initiative; right to information; the right of hearing; right to education; and protection right. Of these, consent and advisory rights are by far the most important.

Advisory rights on:
- matters concerning the course of affairs of the faculty;
- faculty policy regarding educational facilities;
- faculty policy regarding student facilities.

Right of consent on:
- determination of, or changes to, the faculty regulations;
- determination of, or changes to, a part of the education and examination regulations (EER);
- adoption of, or changes to, the regulations of the faculty joint assembly;
- determining the most important aspects of the faculty budget, including any annual reports.

Organisational implications of internationalisation
As described above, student representation has an important role within the faculty. They have a grave responsibility with regard to, among other things, the quality of education, but receives little guidance. In this regard, it is the responsibility of the university to have proper active student representation. In this context, student representation (programme committees and student council) must be involved more closely in policy choices. Disappointing student representation makes it more difficult for voices of students of the faculty to be heard.

To guarantee the quality of active student representation, it is important that attention is paid not to student participation (which will be discussed later in this policy plan under ‘Student Participation’, page 9), but rather best practices from other faculties must be considered. The correct platform for this would be the Presidium, an assembly of all faculty student council chairpersons.
Our faculty is rapidly internationalising. Student representation should reflect this, which is why, this year, we strive to achieve a better balance between international students and Dutch-speaking students in the programme committees.

Like every faculty at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Faculty of Social Sciences works with an annual plan, the budget of the faculty. This is drawn up every year and submitted to the joint assembly for approval. As FSC we have a role to see how our money is spent within the faculty and which projects are funded. There are three streams of money that our Dutch funding system knows.

The first stream of funds from the government, also called the government grant, forms the basis for educational and research activities at the universities. This contribution forms the largest part of the financing of the basic infrastructure of each university: salaries of teachers and researchers, education and research itself, laboratories, libraries, buildings, support staff and scientific staff.

The second funding stream from the universities comprises grants from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW).

The third stream of funds comprises the other income from the universities. For example, universities receive funds for the implementation of contract education and contract research. In addition, collection bus funds and specific target subsidies from Dutch ministries and the European Union, such as Horizon2020, form an important part of the third stream of funds.

As the FSC, we look at how the faculty finances its ambitions through these money flows and sets its priorities.

This year the FSC will look at a number of points within the budget:

- Internationalization
- New programmes
- Quality agreements
- Community Service Learning

For many students, the budget of the faculty is an unknown fact which we would like to change. Regarding the quality agreement, transparency towards our students is important. These are the funds released from the student loans. We will monitor whether the funds are actually invested in educational innovation as required by law.
Accessibility
The faculty and the offered education must be as accessible as possible for students. Coming from abroad to study at VU or studying with a disability should never be a hurdle at our university. Furthermore, we believe the quality of education must be guaranteed at all times for these groups of students.

Students with a disability need to know what resources are available to them and what could be arranged together with faculty and VU staff members, this is to make studying as pleasant as possible. Last year, a study was conducted by our predecessors on studying with a functional disability. A number of issues have emerged here that we, as the current council, will continue to look into.

The FSC also sees the intensification of education as an aims that our faculty should have. This can, for example, take shape in smaller-scale education or community service learning.

New Tracks and ResMa
With the arrival of two new English bachelor tracks (Communication Sciences and Political Science: Global Politics) and a new research master (Societal Resilience) it is of utmost importance to the faculty that these new programmes are monitored for the offered courses and the quality of these new courses. New curricula are ever a challenge, international and linguistic dimensions add to this complexity. By having a continuous dialogue between students, respective Programme Committees, and teaching staff, the Faculty Student Council would like to be part of the supervision of the achievements and shape of these new programs.

Internationalisation
For the Faculty Student Council, internationalisation is a two-sided topic: on the one hand there is the increase in international students, and on the other hand, making the faculty and university accessible to international students. International students may need more guidance than Dutch students. Furthermore, not all documents that a student may need (with regard to guidance) are available in English. We want to ensure that this will happen. We want to support international students wherever possible in order to make their experience at VU as pleasant as possible. We strive to identify these obstacles partly by keeping active contact with the study supervisors throughout the coming year.

There are clear effects of the influx of international students, which subsequently influences education. It has been a deliberate choice to invite these students on both a central and a faculty level. For this reason, the Faculty Student Council considers that this carries a responsibility for the university. By actively attracting international students, these students should be able to expect opportunities, quality of education, and support are of the same level as those for Dutch-speaking students.
At the same time, a healthy discussion about the degree of international influences and the (active) recruitment of international students is a conversation that can and must be had; as long as this takes into account the international students who are already studying at VU.

With the arrival of even more international students this academic year - by means of a new master and two new English bachelor tracks - the Faculty Student Council believes that internationalisation and its effects must be an integral part of the faculty and its policy. Internationalisation should not be considered in the context of a new avenue to income, but as an enrichment of the student population. This means that internationalisation is not a goal in and of itself, and this does not directly lead to educational innovation. The Student Council expects itself and the Faculty of Social Sciences to pay careful attention to this incoming group of international students.

