

EM

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Bye, bye Blackface

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really big?**

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**Erasmus University
College scores low**

THE PRESIDENT

**Iga Podgorska,
ESN-Rotterdam**



UPCOMING EVENTS

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With your Erasmus Sport Pass you can skate for free on weekdays from 9.00am to 4.00pm. (excluding holidays).
After 4pm it's 3 euro's per entry.



Free climbing and Boulderen

Free climbing at Neoliet & Fun Forest
Check our website for the details.

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Every weekend live sports on the big screen in the Erasmus Sport Café.



Holiday Closing

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We hope to welcome you back in the new year.
Happy holidays!



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Beautiful moment

It can be hard to tell at times whether students are actually engaged in the world around them. There are times when it seems that all they do is watch cat videos on Facebook, complain about the lack of power sockets in the Polak Building and worry about their own careers. They don't strike one as the generation that will solve the world's climate change issues, the global financial crisis and other threats menacing the world we know and are trying to preserve.

Look under the surface, though, and you'll find that this is not the whole story. For instance, many students showed up of their own accord this autumn to play sports with the refugees who were being accommodated at the Sports Centre. Furthermore, we have students on campus who are trying hard to reduce the amount of waste caused by flyers, and who sell 'green' mugs so as to reduce the pile of plastic cups we are producing together.

On Monday, 16 November, a few hundred students got together to commemorate the victims of the Paris attacks, as well as those killed in the previous Egypt and Beirut attacks. For a brief moment, Facebook, Netflix and beer-drinking lost out to the need to be together, to be united in peace. I thought it was a beautiful moment.

Wieneke Gunneweg

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Erasmus University College scores low in *Keuzegids*

Last September, Erasmus University College (EUC) welcomed its third intake of students. In the Dutch university information guide *Keuzegids 2016*, the programme is ranked at the bottom of the list of university colleges in the Netherlands.

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Tea lights for the city of light

A student lights a tea light at the Erasmus Pavilion. An estimated six hundred people attended a memorial on the Woudestein campus on Monday evening 16 November for the victims of the Paris attacks. A group of French students organised the gathering on Woudestein campus. Rector Huib Pols addressed those present. There was also a minute's silence. First year IBA student Antoine Gianotta, one of the initiators, was relieved that everything passed off peacefully. "What do I hope people will take away from this? Perhaps they won't think about it every day, but I hope that they remember that you can find unity with each other and that you don't attack ideas with bombs."

Nominal is not actually that normal

Lazing around, slacking or just being nicely bored: in 2015 that's just not on any more, and certainly not in Rotterdam. In an era where every spare minute has to be filled on your mobile phone, every holiday has to be an experience and every study has to be completed cum laude and nominally, it fell to a judge to sound a contrary opinion.

The past month has brought hope for all lazy-bones, procrastinators, night-time revellers, party animals, exam-phobes and first-years who now and then don't actually pass an exam. *Nominal is Normal* is now in question. At least the university is denying it most emphatically, but the judge has spoken and so it must be. Judgment 217.1: "It is also important whether the norm, which is in essence that given the objective and purpose, a student must study nominally in order to complete the entire series, is in fact compatible with the statutory requirement that a negative binding study recommendation can only be issued if a student is unsuitable for the degree programme."

Erasmus University switched instantly into damage control, and declared that the judge really should not have



→ N=N fans can breathe easy

this. "The court case was not specifically about the rule, but about the question as to whether the Examining Board had been too strict in not taking the student's personal circumstances into account," came the response from the A-building. And because the case has now been settled and the judge is not going to issue a definitive judgment, N=N fans can breathe easy. In the meantime lawyer Marianne Wiersma continues to sharpen the knives: students who are 'victims' of N=N can engage her help.

The chance in any case that there are still students who are not performing nominally, is becoming steadily slimmer now that international students are enrolling *en masse* to study in Rotterdam. And if there's one demographic group which is certainly not lazy, it's the boys and girls who are here to follow classes on payment of several thousand euros a year. More arrive each year: in 2014 there were just over 4,300, and now it's almost 5,000. That's a 14 per cent rise.

Certainly there seems no way that Rotterdam students themselves are heading

abroad. Figures show that only one in twelve EUR students head abroad with their Erasmus grants. And that's when Wageningen students do indeed flee their city with an Erasmus grant. Is this down to the splendid architecture in the city on the Maas, a lack of information on Erasmus grants, or do Rotterdammers simply not enjoy continental destinations (Erasmus grants are only possible within Europe)? To be continued...

Hopefully Erasmus University will shortly be enriched further by another, definitely eager-to-learn group: refugee students. Money is already being collected hastily to make their arrival possible. This is one of the university's three new crowdfunding projects. A special platform for this was unveiled officially during the Dies Natalis. Apart from grants for refugee students, the platform can also be used to donate towards a memorial to people who have made their bodies available to the Erasmus MC, or for extending the Erasmus Centre for Entrepreneurship.

