

To whom it may concern,

The ongoing discussions regarding the restructuring of the University of Groningen's faculties, particularly within the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) domain, have raised significant concerns among the student body. As student representatives of Faculty Councils, we are writing to explicitly address the negative impacts of these proposed mergers on students, an aspect currently overlooked in decision-making.

While we acknowledge administrative efficiency, governance models, and interfaculty collaboration as important issues, the consequences for students have received insufficient attention. Below, we outline our key concerns in greater detail:

- **Loss of academic community and identity:** Empirical studies repeatedly highlight that students' identification with their academic discipline and faculty significantly enhances their motivation, academic success, and mental well-being. For instance, [Bliuc et al. \(2011\)](#) found that students who strongly identify with their discipline adopt deeper learning strategies and achieve higher academic performance. Similarly, [Hoffmann et al. \(2020\)](#) demonstrated that stronger identification with academic groups correlates with improved psychological well-being, including higher self-esteem and reduced depression. Large-scale faculty mergers create impersonal environments that weaken these essential community bonds. Research consistently demonstrates that weaker academic communities lead to higher disengagement rates, increased feelings of isolation, and lower academic performance ([Cash et al., 2017](#)). The unique dynamic between students and staff in smaller faculties fosters a sense of belonging and accountability that large, merged structures typically cannot replicate.
- **Erosion of personalised support and student well-being:** When faculties scale up, students often experience a more impersonal environment, with diluted support systems. Empirical data from large student surveys show a clear trend: student satisfaction declines as institution (or faculty) size increases, unless support services expand accordingly. For instance, [Bryant & Bodfish \(2014\)](#) found in their nationwide analysis of US colleges and universities that at bigger universities, students report lower satisfaction with individualised staff support (academic advising, counselling, etc.), even though they still expect personal attention. Mergers that create very large faculties can strain advisor-to-student ratios and campus services, leaving students feeling like "a number." [Skodvin \(2014\)](#), in a European higher education report, notes that merged institutions tend to become more complex and bureaucratic, often requiring more administrators and coordination layers. This bureaucratic growth can unintentionally distance students from support providers. Together, these findings indicate that scaling up via mergers undermines the close-knit academic community and personalised mentorship that smaller faculties often provide, negatively impacting student satisfaction, well-being, and even academic outcomes.
- **Loss of distinctiveness and clarity for prospective students:** Merging faculties can blur a university's academic identity, making it harder for prospective students, especially internationals, to understand programme offerings. For example, [Aula & Tienari \(2011\)](#) studied the high-profile merger that formed Aalto University (Finland) and noted that it required dismantling strong, established faculty brands, a process

which stakeholders felt led to a loss of status and unique identity. This loss of distinctiveness can damage an institution's appeal. The implication is that when previously separate faculties with clear reputations merge into one large unit, the unified entity may become less clear or attractive to applicants, potentially harming international recruitment and overall reputation.

- **Disruption of international partnerships and opportunities:** Faculty-specific international programmes, such as exchange agreements, internship networks, and industry partnerships, can be jeopardised by mergers. [Ursin et al. \(2010\)](#), in a detailed analysis of planning documents for university mergers in Finland, found minimal concrete attention paid to educational considerations. Instead, the primary focus was placed on administrative and research-related issues. Educational aspects, when addressed, were described using vague objectives without clear implementation strategies. This oversight presents a significant risk that meticulously developed international programmes and partnerships within individual faculties may suffer disruption or dilution during the restructuring process. An [OECD policy analysis](#) further emphasises that instructional collaboration or consolidation poses substantial challenges, far greater than those encountered in research or administrative integration, thus exacerbating the likelihood of weakening students' global opportunities through compromised international partnerships.

Given the gravity of these concerns, we explicitly oppose these faculty mergers under any circumstances. We stress that true institutional resilience and academic quality do not arise from administrative centralisation but from well-defined academic communities, clear programme identities, personalised student support systems, and strong connections to societal and international partners.

In addition to these substantive concerns, we must express our discontent with the decision-making process itself. The lack of transparent communication, the absence of a clearly articulated rationale for the mergers, and the failure to present any detailed, forward-looking implications for students undermine confidence in the governance of this restructuring. Students have not been meaningfully included in these discussions, nor have we been presented with a compelling educational case for such a radical reorganisation.

Therefore, we urgently call for:

1. **A rigorous and transparent impact assessment of each proposed restructuring scenario, focused specifically on student experience.** This should include a faculty-specific overview of the expected implications for key areas such as recruitment, student well-being, international opportunities, and access to support services. In addition, the assessment must outline how the organisational structure of any proposed merged faculty would take shape, including the distribution of responsibilities, governance arrangements, and the preservation of programme identities across constituent disciplines. We urge the CvB to publicly commit to publishing these assessments along with the minutes of all governance discussions related to the restructuring.
2. **Full and authoritative student representation in all decision-making bodies involved in the SSH restructuring process.** This includes voting rights and proactive communication to ensure informed participation. Furthermore, we insist on

the immediate establishment of a dedicated student panel with representatives from each faculty to ensure robust and comprehensive student oversight.

3. **Binding safeguards to protect educational integrity, ensuring the continued existence of distinct faculty identities**, specialised academic programmes, and personalised support structures. These protections must be explicitly defined, legally anchored, and immune to future dilution under any new governance model.

We firmly believe that proceeding with mergers would be a strategic error, harming both student welfare and institutional excellence. As essential stakeholders, students deserve a decision-making process that genuinely reflects and respects their experiences, needs, and academic aspirations.

We remain committed to engaging constructively, provided that the foundational principle – the mergers, as proposed now, are detrimental and unacceptable – is acknowledged.

---

This letter is endorsed by the student factions of the following Faculty Councils of the University of Groningen:

**Faculty of Spatial Sciences:**

Kristaps Brics, Lo Muller, Martine van der Meer, Vasu Sinha, Mika Schuback

**Faculty of Science and Engineering:**

Lazarina Kostadinova, Łukasz Sawala, Lenja Mosch, Nina Cielica, Veerle Meulenaar, Oliver Pospíšil, Zalan Novák, Ana Vieira dos Reis, Michaela Repášová

**Faculty of Economics and Business:**

Angela Schindehutte, Mees van 't Spijker, Martin Bartesaghi, Dyone Poppe, Sofie Hatenoer, Tijmen de Groot, Tim van Gameren, Numi Oñorbe Genovesi, Jens Bijl

**Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences:**

Loreen Wijnja, Karlijn Bakker, Ken Hesselink, Eva Dumas, Zoë Ras, Ivy Blackwell, Loïc Poarch, Mieke Waschbüsch, Shawn Pallagi

**Faculty of Arts:**

Tim Tresoor, Alana Swinkels, Anna Astakhova, Dominic Kruize, Savvas Parasidis, Grace Woods, Hessel Berger, Ruben Feddes

**Faculty of Philosophy:**

Suze van Schaik, Jimmy Lin, Maaïke Blom, Barbara de Grouw, Tobias Postma, Alida Gerritsen

**Faculty of Religion, Culture and Society:**

Austin Brewin, Leonie Katteïn, Lonneke Smidt, Scarlett Bernal, Danny Luiken

**Campus Fryslân:**

Leonardo Pereira, Efe Cengiz, Charlotte Greve