



Election Programme 2023-2024



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Foreword

Dear Students,

I am proud to present to you the Election Programme of the Ninth Faction of Letteren Vooruit. Our party has been successful as co-counselling of the Faculty of Arts for the past 8 years and this programme is built upon the foundational tenets established during that time. Of course, as time passed, we have updated this every year. It includes innovative ideas from our candidate party, guidance from former party members, and, of course, concerns raised by our fellow students. Our current faction and candidate faction have agreed upon the principles and designs outlined in this programme, which will guide our efforts to improve the Faculty of Arts in the coming year.

I am honoured to be the leading candidate of a motivated and hardworking group of students who are committed to our cause. Our party members possess a diverse set of strengths and character traits and share a common goal of making our faculty the best it can possibly be. We are excited and determined to work towards improving the quality of education, student wellbeing, and diversity, and also the renovation of the Harmonie complex.

Since this programme is quite extensive, there is going to be overlap of topics in some areas. This is indicated in said paragraphs. There will also be usage of abbreviations, of which the full words are stated and explained on the next page.

We will continue the important work of the previous faction in areas such as transparency, accessibility, and sustainability, and we will also focus on the renovation and the sector plans. With your support, and of course vote, for Letteren Vooruit (LV), we can make a positive difference and move towards the best possible Faculty of Arts.

Sincerely,

Rutger Renkema

Faction Chair, Letteren Vooruit '23-'24

List of Abbreviations

AL - Active Learning

CLAC - Cluster Advisory Committee

FB - Faculty Board

FC - Faculty Council

FoA - Faculty of Arts

F8 - The LV Faction for '22-'23

F9 - The LV Faction for '23-'24

LV - Letteren Vooruit

PC - Programme Committee

SSC - Student Service Centre

In short

These pillars will be our main points of interest for the upcoming year, and in this here section, you will find our motivations for these pillars, and a further explanation of what they entail in the following parts of our programme.

Internationalisation, Decolonisation, & Inclusivity

We will make sure that the study material used at the FoA come from a diverse background so that students are aware of the range of developments that are taking place within academia. It is also important to look at the decolonisation of study material so students can become more critical of what we are taught, challenge hegemonic knowledge production, and highlight the interconnectivity between regions. Moreover, we want to make sure that the FoA is a space open and welcoming for both Dutch and international students and staff, especially with regard to language.

Student Mental Health and Support

It is critical to acknowledge that in the face of current challenges students struggle with, the Faculty should actively engage in meaningful mentorship as to provide a stable ground for supporting mental health. Permanent and accessible support programs are among the pillars that LV is putting forward this year, alongside increasing the visibility of such incremental actions, knowing that we are collectively facing a mental health crisis, as shown by [studies](#). On a program- and faculty-level, this support includes student mentorship, study associations building a community, and study advisors helping with clear frameworks on BSA requirements. We hope to encourage more transparency and certainty around study delays directed at providing students who find themselves in times of struggle. Study associations can also serve as a promoter of these facilities, understanding that the visibility of resources can be limited when not promoted. Training, courses, emails, posters, collaborations and website restructuring are areas where LV wants to make improvements in this coming year.

Quality of Education

The quality of education at the FoA has always been of a very high standard. In order to make sure this is maintained, we want to make sure PCs and CLACs function properly. We also want to critically assess Active Learning, and what it is offering to students. We also want to introduce recorded lectures for students, that serve supplementary for regular ones, and would be made available for students who, for whatever reason, could not be present.

