

Annual Report - Student Council 2006-2007

Visiting Address

Postal Address

Telephone

Email

Webpage

Costerweg 50, Room 2070, Wageningen

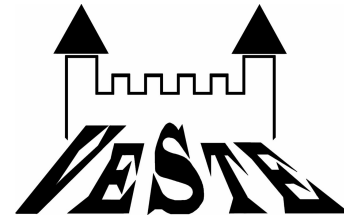
P.O. Box 9101, 6700 HB Wageningen

(Intern Bode 75)

0317-483524

studentcouncil@wur.nl, studentenraad@wur.nl

www.wu.nl/sc, www.wu.nl/sr



Credits

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Editor	Gerben van 't Hag
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Dear reader,

You have just opened the Annual Report of the 2006-2007 Student Council of Wageningen University. In these pages, you will find a short presentation of the Student Council and a general coverage of the work it has done for Wageningen University and Research Centre this year.

Throughout this year, the Student Council had to face challenges, internally as much as externally. Starting with too few people to fill in all the seats, members struck by health or immigration issues, awkward priority settings, and a change of chairman during the year did make it hard for the Council to maintain a good pace during twelve months. Meanwhile, the council inherited hard topics such as the IPOP and had to take on new challenges such as re-structuring the co-management.

In spite of all these difficulties, the Council still managed to accomplish estimable achievements. In some aspects, the work of this particular council can even be seen as outstanding. For this, those members who dedicated long hours of their lives to the Council can be proud.

To this year's Council members who have just taken their official function, I will say "keep working hard to stay in touch with the students, do not forget that your network is your best lever to get things moving, and you will leave your print on this institution".

Frédéric Linardon
Chair of the Student Council

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1. What is the Student Council?

The Student Council (SC) consists of 12 elected students who postpone their studies and represent the interests of all students in Wageningen for a full year. Three parties, The Christian Student Party (CSF), The Progressive Student Party (PSF) and United Students (VeSte), form the SC. The three parties have a slightly different working style, but usually come to a consensus to form a unified student voice towards the Executive Board (EB), whom they meet with on a regular basis. In short, they attempt to find the best possible solution for regulations regarding studies and student related activities.

Rights and Jurisdiction of the Student Council - The SC has three official rights for influencing issues they are working on: the right of advice, approval and initiative. The **right of advice** means the SC can provide the EB with advice on any issue directly or indirectly related to students. The EB must provide good reasons if they do not follow the advice given. The Council also has the **right of approval** on everything that directly applies to students; the Council must approve of the proposed plans before they can be implemented. The **right of initiative** means the Council can put forth ideas and suggestions, and in return, the EB is required to respond seriously.

The Student-Staff Council - In the SSC (Gezamenlijke Vergadering/ Student-Staff Council) the SC meets with WU members of the Central Employees Council (COR) and directly chosen members of the university. The SSC discusses issues that relate to both students and WU employees. Examples include the business-plans and vision of the

University, quality assurance and the administration and control regulations (BBR).

Mode of Operation - The Council works with six-week cycles, beginning with preparatory meetings and culminating with the meeting with the EB. Here the final discussion and decision-making occurs. To streamline this process many subjects are dealt with in content-based committees. For the SSC, the preparations are comparable, but with more structure and formality. To stay in touch with what is happening in Wageningen, the Council maintains contact with various student organisations like the Wageningen Student Union (WSO), the student clubs, the study associations and the decentralised participatory organs (i.e. education committees, or OpCies).

Informal meetings with the rector and director of the OWI (Educational Institute) Besides the official meetings, the Student Council can address issues in an informal meeting with two important players at the University, namely the Rector and the director of the Educational Institute. The chair and vice-chair of the Student Council meet once every three weeks with the Rector. The informal meeting with the OWI-director takes place once every month. All party-chairs, chair and vice-chair of the Student Council are present. The OWI is responsible for the implementation of all education issues at central level. There is no official direct link between the OWI and the Student Council, which is why this meeting is very important.

2. Selection of items discussed in the Student Council

Education and Examination Regulation 2007-2008 - The SC approved the new EER with the exception of two issues. The new criteria for an internship as proposed in the new EER seemed as if students had to do a second thesis. The text about the thesis has been changed back to its original state. It was also proposed to add a section about group fraud. This stated that if in a group of people doing group work one person committed fraud the whole group could be held responsible. The SC thought this was unreasonable. The section has now been removed.

WUSS - The SC made a proposal for an annual Wageningen University Student Survey (WUSS). In this survey students will be asked for their opinion on a wide range of topics concerning studying at the university, such as canteen facilities, working spaces, the housing by Idealis and co-management. Having such an annual returning survey is important because student opinion is a valuable resource for evaluating how the university is performing. After consultation with the policy makers, it was decided to have a kind of surveying system, in which all other surveys would be taken up as well, under responsibility of the Executive Board.