Programme Committees

Every bachelor and master at the Faculty of Social Sciences has their own Programme Committee. These committees are comprised of three teaching staff-members and three students of the respective program, and are responsible for supervising course evaluations. Where necessary, these committees will sit down the program directors or staff concerned with the courses to speak with them. On top of that, a Programme Committee give (unsolicited) advice and proposals on virtually everything concerning the programme.

The Faculty Student Council intends to stay in close contact with the Programme Committees of the Faculty of Social Sciences to get a picture of the state of affairs within each programme. Two members of the FSC, the education officers, are part of a faculty-wide monitoring and coordinating group, the Programme Committee taskforce.

The FSC and the Programme Committees can support each other to effectively work towards educational improvement. Since the Programme Committee operates on a programme level, and the FSC on a (higher) faculty level, knowledge and reach complement each other.

Considering the internationalisation of our faculty, both in terms of student and teaching population, we would like to see the Programme Committees better represent these populations. This would more accurately reflect the programmes.

SS4S

For two years the course Social Sciences for Society has been part of all bachelor curricula at the Faculty of Social Sciences. In this course all different bachelors are viewed in an interdisciplinary way. It is a good aim to working interdisciplinary, however evaluations by students show that students do not view the course positively. Among other things, it is unclear to students what is expected of them, nor do they understand how lectures connect to working groups.

The faculty is hard at work to improve this course. It is no longer possible to make large charges to the course for the coming academic year. For the academic year of 2020-2021 this would still be possible. The Faculty Student Council wants to be actively involved in this process to offer a student perspective as best as it can.
**Student Participation**

The Faculty Student Council values student participation. A point of contention concerning student activity is the low student turnout for lectures. As such we find it important to do research into the causes and potential effects of lower attendance at lectures. In this research we aim to find the underlying causes. By actually looking whether these developments are ‘bad’ for the academic results of students, it may become clear that a new educational environment might be necessary.

We hope to present the results and any proposals by the end of this academic year regarding low attendance of lectures.

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**Communication**

As the Faculty Student Council, we would like to be as accessible as possible to the students of our faculty. Alongside this we strive to be cooperative as well. We hope to reach this together with EOS, by keeping close ties with them. This union can take shape in the form of joint activities, such as Lunch Lectures in which we hope to inspire students or offer them a glance into the field. This collaboration is beneficial to students, and because of the difference in expertise between EOS and the FSC this relationship can be complementary.

**Collaborations**

Helping each other when in need is a vital part inside large organisations, like VU. This is why collaboration and cooperation between (faculty) organisations is of value to us.

For example, by consulting with other Faculty Student Councils, we may discover what matters are prevalent. Not just for the students of our faculty, but university-wide as well. This helps us prioritise and distinguish between faculty and central issues. The University Student Council (USC) in particular has a clear overview of university-wide concerns. As such, it is important to remain in touch with the USC to keep tabs on these issues.

At the same time it is equally important to retain good ties with student associations like EOS and KalioPPE. With the latter we hope to collaborate more with on topics such as promoting political involvement and sustainability. The Green Office also holds these beliefs, as they aim to create a future-proof and sustainable study environment at VU. We hope to shed new light on these themes with the mentioned forward-thinking parties by offering jointly-organised events. An example of such an event was the European Election evening, which was a collaboration between the FSC, EOS, KalioPPE, and the Political Science and Public Administration department.
Professional Orientation
The FSC would like to, again, help students gain a clearer view of their options after their studies. Students may finish their education while unsure of what they can or want to do afterwards. This year the Faculty Student Council wants to support students in discovering their opportunities. The FSC will organise several events this year. Of course traditional career options will be presented, but we would also like to present bold career options which may not seem obvious after graduating from a social science programme. Job openings will be regularly posted on our social media platforms. An example of an organised activity we support is the EOS Career Week.

Student Contact
As mentioned before, we too see the lowering student participation at our faculty. To strengthen the ties among students, input sessions ought to be organised. These moments will be created by arranging Pizza Nights, where students can pose their questions or share their suggestions while having a slice of pizza. This is next to the bi-weekly input hours we have scheduled for our students.

By organising two social drinks (Borrels) where students from different studies and years can meet and mix. These gatherings will have a theme with relation to the faculty.

Special International Lunches are to enable the (new) international students to meet each other and their respective fields. Both internationals from bachelor and master programs will be invited to two events this year, one at the start of this academic year and another after February to welcome the new mid-year students.

Contact Options
We would like to invite everyone to reach out whenever a question pops up or a suggestion comes to mind. There are many ways to reach the Faculty Student Council Social Sciences. Please pick an avenue that suits you best, we would love to get in touch and share our work with you.

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