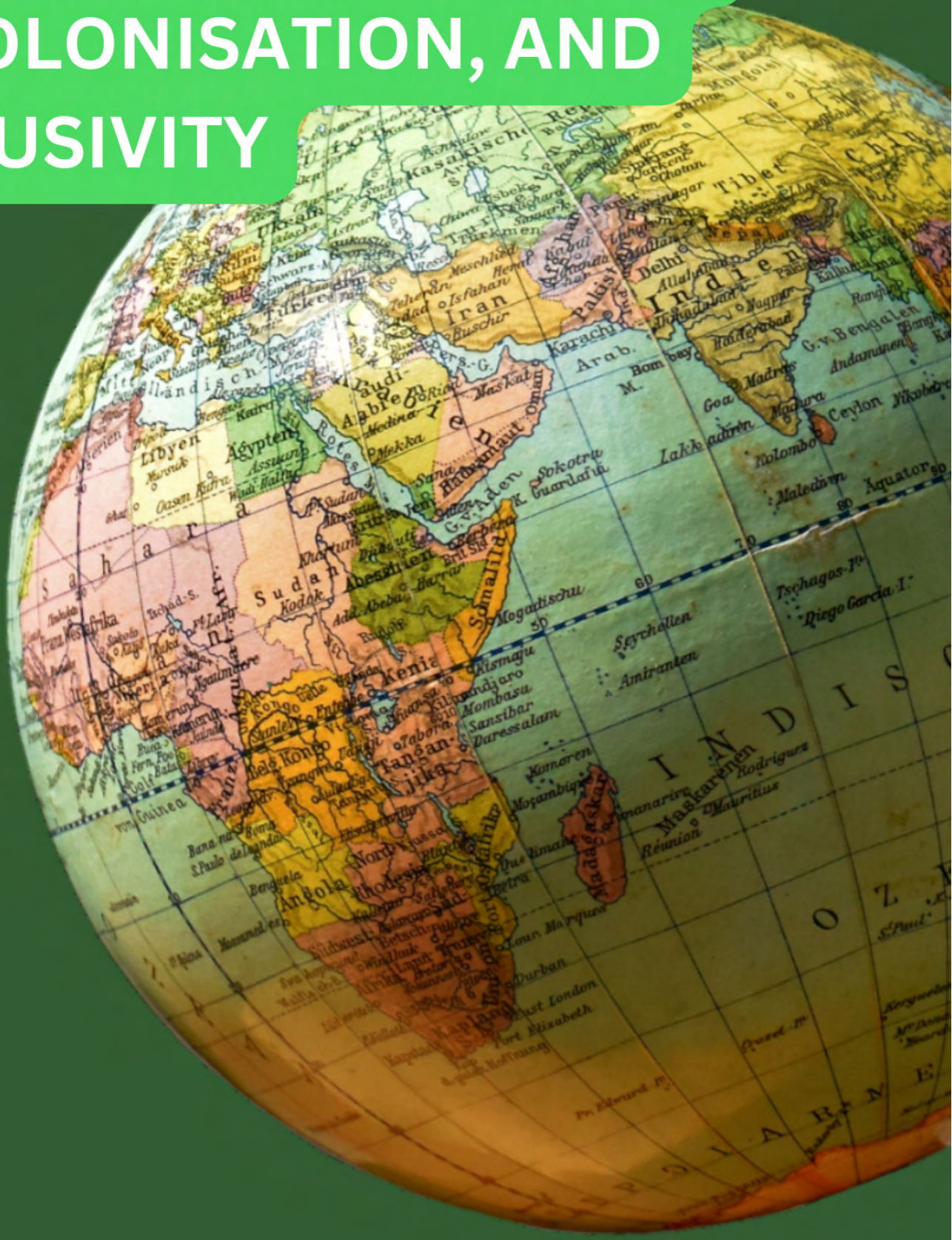
Sustainability and Renovation

The Harmonie building will be renovated after the Law Faculty relocates in 2023 in order to improve education and research alongside energy efficiency. LV wants to strive to have as much student input as possible in the designing of this new complex, in the form of a working group and a student survey. One of the goals is for study associations to have their place in the new Harmony building. Next to that, LV wants to generate attention for different dietary options and look into the possibility of non-dairy milk. Finally, Letteren Vooruit wants to increase awareness of sustainability amongst students and staff. For example, we want to make more people aware of the Green Office Embassy at the FoA, encourage the Faculty to organise more sustainable awareness campaigns and events.

Communication and Transparency within the Faculty

The Faculty of Arts is a bilingual faculty and with the help of a translator, there are live translations for the faculty council meetings in English completed via Google Docs. Nonetheless, unfortunately this takes a long time and a lot of effort, and some details may be lost in translation. This year, and like others before, we as a faction strive for equal active participation within our faculty, for those proficient in Dutch and those not so much. We want to implement procedures which will highlight the accessibility of resources within the FoA, and in turn generate more visibility around such structures. Visibility and transparency is an issue many students, staff, associations and other organisational structures may experience at the FoA. This year, we want to make sure that all students feel that their voices and concerns matter.

INTERNATIONALISATION, DECOLONISATION, AND INCLUSIVITY



Internationalisation, Decolonisation, & Inclusivity

Letteren Vooruit wants to make sure that the Faculty of Arts is a welcoming space for Dutch and international students alike both in terms of education and access to resources.