English Intake Level - The internationalisation committee wrote a memo - which was discussed in the SC- to improve the English quality (Intake Level) at Wageningen UR. The document contained questions regarding the quality of English of new students enrolling at the University. Some students at WU have difficulties following courses or generally communicating due to their poor level of spoken and written English. The resulting communication tension

among students, as well as between students and teachers, has become a problem to consider. These students often have difficulties passing their exams or score unreasonably low, even though their level of knowledge of the subject might be high. The facilities of CENTA as one of the tools to improve the English intake level have been discussed as well. The overcrowding of English courses at CENTA, the quality of education/courses, the Quick Placement Test (QPT) were topics the SC tried to work on. Suggestions such as how and what kind of English test should be taken by new students before they enter their MSc study, the coordination between CENTA and CSA, the participation of the study advisor were included in the memo. The plan to conduct a survey regarding this topic has been discussed and will be done in collaboration with the WSO.

Side inflow - Since the introduction of the Bachelor-Master (BAMA) structure at Wageningen University, there are possibilities for students with a bachelor degree to join a Wageningen Master. This includes students from polytechnics (HBO, e.g. Van Hall Larenstein) and students from abroad. In order to have a smooth integration, some linkage programmes and courses are provided. The question remains, however, if the performance of these students is equal to students with a Wageningen BSc. The SC started its investigation on this topic only recently, and meanwhile the OWI and the study programmes are also doing a good job on this issue. The latest development is the call for so-called distance learning modules, where international students can have a scientific preparation to their field of study, in their home country.

Mentor project - There are several types of mentoring projects in WU, but none of them have been centralised with educational purposes. The idea was to build in some mutual help for educational issues. The SC did some investigation with the study associations, usually involved in the mentor projects. A document will be made, describing 'best practices'. The document will hopefully encourage the study associations to develop their own mentor project, involving education as well.

Extracurricular education - In line with (inter)national trends, one of the spearheads of the SC this year was extracurricular education. The SC aimed at finding ways to stimulate excellence in students rather than stimulating excellent students. First, an inventory of possibilities in extracurricular education or honours programmes was made. Next to this, the current situation at Wageningen University and its characteristics concerning education were mapped out. This left us with the conclusion that because of small-scale education, short linkages between teachers and students and a focus on multi-disciplinarity, Wageningen does not need an extended honours programme like other universities.

The work done was not in vain as the Student Council was asked to think of ways to spend additional money on stimulating excellence. Based on the broad inventory, the Student Council came up with the idea to deploy vouchers for students to 'spend' at a professor or teacher to gain knowledge. The system will be demand-driven, focused on broad academic development and motivation of students *and lecturers* involved.

Ethics - For the last 10 years the topic of ethics and philosophy of science education has been discussed in the University, without any change in the curricula resulting from this.

Meanwhile, everybody involved agrees on the relevance of this subject; ethics is intertwined with all topics students come across while studying here. That is why the Student Council of this year conducted an elaborate research on ethics in education which resulted in the report 'mission: possible. Action plan to get more and better ethics in Wageningen University education, March 2007'. This plan was discussed with the Executive Board, who was enthusiastic and delegated the implementation to the OWI board. The main idea is that ethics should be implemented in an integrated way and linked to content of study programmes.

3. Selection of Items discussed in the Student-Staff Council

Impact@WURk

July 2006 a workgroup for the restructuring of co-management at WUR was started. The workgroup, called Impact@WURk, consisted of 1 or 2 members from every central co-management body and 2 staff members of Corporate Governance. The aim of the group was to prepare a broad discussion in all the central councils to come to a more efficient and effective co-management structure and to combine the outcome into an advice for the EB. Special points of attention were the integration of VHL and the new law on Higher Education (WHOO: Wet op Hoger Onderwijs en Onderzoek). A few models were determined which were worked out for the co-management restructuring discussion day on the 24th of January 2007.

At the end of the day all co-management members present could vote for their favourite model. There was no clear preference for one model, as 3 models got nearly the same amount of votes. The workgroup decided to work out the 1 WUR council model and presented this in an advice concerning remodelling the co-management to the EB. The EB took over the advice, with exception of some elements crucial for the functioning of this model like a technical chair.

The SC voted against the 1-CMO (Central Co-management Council) model, giving as main argument the disappearance of a university/student co-management body. The topic of co-management restructuring is still on-going. A new informal workgroup is still talking about other possible ways of making the co-management system more effective.

Environmental Policy - In the beginning of the year, the SSC put sustainability on the list of its priorities. Based on some preliminary research, questions were asked to the Executive Board and even to the Supervisory Board about the 'greenness' of WUR. The disappointing and evading answers encouraged SSC members to go deeper into the topic.

The issue was not only brought up at the meeting table. At the same time, the PSF and the WSO launched a big action to raise awareness about the lack of green policies at the university ('the inconvenient truth about WUR'). This resulted in the establishment of the Wageningen Environmental Platform (WEP).

Using the information and broad support of the students' action, the SSC could ask for more efforts of the Executive Board on environmental policy at WUR. The most important promises were: the establishment of an energy policy plan, carrying out an independent sustainability audit by Price Water House Coopers and launching a communication plan on sustainability.

A major point of discussion remains the formulation of more ambitious sustainability policies (e.g. a clear environmental policy plan). Another challenge is to unite the Executive Board, management directors, the Health Safety and Environment Office, employees and students to improve sustainability at WUR.