The 13 November attacks in Paris moved two French students to organise a meeting on-campus. An audience of some six hundred students gathered in the moonlight of a Monday evening on Erasmus Plaza. There they lit candles and left flowers and messages. Rector Huib Pols addressed those present: "We share the same values, expressed in the French motto: *Liberté, Egalité and Fraternité*. We need to unite in peace, and to observe a minute's silence."

'We share the same values, expressed in the French motto: Liberté, Egalité and Fraternité'



St Nicholas is fine, but without Black Pete

Isabel Awad's family did not celebrate a day dedicated to St Nicholas in Chile. "We only have Christmas in Chile. It's more American. There's Santa Claus and there are many presents. I think that we adopted the style from the US. But Christmas in Chile is actually very different, because the country is in the Southern Hemisphere. Christmas therefore occurs in the middle of summer. Cotton is used to create the impression of snow and Santa goes around in his winter clothes while it's 35 degrees Celsius." Children stay up until midnight on Christmas Eve, because that is when the big moment takes place. At that point, it is actually like St Nicholas in the Netherlands: parents distract their children and then – hey presto! – the presents are suddenly there. And there are many of them indeed. This was also the case when Awad was growing up. She can still remember the toy house she received when she was around six years old.

"It's not actually a very nice way of celebrating. It's mainly about presents. In Chile you have to give something to everyone – your colleagues, your adult friends, everyone. It's very materialistic. The St Nicholas celebration in the Netherlands is very different, because it's well and truly a celebration for children. I therefore think it's a lot nicer than the Christmas celebration in Chile. It is more spiritual. It has more meaning. Many Dutch friends give a nice present and a poem to one other person. Although Awad is critical of the Black Pete element, she values the St Nicholas celebration. "I don't go to Chile for Christmas, I prefer the St Nicholas event."

Stunned

Awad never saw a Black Pete when she was growing up in Chile. She also never saw faces that had been painted black. "Chile has a lot of minorities. There is also

Isabel Awad is a communication researcher at the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication (ESHCC). Together with a number of colleagues, she wrote a glossy about Black Pete. The work will be presented at the university on 19 November. As an outsider – Awad was born in Chile – she was 'shocked' when she first experienced the event that marks the arrival of St Nicholas in 2007. Nevertheless: "In many respects, the St Nicholas celebration in the Netherlands is nicer than the Chilean Christmas celebration."

racism, though not against black people, because there are hardly any black people in Chile. There was no slavery in Chile like there was in many other Latin American colonies. It is only in the past few years that an 'Afro-Chilean' group has emerged as a result of very recent immigration from the Caribbean region." Awad is also a member of a minority group in Chile. "My family originally comes from Syria and Palestine. My great-grandparents immigrated to South America over a hundred years ago." In Chile her family now identifies itself as 'Turkish', since, at the time that Awad's great-grandparents made their journey, the Middle East was still part of the Ottoman Empire.

Born in Chile, Awad lived in the United States for six years, where she conducted her doctoral research into cultural diversity in the news media. "My research in the US was about the Latino community in San José. It was about racism and the representation of *The Other*." Sometimes, though only rarely, she encountered the 'blackface' phenomenon. "But it was always in the context of the phenomenon being criticised." She arrived in the Netherlands in 2007 to work at the Uni-

versity of Amsterdam and, from 2009, at the ESHCC.

Awad first saw Black Petes on yellowed postcards. "The postcards got my attention, but I had no idea how mainstream or popular Black Petes still were." She found out during the arrival procession of St Nicholas in Amsterdam in November 2007. "A friend with two children invited me to the event. At the time I had no idea what the whole St Nicholas thing was about. I love kids, though, so I was more than happy to go and see the event for myself. I was therefore one of the many people standing on the side of the street waiting for St Nicholas. I was stunned when I saw the group, especially because of the way everyone in the crowd seemed to be thinking that it was all okay. I saw a white bishop on a horse. The contrast between this elderly white man seated high on his horse, this almost regal figure, and the comical, clown-like buffoons accompanying him on foot, their faces painted black, could not have been greater. It was truly shocking to me. There were also children with shoe polish on their faces. I heard from my friends that children sometimes point at black people and say 'Look! Black Pete!'"



Just Pete

Awad did not discuss the matter on the spot. She did so later, however. "I also discussed the matter with many Dutch people. It was nice to come across many Dutch people in Rotterdam who were also critical. A serious debate was going on in the city."