Decolonisation and Inclusivity of the Study Material

The diversity of the student body in terms of perspectives as well as social and cultural backgrounds should also be represented in the study materials. In this manner, problems can be viewed from multiple perspectives, e.g. right-wing, liberal, feminist, or environmentalist. Many articles and journals provided as readings in courses are still dominated by Western scholarly perspectives, even though scholars from the Global South are just as active in their fields. It is important for the course coordinators to bring those articles to the forefront. We, as a faction, would like to encourage teachers to introduce their students to such perspectives and make their studies more inclusive and to problematise the so-called 'traditional' perspectives that students are presented with as the 'default'. For example, we would like to achieve this through greater collaboration with the Decolonisation Hub which currently has a student assistant who discusses decolonisation with History professors. Global academic developments include emphasising the voices of traditionally silenced voices, and we believe that the Faculty of Arts should be a part of this movement.

We consider this to be especially important due to the Netherlands, Groningen and the RUG's role in the trans-Atlantic enslavement trade. Thus, it is also important to present potentially sensitive topics with care and sensitivity in order to not perpetuate harmful stereotypes or perceptions of marginalised identities. For example, using racist literature without highlighting the racist nature is problematic; however, they can be a very useful learning tool in understanding how racism has been sustained in academia and how it differs across countries and historical backgrounds. The nuances in this can be considered in aspects like disclosing the time period of publication, and other interdisciplinary aspects to specific texts. E.g., a text on colonialism can be seen as framing itself as racist, even though it is not specified.

Diversity of the Staff Body

Obtaining teaching inclusivity at the Faculty of Arts is easier if personnel is comprised of people from different perspectives and backgrounds. Recently, the University has made an effort to increase the number of female professors, which is something Letteren Vooruit endorses. However, diversity goes beyond the gender

mark, we therefore call on the Faculty to encourage clusters and programmes to explicitly take diversity into account when hiring new staff members.

We also believe that the RUG needs to provide greater support for international teachers to learn Dutch. There is a large discrepancy between the expected level of Dutch for international Staff and the support they are given to achieve that level. We have received signals from staff members that they are not informed that the level they are legally asked to have (B2) is not reflective of the level that is needed (C2) in order to teach in Dutch. Letteren Vooruit strives for more budget and support in terms of hours to realise this.

Solving the Language Barrier

Mastering the language of instruction is an essential step in the process of learning. Insufficient English and/or Dutch proficiency is a challenge both for students and staff. When it comes to staff, there is sufficient funding for staff to boost their studies, but, when it comes to students, there is still room for improvement. A part of the funding offered by the University is be spent on English and Dutch classes for students. Many students have difficulties in their studies with the use of academic English in coursework, the main reason for this is a lack of previous knowledge and instruction in this sense. As a result, LV stresses the importance of introducing classes that would help students gain a better understanding of academic language. To do so, we want to increase the visibility of the English academic skills courses offered at the Language Centre and Student Service Centre (SSC). LV takes this topic seriously, and we will investigate how problems resulting from a lack of English proficiency are handled at Faculty level and what improvements can be made in the coming year. We plan to do this by encouraging research programmes to include academic writing skills courses in the first year, as well as exploring the possibility of adding more courses to the curriculum.

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND SUPPORT



Student Mental Health & Support

Since our founding, Letteren Vooruit has strived to bring real change when it comes to the mental health of students of the Faculty of Arts.

In 2022, Trimbos conducted a survey among students asking about their mental wellbeing. Results of this showed that students are incredibly stressed and lonely; more than 80% of students reported to be lonely, and sadly, the numbers of suicide amongst students have increased significantly in 2021. The state of student wellbeing and what we as a Faculty can do about it is one of the most critical issues that we take upon ourselves to improve. The distress that is highlighted recently should not be treated as something minor or something that is a temporary fix. Rather than hoping that things will improve over time, the Faculty needs to bring real changes and real support.

Access to Support Resources

Throughout the pandemic, we have become more aware of how a student's life may be affected by a lack of care for their mental health. A key part of LV philosophy has been the improvement of mental health. Through the usage of events that promote students' mental well-being, we hope to support the courage needed to both seek and offer help. We would like to look at possible parties that would be interested in doing this, such as study and student associations and organisations.

