

## Student related advice from the COVID-19 Task Force

Dear members of the Executive Board,

In the middle of the on-going covid-19 crisis, the University Council would like to thank you and the University once more for the work that has been done to guarantee the best possible outcomes for education even in times of great uncertainty. Since the UC has been collaborating with you into finding the best possible solutions for all the stakeholders, we would like to offer some unsolicited advice regarding different points of concern for the student community. We furthermore explicitly want to state that we understand that these proposals have consequences for staff and we will come up with further advice on how to deal with covid-related work pressure for staff members in a next letter. We hope that these proposals are useful for you in your path towards new policies. We would greatly appreciate that you consider putting them to use and/or discuss them further with the Deans and Vice Deans of Education across the EUR Faculties.

- **In terms of grading:** As we all well know, there are certain groups of students with higher levels of tension due to the covid19 crisis. To alleviate the struggle of some of these students, we ask you to consider the following solutions:
  - ***A temporary reduction for the BSA to 45 EC in all Faculties during this crisis year.*** Hundreds of first-years students are probably having the least expected university entrance. Many of them might struggle to meet the special EUR BSA requirements. Given the unique circumstances, EUR could offer them also a unique solution for this year, still striving for excellence with a relatively high BSA. Furthermore, all universities of applied sciences in the Netherlands already collectively decided not to apply the BSA rule this year.
  - ***An extra round of resits in summer for all students, especially for students in their last year of their studies.*** Given the circumstances, we would appreciate if Schools could consider offering an extraordinary round of resits to those students that have lagged in the current circumstances. This will give students the opportunity to lower the stress levels.
  - ***Stimulate a voluntary pass/fail grading system.*** Some of the Schools at our University, like ESPhil, have already established a voluntary pass/fail grading system for students that want to manage their stress regarding grades. We call upon you to promote this also for this year, giving the fact that many of our students are not studying under normal circumstances and fear for their GPA.
  
- **In terms of physical education and spaces that are open on campus:** Students and employees have gratefully welcomed the current system that allows for our campus to be partially open and encourages some kind of physical education specially for most vulnerable groups like first years. We understand that all choices have implications for the greater community. In this sense, we would like to offer a general reflection on priorities in scarcity and some specific solutions that could be put in place in the short term.
  - ***Priorities in Scarcity:*** So far, we have seen the university give priority of going back to certain offline education. However, this decision that clearly addresses concerns for a certain group of students, leave others in very vulnerable position. We would like to ask you to shift the priorities about the use of the available space on campus. As we see it, guaranteeing exams on a physical location should always be the number one priority. On a second level, we would like to ask you to further increase the number

of physical study spots: not all students can efficiently study at home, therefore, having a designated space by the university is fundamental. Providing lectures physically will then be the third level of priorities, since there is a relatively good alternative to it already.

- **Considering new possible spaces on campus:** Our university should try to accommodate as many students as possible on campus still bearing the regulations in mind. We believe that study places it is important to also accommodate students to study during weekends. Therefore, we recommend opening Polak and Van Der Groot during weekends. Additionally, we believe that 'safe' study spots are lost by not using Tinbergen, the food court and lecture halls as study places.
- **Considering new possible spaces outside campus.** The UC also knows that efforts have been made to find different public spaces in the city that could be used for examination, study spaces or physical classes outside campus. There are ample parties which could prove useful as study spots. Concrete places to consider could be local hotels (Novotel e.g.), theatres, local cafeteria and student associations. We would very much support and appreciate any measures taken in this area, guaranteeing that more spots are available for examinations, study and of course, lecturing.

- **In terms of online examinations:** Closely related to this last point, we want to further delve on why we believe that physical exams should be a priority and online examinations just an exception. In the past couple of months, many exams were conducted online via 'online proctoring'. However, a growing number of students feel uncomfortable with the fact that they must record their private space, take a picture of their ID- or student card, are being recorded for the full time of their exams, and they can't fully trust the proctoring services. As established in the previous sections, we believe that EUR should strive to use as little proctoring as necessary, and that as many physical exams can physically take place as possible with the necessary constraints. We would like to ask you for a policy whereas online proctoring is only a last resort – having other forms of examinations to be considered instead. If a proctored exam is the preferred choice, it should be clearly substantiated in front of the students.

We ask the EB to invite schools to **explore the use of alternatives to online proctoring. Because of its many downsides online proctoring should only be used as a last resort.** This can be promoted by making toolkits with best practices across the schools. Students are looking for alternatives that are more privacy-friendly and improve the trust on online examination. Work pressure among staff members is at a critical point, but maybe options like live proctoring can also help deal with this. Other alternatives could be the use of id checks via students' typing behavior (as provided by, for example, Intense Keyboards (startup in Eindhoven)), instead of taking a picture of their ID.

Additionally, we ask upon the EB to ensure that all audio and visual facilities meet the requirements necessary in enabling hybrid education. When problems are reported on broken mics and webcams, these should be fixed swiftly.

The UC is convinced that the proposed measures will mean a definite improvement for students at EUR, especially in this unique time. As these proposals also have consequences for staff we will come up with further advice on how to deal with covid-related work pressure for staff members in a next letter. We will be happy to discuss with you further about any of the options that we are presenting.

We are looking forward to your response to this unsolicited advice and, hopefully, for a rapid enforcement of it.

With kind regards on behalf of the University Council,

*The COVID-19 Task Force*

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