Awad got involved in this debate. She said that when her daughter was born in 2011, she could no longer avoid the issue. "I would like my child to be able to participate in traditions like St Nicholas. She loves the celebration and the 'spice nuts'. At first I thought that it was great that I could take her to the St Nicholas event here at Erasmus University." Awad took her daughter for the first time when she was two years old. "She wasn't really aware of what was going on because she was so young. But it wasn't the kind of celebration that I wanted to be involved in. I was very disappointed when I learned that faces painted black were also part of the celebration on campus. I'd really like my daughter to absorb the Dutch tradition, because she's growing up here. But I don't want her to be part of the tradition's racist element. Since she's now four, she's just starting to become aware of what it means. I've explained to her that there

'I'd really like my daughter to absorb the Dutch tradition, because she's growing up here. But I don't want her to be part of the tradition's racist element'

✎ Isabel Awad

are more colours than black and that she should therefore no longer say *Black Pete*. She still says it sometimes. When she does, I say: 'No, it's just Pete'. She then remembers what I explained. The whole thing makes no difference to her in other respects."

Chimney sweeps

Before taking her daughter to the St Nicholas celebration at Erasmus University for the second time in 2014, Awad sent an e-mail message to the organisers. She asked what the party would be like that year. "I was informed that it would be like it had been every year and that there would be Brown Petes instead of Black Petes. I didn't understand that at all. Together with my colleague Jiska Engelbert, I later wrote a letter to *EM*." The two ESHCC academics are very clear in the letter: "We would like to express our deep disappointment about, and distance ourselves from, Erasmus University's response to the current St Nicholas debate, particularly with respect to the racism underlying the Black Pete character."

Ultimately, the party featured a few Chimney Sweep Petes in addition to Black and Brown Petes. "That wasn't a real solution, obviously. I decided not to go in the end. It was a real shame. I may go this year. More discussion is possible now."

The letter proved to be the starting shot of a year-long study into the Black Pete phenomenon. Together with her colleagues in Rotterdam Jiska Engelbert, Alex van Stipriaan and Jacco van Sterkenburg, as well as Chris Peters of the Universi- ✎

ty of Groningen, Awad is also writing a letter on the subject. This letter will be published in <c>de Volkskrant</c>, a daily newspaper. In addition, the Erasmus University scholars are spending their free time working with their colleague Janelle Ward and research assistants on a plan to give the academic community a leading role in the Black Pete debate. Together with media and culture professionals based in Amsterdam, the Rotterdam researchers prepared a glossy of over 200 pages. The purpose of this publication is to show how many different kinds of Black Pete there already are in the Netherlands.

Dutch identity

Despite the experience that she now has in the subject, she is always surprised by the tone in which the Black Pete debate is conducted. In her view, a number of the replies to the letter that President Pauline van der Meer Mohr published in <c>EM</c> in an attempt to get the debate going at Erasmus University are striking examples of this tone. "The contents of the letter were hardly radical. Some of the replies were therefore mind-boggling. I simply do not expect that kind of thing." She has no conclusive explanation for the vehemence. "I think it has something to do with the wish to defend a narrow, essentialist perception of Dutch identity against external influences, as if that identity is something immutable and incapable of change. My own view is that it's always evolving and that the issue must be seen from different perspectives. I know people who say: 'It's only a children's celebration, so what's all the fuss about Black Pete?' But I rarely encounter the people who are so uncompromising in their tone."

Nevertheless, she believes that it is possible to involve everyone in the debate, also those who are in favour of retaining Black Pete. "I don't think that the university is in an ivory tower. If anything, we're doing our very best to engage everyone in the debate and we welcome participation. It's in any case good that the academic community is trying to get involved in this debate. Doing nothing means failing as a university. It's not always possible

'I was very disappointed when I learned that faces painted black were also part of the celebration on campus'

✎ *Isabel Awad*

to simply wash your hands, absolve yourself of any responsibility and sit on the fence to see how things pan out. Given the importance of the debate to society, that kind of indifference is inexcusable in a 'civilised society' that has a legion of historians, sociologists, philosophers, communication experts and marketeers at its disposal, people who have something meaningful to say about the subject."

Post-war invention

The group of 'Black Pete scholars' at the ESHCC is convinced of one thing: the debate should no longer be about whether Black Pete should change, it has to be about how Black Pete should change. "Pete has never stopped changing. My colleague Alex van Stipriaan prepared a historical overview for our glossy. The current Pete was invented after the Second World War. The character of course has a historical background, part of which dates back to the reality of slavery in the context of the Atlantic slave trade. That's problematic. At the same time, however, the character has always changed and will continue to change in a societal context. There is of course momentum for such change now. The St Nicholas tradition in itself is a beautiful one. It's much more about family than Christmas in Chile. It doesn't actually need Black Pete to remain something that is quite special." ◀

Colophon

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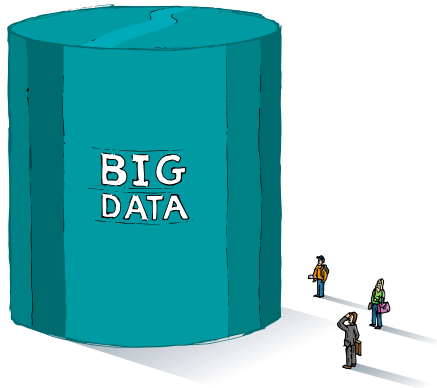
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Is Big Data really Big?