It is important that students of the Faculty of Arts know where to look and are aware of where to find support for their mental health. We all know that at times, these resources can feel hard to find or inaccessible. The Faculty of Arts offers a lot of help, such as student advisors, student psychologists, and mentors. However, Letteren Vooruit understands this may feel like a big step, and therefore supports smaller, more accessible steps first. For example, the Faculty could institute information events on mental health throughout the year, as well as bettering the student mentor programme. We, as Letteren Vooruit, aim to bring more awareness of mental health issues within the Faculty. It is our belief that this topic should be routinely examined within the Faculty Council and that our students should feel comfortable looking for the support they may need. Students should be made aware of how to find this information on Brightspace as it can be intimidating to find support.

Having on-campus student counselling support is a necessary resource for many students at the University, and thankfully, there are support services available. Whether it is individual study advisors of a programme, a study mentor or a study association, many resources are available within individual programmes at the Faculty of Arts. The unfortunate issue is the visibility of these resources. Many

students at the faculty are not aware of such resources, whether it is the on-campus counselling services, study workshops or meetings with staff of a programme or of the Faculty. Our aim with Letteren Vooruit this year is to promote the accessibility of these resources. The University of Groningen, and especially the Faculty of Arts, has a wide range of accessible resources to offer, and it is important to remind students that they are not alone in the issues they may face during their studies, and that there are resources available that could help or possibly guide or give advice if necessary. There are support resources available that are very adaptable and helpful to sit down, listen and go through whatever is on your mind, and possibly point you in the direction of those who might be more qualified to help, or talk it through with you. These resources can be used for anything from improving study skills, to lowering or helping the feeling of anxiety and being overwhelmed around exams, to studying with ADHD, and making important decisions that may impact a student's time here at the Faculty of Arts. Our goal with LV is to aid students by raising and promoting awareness of available resources and increasing the visibility and accessibility of this information.

There's a need to provide international students the facilities so they can successfully integrate into formal academia, knowing that the overwhelming majority come from secondary school. Even if one is familiar with academia, adapting to a different workload, environment, city, curriculum and facilities completely different from what you're used to, can definitely take a toll on someone.

Study Associations

An important concept we want to realise is increasing the sense of belonging of students by facilitating the organisation of gatherings, inclusive socialisation and events, focusing on the fact that all are FoA-students. A very useful vehicle for this are the study associations.

Study associations have been successful in making sure both Dutch and international students are involved in social life, and we want to make sure they can still do that in the upcoming year, and even improve this. Most study associations already have inclusive spaces such as English-speaking events. By improving their visibility, future collaborations might be a useful option. This is currently in the works by F8. This can reduce feelings of isolation and promote a sense of belonging amongst international students to feel at home at the FoA. Study associations are able offer academic support and guidance to international students, such as tutoring services, study groups, and question sessions. This can help them succeed academically and adapt to the different academic expectations and norms, and hopefully also help reduce stress for both international students and Dutch students.

As of now, there are some issues with visibility for these study associations for international students. For both international and Dutch students, there is a real lack of knowledge around what associations exactly are. We want to stress the unique position that the associations have. By having more attention, better promotion and better contact from the faculty, these associations can offer a lot of opportunities for students to meet new people without any obligations, while also being able to pursue academic skill sets.

The faculty board is already working on bettering contact with the study associations and plans on helping study associations with initiatives like this. However, the associations are not professionals and they should not be seen as responsible for student counselling, they can only help reaching out to students that cannot be reached otherwise, and refer them to professionals.

Information from the Faculty

The Faculty implemented an online study guide, available on Brightspace under Study Info, and everyone has access to the mental health resources that have been stored and listed within it. However, most students in the Faculty of Arts do not seem to be aware of their existence. Better promotion of these resources are vital, and also a clearer and more direct link to study guides on Brightspace, would be extremely helpful.

Moreover, while all information is available from the Faculty about mental health problems and the possibility of going to a student psychologist, this information should be made more obvious to all students. Currently, students often do not know what options they have and experience stressful situations that could have easily been prevented. Letteren Vooruit strives for better and clearer information concerning mental health and solutions, and supplying this information is the responsibility of the Faculty. Examples of how this could be improved are posters within the Harmony Building about student psychologists, clearer information on the Faculty website, as well as reminders about the possibility of taking stress management training. It should also be made more clear that it is not only beneficial for students' mental health to talk to someone about issues they are facing. There can also be practical agreements about BSA or study delay in special circumstances. This might relieve some of the stress that contributes to mental health problems. Besides this, more discussion about this topic might create a more safe space amongst students themselves, where they would feel listened to and understood when talking about their mental health problems with peers.