In the last couple of years, scandals surrounding WikiLeaks and Edward Snowden have been continuously drawing attention to the issue of Big Data. CCTV, credit card transactions, Facebook activity – it seems like Big Data is everywhere around us and nowhere in concrete form.



What is Big Data?

You are being watched, they track what you buy; the media urge us to beware of Big Data. Still, few know what it is, and even fewer understand how it works. And who are 'they', after all? Despite its ubiquity, Big Data is a moving target. Politicians, academics and marketing professionals cannot reach a consensus on a precise definition. Roughly, it is anything digital – video, text, audio or image. It can be information about traffic patterns that the government uses to optimize road planning. Song download rates tracked by record labels also fall into this category. Massive data sets of DNA samples are yet another example.

What comes around

None of this is really new, however. Companies like Walmart in the USA have been collecting data about transactions since the 1960s. The crucial difference is not even the volume, although the size of the server farms – enormous storage facilities that large companies use to host services and carry out daily operations – might be mind-boggling. What makes Big Data really worthy of our attention is what it can be used for. Back in the day, businesses had to use brute force methods to obtain sensible information about consumer preferences. They then had to discard most of it because there was no room to store it. Now computer technology has

both the hardware and the software to collect and store large amounts of data and find meaningful patterns across different sources.

Devil in the detail

The trick is that it is a massive parallel processing mechanism. Once collected, data can be recycled for secondary purposes and connected across various sets. So now it is not only Vodafone that knows that you have a Samsung smartphone and the municipal authority that has your address. Now it is the local electronics retailer that connects the dots, looks at the average income in your area and sends you emails with offers which best fit your budget. The deal with the devil is this: you give us your data, we give you the best service, be it the marketing department or the police that patrol the areas with the highest crime rates more often.

The Four Vs

So let's look at the numbers and main characteristics that actually make Big Data Big. These are four Vs – volume, velocity, variety and veracity. Not surprisingly, the volume of the data collected is huge. According to IT leader Cisco, we already have one million years of video material on the net and we create 2.3 trillion gigabytes of data each day. It's happening

very fast indeed: by 2016 we are expected to have 18.9 network connections, 2.5 per person on Earth. The data is incredibly diverse: Facebook yields 30 billion pieces of content each month, while we store 161 billion gigabytes of healthcare data. The issue is the last V – veracity. This means that Big Data is often used for profiling, which brings us back to "being watched". For example, airport security uses risk profiles. These profiles are generated on the basis of correlation, which is detected against the backdrop of the entire data set. Now, remember the statistics classes that you hated? The mantra there is "correlation is not causation". Make the scale large enough and you will find the link between skin colour and the preference for watching The Simpsons on Sunday morning.

Angels and demons

So is it time to start paying cash and switch to a black hoodie uniform? Or shall we make ourselves comfortable in our chair and do some shopping from the "suggested items" list? Apparently, Big Data has an effect in both public and private domains. Indeed, it makes life easier to have a personal assistant like a Google Now service to guide you in your everyday life, and the streets are safer with CCTV. The question is what is better: controlled choice on the autopilot or a risky decision of your own? ▽



I spy with my little eye

We tend to think that a complete picture of our life is only accessible to us. As students, we are more or less free from formal tracking. Most of us don't have to worry about medical insurance, employment contracts and tax records. It seems like our daily business is our private matter. Strictly speaking, what we do is only interesting to us. However, the advent of Big Data casts doubt on such assumptions. Let's follow an average student in Rotterdam and see how many data shadows we create on a typical day.

8.30 – Coolhaven

You woke up to find out that you are already somewhat late for the lecture on campus at 9 a.m. It's Monday again. Outside the window of your student apartment is a typical Rotterdam scene – lashing rain. You decide to splurge and go by metro. You check in with your public transport chip card at Coolhaven station. There's some time left and you are half asleep, so you pay for a cup of coffee with your debit card. On the train, you are dead bored. You connect to the Wi-Fi generously provided by the transport company, accepting all the terms, and go on Facebook.