Student Mentor Programme

We believe that student mentors can play an important role in decreasing the pressure and overwhelming feelings on first-year students. It is entirely

understandable that students that are new to Groningen, or even new to the Netherlands or Europe, have difficulty adjusting to the Dutch school system, the city of Groningen, and Dutch student life. While it is not expected of universities to help adjust to the weather, everything else can and should be introduced to students in a comforting manner. The student mentor programme, which has been in place for a number of years, focuses mainly on helping first-year students orient themselves in their new learning environment and encouraging them, along with the lecturer mentor, to develop active and effective study habits. Student mentors offer practical advice, based on their own experiences and the instruction they receive. We know from other faculties that they have taken a broader approach towards peer-support by second- or third-year students, for example at the Faculty of Economics and Business, where student mentorship has included an entire introduction to the university, a walk around the faculty, and an introduction to Groningen, including a night out together. It is also with this student mentor that first-year students can easily ask their questions regarding the programme, BSA, study delay, etc. However, it should be emphasised that these student mentors are to be trained and prepared for their task if they are to receive more responsibility.

Other Partners in Helping Students

Issues within the RUG, between students and/or staff, can be reported to the Confidential Advisor. This position, like study advisors and study counsellors, is not very well known. Their role is to provide an independent, listening ear, to provide information and advice, and to mediate when deemed necessary. The confidential advisor's work sphere covers a few main areas, of which undesirable behaviour and integrity are the most important. Letteren Vooruit wants to highlight the position of the Confidential Advisor and increase their visibility.

Furthermore, we want to stress that prevention is always better than treating the symptoms later. Making sure this support is available full time, and not just later when it is already too late. Especially in the earlier stages of the degree, it has to be stressed that there's always help available.

Student Stress Management

Letteren Vooruit aims to bring awareness to the different solutions to student mental health issues, and to take preventive steps in order to avoid burnout and other stress-related problems. A good opportunity for the Faculty of Arts would be to increase awareness of the student stress management training courses taught at the SSC, via emails or posters in order to reach the greatest number of students. This would be very useful in terms of coping with and mitigating stress in healthy ways. Not only do these training sessions provide helpful tips, they will also set up a

platform for peers, so students may feel less alone with their problems and perhaps even find someone who might be experiencing similar issues.

Quality of Education



Quality of Education

The high quality of Education that is present at the FoA is something that has taken decades of work, and we strive to make sure this is never lowered.

Covid Measures

LV strives for the implementation of online recorded lectures, as supplementary to regular lectures. This was first introduced during the pandemic, and benefits of these recorded lectures were noticed. We want to see this continued in the future. We want the recorded lectures to be made available for the last 2 weeks of the blocks, in order for people to access them in the weeks working up to exams. This is also helpful for those who have not had the opportunity to go to the lectures for their own reasons. We want to stress that this is supplementary, as we do not want it to be the new norm. It is important to note however, that early access (i.e., within 24 hours) to lecture recordings should be in place for students who cannot attend due to health issues and other extenuating circumstances. Additionally, this is not necessarily feasible for all lectures due to technicalities such as some courses have a low number of students. The Faculty Board is already looking into making a pilot for this, thanks to the work of F8.

Active Learning

Letteren Vooruit believes that Active Learning (AL) is a fundamentally good philosophy with great potential, but the implementation of it at the Faculty of Arts leaves much to be desired. It aims to make learning more engaging for students and move away from passive techniques where students just listen to teachers. The quality of courses is not always improved, and it too often leads to an increased amount of work and stress for both students and teachers, which negatively impacts wellbeing and quality of education. Work is needed to improve the implementation of AL and to ensure a productive AL policy with the FoA creating a clear policy for programmes to follow.

LV believes that the Faculty should invest and take an active role in communication about Active Learning by proactively seeking contact and evaluating AL policy with feedback and collaboration with the Cluster Assessors and Programme Committees. This way, feedback about the AL policy will more easily, swiftly, and efficiently reach the Faculty so improvements to the AL policy can be made quicker and better informed. At the same time it is important that programmes and their teachers and students receive good information about and support with the AL policy so they know how and are able to adequately implement it. The Faculty should also facilitate horizontal communication about AL between programmes, so programmes

and teachers from across the Faculty can share experiences and learn from each other.

We believe that faculty policy regarding the implementation of Active Learning should leave room for flexibility. The programmes within the FoA are varied and are often fundamentally different from one another. This means that what works in one programme won't necessarily work in another. The programmes themselves know best what will and what will not work, and where and to what degree AL principles should be implemented.

The number of Active Learning Classrooms in the Faculty of Arts buildings should be expanded. These are classrooms specifically designed with AL in mind. Currently, only a few of these exist at FoA buildings, meaning that AL courses often take place in classrooms designed for traditional lecturing. This greatly frustrates the creation of lively organic discussions and working groups, elements that are essential to AL.

Student Satisfaction

Greater participation is needed for student feedback in courses. As of now, Programme Committees sometimes have to draw conclusions from a small percentage of students giving their opinions. There is a need to emphasise the importance of feedback, since some smaller departments really rely on this form of feedback in order to create the best quality of education possible. This is further referenced and emphasised in the section about participation and also transparency.

Discrepancies

There is discrepancy between the courses within programmes and between courses, in terms of workload appropriate to the ECTS. Since Programme Committees exist to keep these in check, we want to make sure that the PCs work as they are intended. Another very important aspect is the continuous monitoring of progress. This can of course be done by feedback forms. Most students do not see direct benefits from these questionnaires or do not take the time to fill them in, which is an issue that needs to be addressed. In some departments, there has been a pilot, which was focussed on having a feedback session immediately after class. By directly collaborating with multiple students from various FoA programmes, we can capture the pulse in real time. This leads to more insights, making students feel more involved through somewhat active participation in the decision making process.

Sustainability and Renovation



Sustainability and Renovation

The University has produced a roadmap for the next 5 years, with sustainability goals such as a 30% CO₂ reduction in 2025 compared to 2019. Up to now, this is running smoothly, but the RUG has many older buildings that are poorly insulated, or inefficient. To help mitigate this, on Faculty-level, the Harmony building will be renovated when the Law Faculty relocates in 2023.

Sustainable Renovation

The part of the Law Faculty that still is housed there will move to the Oude Boteringestraat. Other buildings used by the Arts Faculty such as at Aweg 30, Rode Weeshuisstraat 12 and Broerstraat 9, are technically and functionally obsolete. On the one hand, because of the age of the buildings, and on the other hand because they no longer meet the developments in education and research; there is not enough capacity to house every class, and specifically for Active Learning, more space is needed. As we all know, much of the Harmonie complex is, in the experience of its users, a cluttered complex characterised by little daylight and a closed structure. The building is over 30 years old and is therefore eligible for renovation and adaptation to current needs and requirements. The aim of renovation is a more efficient use of space, allowing the disposal of other locations throughout the city.

LV looks forward to these renovations, but we are worried that this renovation and all its plans will be finalised without sufficient input of students' needs. We need to strive to have as much input as possible, to make it as accommodating as possible for one of the most frequent users of the faculty and its facilities; us students. We hope to work together with the staff members of the FC to make it as accessible as possible.

This year, we are going to strive for two forms of student input in the renovation, which are a Faculty-wide survey on the renovation, as well as supporting the small working group, made to contribute to the lay-out and efficiency of the new building and to make the square in front a more liveable, usable space. There's already a group for this, but the visibility is next to none, as is the accessibility. Next to that, in the entire faculty and for every study programme, the role of study associations is gravely undervalued. The integrating role that they play in the lives of students, especially new students, is extremely important. We strive for creating an area in the renovated building, in order for board members and committees to have a place to have meetings as well as a sort of forum for members of the association.

Dietary Options

In the ever-changing climate of being a student, especially if there are dietary restrictions present or be it a personal choice, the accessibility of certain dietary options within the University is limited. As students, coffee and studies often go hand in hand; unfortunately, the accessibility of plant-based milk is very limited. Our goal is to generate more attention around certain dietary options within the FoA.

Sustainability Collaboration Green Office Embassy

This year Letteren Vooruit wants to create more opportunities for students and staff to become aware of sustainability within the FdL. We want to make more people aware of the Green Office Embassy at the FoA. Moreover, we would like to encourage the Faculty to organise more sustainable awareness campaigns and events. For example, with open talks about how we can improve sustainability within the Faculty, with suggestions of increased involvement and visibility of the Green Office Embassy, and the opportunity to become involved in these initiatives.