Number of traces: 5

Types of Data: *CCTV at the station, location, credit card transaction, Wi-Fi activity cache, Facebook account logs*



9.30 – Campus Woudestein, CB-2 lecture room

You made it to the lecture. Your body may be in the room, but your brain is still in weekend mode. What is he talking about, anyway? You log in to Blackboard to download the article you were supposed to read for the session. It makes no sense, you can only see a ton of references. The lecturer mentions a course textbook and you look it up on Amazon. You decide to order it, hoping that it will be more understandable, since you've promised yourself to study harder.

Number of traces: 4

Types of data: *ERNA account activity, email, credit card transaction, Amazon consumer preference tracking, CCTV in the Theil building.*





16.00 - Albert Heijn, Oudedijk

On the way home, you drop by an Albert Heijn branch because your fridge always looks like a barren desert after a fun weekend. You get your couple of litres of milk, a jar of peanut butter and a stack of bread. OK, at least your breakfast is sorted out for a week. You notice that there's a bonus offer for beer and grab as many cans as you can. Who could resist such an offer?

Number of traces: 3

Types of data: *CCTV in the parking area, credit card transaction, bonus card tracking*



12.30 - Erasmus Food Plaza

It's over. Lunch time! You use your debit card to buy a grilled cheese sandwich at Tosti World and get a pumpkin spice latte at Starbucks. You check in at Foursquare, since you think that it's cool to have a Starbucks on campus, and post a picture of your Christmas cup on Instagram, because they wrote your name wrong, again. Chewing on your grilled cheese sandwich, you WhatsApp with a friend to agree on the time to go to the cinema in the evening.

Number of traces: 6

Types of data: *CCTV recording, credit card transaction, location, Instagram logs, WhatsApp message archive, consumer preference tags*



19.00 - Pathe Schouburgplein

You meet with your friend at Pathé. You get the tickets for *The Martian* in 3D and grab a massive bucket of popcorn at the food court. Making yourself comfortable in your chair and preparing for the fun, you start fooling around with your 3D glasses. Your friend takes a picture of you and posts it on Twitter. Of course, he just wants to embarrass you. To have an excuse, he adds in #TheMartian, and a #funny hashtag to do justice to your silly expression. After the movie, you want to know everything about Matt Damon. You log in to Pathé Wi-Fi and find out what his favourite ice cream brand is. The day has not been wasted.

Number of traces: 6

Types of data: *credit card transaction, Pathé Wi-Fi cache, hashtag tracking, Google search history, CCTV at Schouburgplein, cinema marketing department client profiling*

Erasmus University College scores low in Keuzegids

The Keuzegids bases its evaluation on the results of the *National Student Survey* (Nationale Studenten Enquête or NSE). Every year, all students in higher education in the Netherlands are asked for their opinion on a range of issues. The survey asks questions about everything relating to their studies, such as lecturers and academic skills, as well as the university facilities and accommodation. Similar programmes are compared based on the following parts: content, lecturers, skills, academic education, workload, information, facilities and the expert opinion. The last part does not come from the NSE, but is a summary of the visitation report published by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (Nederlands Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie or NVAO).

Pluses and minuses

In the case of EUC, this means that the programme is compared with eight other university colleges in the country. Only the programme in Venlo from Maastricht University came lower than Rotterdam, but this is easy to explain: the programme only started this year, so there were no evaluations from last year.

The areas mentioned by the Keuzegids are very general. And that creates uncertainty. A low score on content for one programme may be due to the literature discussed. For another programme, it might be the number of subjects discussed in each course.

Another factor which creates uncertainty is that the evaluation is based on an average. The programmes are compared with each other per part. If one part scores lower than the average, it receives 'minuses', with a maximum of three. If a part scores higher than the average, it can be given 'pluses' – also a maximum of three.

Last September, Erasmus University College (EUC) welcomed its third intake of students. In the Dutch university information guide *Keuzegids 2016*, the programme is ranked at the bottom of the list of university colleges in the Netherlands. The programme scored lower than average with regard to the quality of the lecturers and the content. It also got a fail for its organisation.

A score equal to the average results in that part is given a '0'.

That sounds easy enough, but it also gives distorted results. Because you don't know what the average score is, it is difficult to assess whether a minimum is really such a big fail or not: the average might just be very high. Anyone who is really interested can request the raw data from the survey. But that does involve paying a couple of hundred euros, not something that the average new student is keen to fork out. Elsevier's Studiegids takes a different approach. Although it gets students to fill in a questionnaire with more or less the same subjects, the results show what percentage of students is happy.