Communication and Transparency within the Faculty

Communication and Transparency within the Faculty

Language of Communication

At the moment, Faculty Council meetings are held mainly in Dutch, but with the help of a translator from the Language Centre, the discussions are made available in English as well. The meetings are translated via a Google Doc, which takes quite a long time, and details are often lost in the summary. As a consequence, international students and teachers who do not speak Dutch proficiently are unable to actively participate in the meetings. While it is not possible to hold meetings entirely in English, as the RUG is a bilingual university which uses both Dutch and English and not all staff are fluent in both. Within Faculty Council meetings, we will attempt to create a procedure of speaking and taking terms where the chair of the council waits until the non-Dutch faction members have had a chance to read the translation before a new speaker starts.

Clarifying Organisational Structures

Many structures, such as Programme Committees, Clusters, and the Faculty Council remain removed from a student's perspective; they are not as easily accessible or available as we would like. In the upcoming year, Letteren Vooruit hopes to make these structures more transparent to all students.

Although not all students may express their interests in participating or becoming part of associations, it is still helpful of their existence, where you can find them, and the roles of each. In regards to this, we hope to encourage the Faculty to provide sufficient information to those in positions of advice, whether it be individual study mentors, advisors, or study associations.

Greater Use of Social Media

Today, many staff and students alike rely on social media output to find information, news, resources, and events. However, there are still many who remain off of social media platforms and may not have the same level of accessibility to information as others. Whether it is a personal choice or other, to be on social media or not, inclusion is something that we strive for as students, and especially as a collective student party, representing the voices of many here at the FoA.

For those on social media, or even those considering getting on social media, we hope to generate more attention around the visibility of organisational structures, events, and information within our Faculty by sharing links and stories onto main

pages and accounts. We want to ensure that students and staff can find details of where these smaller structures can be found, and what they can help with, and in the case of being pointed in a different direction, having the information will be available for such an occurrence.

For those not on social media platforms, with Letteren Vooruit's involvement within faculty matters this year, we hope to generate attention around creating an Extra Information Tab on the FoA's website, in ways in which it is visible through Brightspace, an individual's student portal and also the public website platforms. We hope that this Extra Information Tab can answer the questions about the additional information you may need about the Faculty and who can provide you with this information. The idea of this tab will mainly revolve around the question of, *"Looking for any additional information or help?"*, with the response of; *"On this page you can find the details of our governance structures here at the Faculty of Arts with their aims, positions, descriptions and details below"*.

Visibility around communication and transparency is, unfortunately, an ongoing issue each of us may experience during our studies, and even if initially it may only be aided in minute or individual ways, we hope to make our faculty and the even distribution of accessible resources a less stressful experience for all. Each voice matters and deserves to be heard, no matter how small it may feel.

Candidates



Rutger Renkema
American Studies



Lara O'Toole
Minorities and Multilingualism



Lukas van Rongen
International Relations and International Organisation



Sytse Wilmink
Archaeology



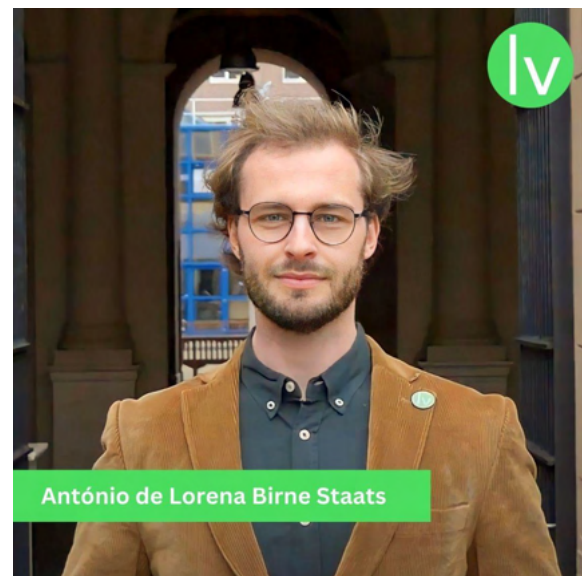
Alexandru Dinca-Oprea
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Milena dos Santos Bendixen
*History and European Languages
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Olaf Jan Oost
Media Studies



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