When the percentage from the Studiegids is compared with the 'pluses and minuses' of the Keuzegids, we see that the results correspond. Thus only 35 percent of

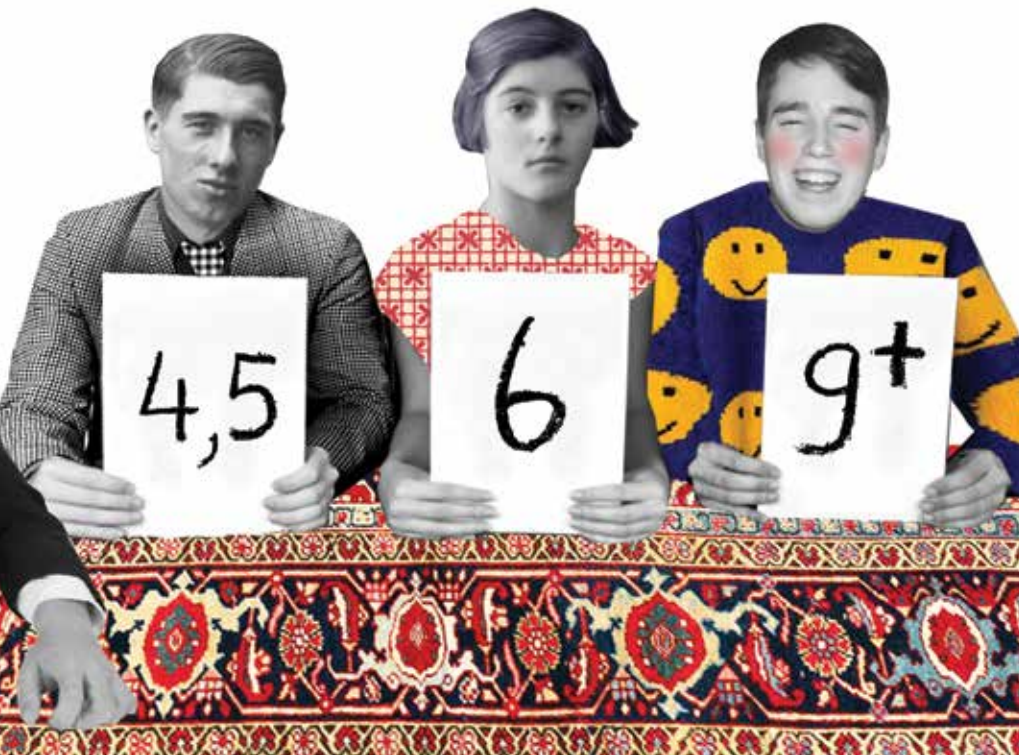


the students are happy with the organisation and communication of the EUC programme, 61 percent are satisfied with the lecturers, and around two thirds of the students are happy with the education.

Five moves

So where does this dissatisfaction originate? It may be the result of the teething problems experienced by every new organisation. The structure of a university college can't be compared to the structure of any other mainstream programme. Furthermore, the programme had some start-up issues. Since the start, a good two years ago, the programme had to move five times because the current building wasn't ready.

Another issue is communication. The information about the programme was fairly general and not geared to the individu-



al needs of the students who, apart from the start date of their study, often have little in common with each other.

Improvements

Lack of clarity was another issue when choosing subjects. The content of the first year was completely different from the second year. In the first year, students were given a detailed curriculum, which courses may not all be appealing to students who had specially chosen the University College for its freedom of choice. In the second year they had complete freedom and students could choose between subjects worth 1.5 to 7 ECTs. That meant a lot of calculating to achieve the required 60 ECTs.

The students also faced problems assessing their lecturers. Due to the different disciplines offered by the programme,

‘Considering the number of students who register with us every year, I don’t think that they look at that ranking’ ↘ dean Maarten Frens

the lecturers were brought in from all over the place. All these lecturers brought with them their own customs regarding testing, organising the courses and lesson structure. This was very confusing for students who were told different things in each subject.

The programme recognises the criticism expressed in the Keuzegids, says dean Maarten Frens. But the results say little about the current organisation of the programme, he explains. “You have to realise that the survey is from last year. Since then we have made lots of changes which have significantly improved the programme.”

For example, all courses are now worth a standard 5 ECTs, the programme has finally moved into its permanent accommodation in the city, and the information provision has been turned around. Instead of students being addressed per year, the programme now approaches students per programme. Students now also have 8 instead of 12 compulsory subjects in the first year, leaving 20 ECTs which they can fill in themselves. In order to introduce structure, a coordinator was appointed for each course. This is to ensure that each course has the same structure and exams. The information provision is now also geared more to the individual student.

Growing steadily

The programme is expected to score much higher in the next National Student Survey. “Three years ago, the programme in The Hague had also only just started and was also ranked at the bottom of the list,” says Frens. “Now the programme is in the top 3. I expect the same thing will happen to us. We are going in the right direction and we will continue along this route.” Meanwhile, the number of registrations for Erasmus University College is growing steadily. Isn’t Frens worried about a decline following the disappointing results in the Keuzegids? “No, not really,” he replies. “Considering the number of students who register with us every year, I don’t think that they look at that ranking. We simply have a good story and that’s what appeals to students.” ↙

Before green turns grim

Have you already pimped a lavishing fir tree to tower over your living room for the Christmas festivities? Or at least snatched a slender pine wreath with some pretty red ribbons to put up on your door? If we continue on like this, I wonder how many more Christmases we have left.

Yes, it is the sustainability talk again. At this point I bet you are tempted to shut the magazine and carry on having your polyurethane-packaged lunch with a plastic-bottled Coke. And I agree! I am also tired of the abstract green buzz. But even more so, I am puzzled by how despite all this, each of us continues to spit into the well we are all drinking from. So let's see how this issue is relevant to us as students, here at the Erasmus University.

The diverse assortment of catering facilities at Campus Woudestein turns its spell into a curse. Think about the sheer amount of plastic forks wasted at Spar and the enormous electricity demand of the snack machines. Add to that all the profusely wrapped to-go options from the Erasmus Plaza and you start getting a feeling of the scale of the problem. Now, if you happen to be at Erasmus MC Medical Library, take a look at the Mount Everest heaps of plastic cups from the free coffee machines and you see the catastrophe looming.

To be fair, there are great initiatives like the Erasmus sustainability hub. After all, you might bring your lunch in a re-usable container, always shop at the market and accurately sort your trash. Maybe you even just got the Erasmus Mug to get your eco image slick and clean.

However, in most cases the problem is that what starts out as green initiative ends up as old grim consumerism. See, if you got the mug only to nestle it between your disposable bottle from HEMA and a thermal cup from Starbucks, then you have not made much difference. Similarly, if you stuff your cotton shopping bag with all the plastic bagged veggies and fruits from the market, there's still much to improve on.

Thanks to the developed capitalism in Europe, we have an illusion that we are doing well - we have organic shops and separate waste collection. We even have time to set up the demonstrations to cultivate an eco-friendly society. On November 29th a climate parade will take place in Amsterdam. No doubt, voices have to be heard. But action has to be seen as well. The fact that Europe boasts outstanding public services does not mean that we waste less than elsewhere in the world. It simply means that we clean more. New Year is a good time to reduce wastage instead of increasing efforts to sweep it under the rug.

Kate Sytnik is studying Liberal Arts & Sciences at the Erasmus University College

text GERT VAN DER ENDE
 photography MICHEL DE GROOT



Why did you want to be president? "Actually, I was already an active member last year. I enjoyed the atmosphere at ESN and met a lot of people, so I decided to become a member of the board."

Just like that? "Well, you have to apply for the job. I had to do an extended in-depth interview with two former presidents of the ESN. I didn't know I wanted to be the president beforehand. But after asking the relevant questions, I discovered that with my skills I am the type of person suited for the presidency."

And are you? "I think so, yes. I like to help people, I like to keep an eye on how things are going, and I always stand up for my team. They are like a family."

What kind of president would you say you are? "Not an overly authoritarian kind. I think everyone in the board should have lots of autonomy, and there should always room for discussion. So it's not like 'I am the boss', I try to lead by example. Whether this is the case or not, that's for others to judge."

Meanwhile you are doing a master. You don't get in trouble? "It's not easy, but I am good at time-management. My grades are still ok - I'm doing a minor at RSM right now - the only thing I had to cut down was my social life. Friends just see a little less of me this year."

You work long hours then? "ESN costs me 30-40 hours on a weekly basis. Being at the office is the smallest part though, talking with all kinds of people and being present at all our activities takes far more of my time, but of

Iga Podgorska Motto: 'Lead by example'

Name: Iga Podgorska

Age: 21

Study: 3rd year of Bachelors at Erasmus University College

Association: ESN-Rotterdam. ESN is an interdisciplinary student association in Europe which was founded in 1990. ESN is represented in 37 countries with over 460 different branches. ESN-Rotterdam is a service organization which consists of around 40 active members that work closely with the University to greatly enhance the studying abroad experience for international students. As a non-profit organization, ESN-Rotterdam aims to connect international students and to stimulate integration between natives and international students by organising many cultural and social events.

President since: August 2015

course that's time spent very pleasurably."

Your parents were probably not too thrilled when you told them your plans? "Ha, ha, of course. The first thing they asked was: 'What about your studies?' It took some time, and a lot of my negotiating skills to get them aboard, but in the end I succeeded. By now, they are very supportive, which is actually very nice."

Were you well-prepared when you took the job on? "Yes. The more because I already started thinking about becoming a board member back in February. By June I had already had a lot of meetings with former presidents, so I knew what was waiting for me. I had been on some student-boards during high-school and the Erasmus University College, but I now know that that was a completely different experience."

What did you experience so far, that you hadn't expected? "That you always should keep in mind to look at each other as friends and that you pay attention to the human things. Because sometimes one can be so caught up in things, one tends to forget about those aspects."

What quality do you need the most as a president? "Knowing how to ask the right questions."

What do you like the best about being a president? "Seeing that my input has helped someone accomplish something. Of course, it's a two-way street: we help each other grow."

Are there any things you don't like about the job? "Hmm, not really. However, I am not too thrilled about staying up all night too often." ←

What's
online

www.erasmusmagazine.nl



'While respecting the capabilities of our opponents at all times, we will have to stop being overawed by them, because we're a very strong team'

Coach Richard de Kogel on Erasmus University's men's first team's close victory over ROWI Volleyball Club.

'If everything claimed in research turned out to be true, then we would have been immortal a long time ago'

John Ioannidis (Stanford School of Medicine) received an honorary doctorate from Erasmus University. During his acceptance speech, he advocated more replication and repetition of research so that the 'real truth' can be found.

'Really omg?! Erasmus university Rotterdam is my **FIRST** choiceeeeeee,... - Omg don't worry u can handle it goodluck babe xx'
@rihanniaz

A future EUR student gives herself a pep talk on Twitter.



'Why the fuck did I choose the Erasmus university that makes you do 5 exams in one semester. 😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊 cunts'
@alice_careyy

Alice, a Notary Law student, is angry but cheerful at the same time, judging from the row of smileys in her tweet.

'And now half the population of Erasmus University is boarding the tram. About half of them look like they're 8 years old, while the other half look like they're 56'
@90scaylen

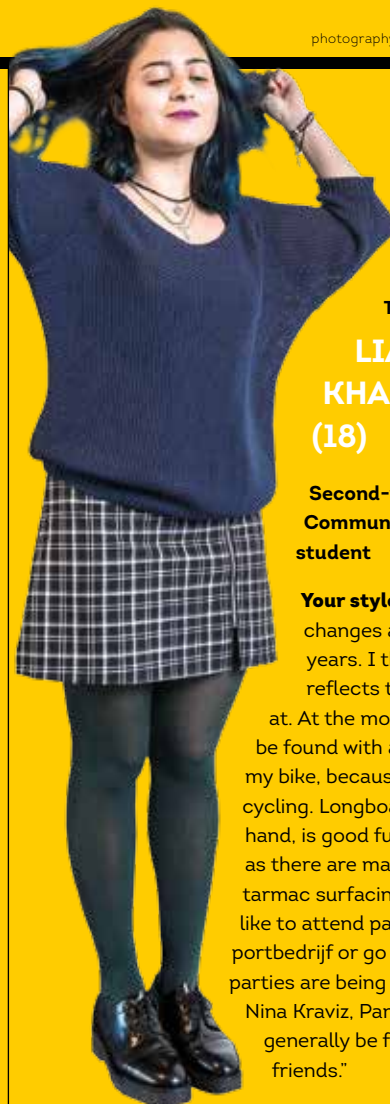


A commuter aboard a tram sums up Erasmus University's population in one single tweet.

'We don't drink Martinis during working hours': DG Bertholee damps students' expectations #007.
@AIVD



150 Erasmus University students attended an information meeting on working for AIVD (the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service). It was a bit of a letdown for some of them, an AIVD employee tweeted.



THIS IS ME
LIANA KHANAGHIAN
(18)

Second-year Media and Communication (IBCoM) student

Your style? "My style changes about every two years. I think the way I dress reflects the stage of life I'm at. At the moment I can often be found with a longboard. I sold my bike, because I found I hated cycling. Longboarding, on the other hand, is good fun in Rotterdam, as there are many flat roads with tarmac surfacing. In my free time I like to attend parties at Het Transportbedrijf or go to BAR. If any cool parties are being hosted featuring Nina Kraviz, Pan Pot or Noisia, I can generally be found there with my friends."

Rotterdam dummy. "My sister and I came to the Netherlands to study. We were looking for a European university that offered both Media and Communication and Economics. I'm from Armenia, and my parents thought it would be a good idea for me and my sister to study abroad together. We ended up at Erasmus University, although neither of us had ever been to the Netherlands before. I'd never even heard of Rotterdam. We enrolled, then moved here. We share an apartment together, which is an advantage."

Theatre. "I used to want to be an actress. I think it's hard to become a professional actress, though, so now it's mostly just a hobby. I have joined a theatre troupe for international Erasmus students. At the moment we're doing a lot of improv, and we're attending lectures and performances. This January we'll be picking a play we're going to perform ourselves. I don't have a lot of acting experience, so it's quite exciting for me."

Dutch friends. "I find it quite hard to make friends in the Netherlands. In Armenia, everyone you meet on your first day of school is your friend, but it's not like that here. Dutch people seem to like their privacy. It's quite normal to have known someone for four months without ever having visited their home. I've managed to make some friends, though, including a few Dutch people!"