Co-operation University-VHL – since the fusion of WUR with VHL co-operation in education has been a *hot item*, counting over 40 initiatives of which 4 are prioritised. One of these prioritised projects proposed for this year was the implementation of a Water Technology Master Programme in Leeuwarden. The SSC opposed to this idea due to the lack of an academic environment over there. The topic is still ongoing.

Another prioritised project is the ‘through flow’ of VHL students to a university master. Special ‘through-flow minors’ have been developed to facilitate this. The Student-Staff Council is in favour of the idea of a side-inflow minor since it will provide a better preparation for VHL students intending to study in Wageningen. This topic is also still running.

4. Promotion and other activities

Sinterklaas wishes collection - The Student Council organised a Sinterklaas activity to collect wishes from the students on what they want to improve in the university. Wish boxes and a big shoe, in which students could put wishes, were put in the main canteens. The Rector picked out 10 wishes during the New Year's drink and rewarded the owner with a present. The wishes that were made were quite diverse, ranging from bigger bicycle sheds to praying/meditation rooms and from better English courses to more information about going abroad. The SC sent a follow-up report about all the wishes to the Executive Board (EB); and was glad that the EB would take action on carrying out most of the wishes.

New Year's Drink - As tradition goes, last year the New Year's Drink was organised by the Student Council in co-operation with the University. It was a successful event; many students enjoyed the combination of interesting content and the drink afterwards. The theme of this year was "a healthy mind in a healthy body". The first part of the programme took place at the Mathematics building in C1, which was completely filled with students. It contained a speech of the rector, the presentation of the Teacher of the Year Award, a speech in relation to the theme and the rewards of the Sinterklaas activity. Afterwards everybody went to Unitas, where a band played live music and all students could enjoy free drinks and snacks.

The FOS debate - February 13th, 2007 the Student Council organised a debate on the importance of maintaining the FOS budget. This budget offers financial support for students that have a study delay for a special reason, like participating in a board. The debate was organised after the EB announced they had plans to cut on the FOS budget. All the stakeholders were brought together and after an informative and useful evening filled with heated debate, the EB announced they will keep the number of board-grants intact for the next FOS round.

5. Elections

Elections - After a year of absence due to a shortage of people it finally was once more election time!

Seventeen people of all kinds of nationalities were found willing to sacrifice a year of their study and life for student interest protection and monitoring the functioning of the university. This could of course not go by unnoticed! Therefore, during the elections we organised a number of activities to get the fact known that elections were going and to get as many students as possible to vote.

Student Council Election Debate - To promote the elections and set the atmosphere we organised a debate between the candidates of both parties in LA13. We also invited the Rector to be present and ask questions. The theme of the debate was "The Ideal University". The discussions were about party plans for next year, ways of working of the parties and The Ideal University. Although the discussion was nice, the amount of people showing up could have been a little higher.

Mobile Voting Computer – During election time the SC promo committee made a mobile voting boot. With this place we visited all the big canteens and in this way made students aware of the election period.

PSF – VeSte football match - As a sort of publicity stunt a football match was organised on the field next to Dijkgraaf.

Although not many spectators showed up, the ones that were there enjoyed themselves as did the candidates playing football. PSF won the match with 4-2.

Election Result – The SC 2007/2008 elections were a great success. This even despite the fact that CSF didn't manage to find anyone and was thus not able to participate. 1,637 students (37.86%) voted. This had as a result the following seat division: PSF 5, VeSte 7.

6. Members Student Council 2006-2007



From left to right:

Silvia Erimasita (VeSte), Ineke Kleemans (PSF), Mattijs Smits (PSF), Yao Mingtian (VeSte), Anda Istudor (VeSte), Pieter Heringa (CSF), Florene Slotboom (VeSte, from 1 January 2007), Gerben van 't Hag (PSF, from 1 January 2007), Amrish Baidjoe (PSF), Song Yang (PSF), missing: Luca Siciliano (VeSte), Frédéric Linardon (until 31 December 2006)

7. Next year's Student Council



Student Council 2007-2008 *(From left to right)*

Back row: Jiajun Hu (VeSte), Gerben van 't Hag (PSF, until 31 December 2007), Alexey Pristupa (VeSte), Sicco Stortelder (PSF), Florene Slotboom (VeSte, until 31 December 2007), Frédéric Linardon (SC chair);
front row: Ricky van Lingen (VeSte), Yang Zhang (VeSte), Mascha Rasenberg (VeSte), Mandy Doddema (VeSte), Rishi Kukreja (PSF), Joppe de Groot (PSF)

8. List of abbreviations

CENTA	Language Centre (Centrum voor Talenonderwijs)
COR	Central Employees Council (Centrale Ondernemingsraad)
CSA	Central Student Administration (Centrale Studenten Administratie)
CSF	Christian Student Party (Christen Studenten Fractie)
EB	Executive Board Wageningen UR (Raad van Bestuur Wageningen UR)
EER/OER	Education and Examination Regulations (Onderwijs en Examenreglement)
FOS	Financial Support Students (Financiële Ondersteuning Studenten)
HBO	Higher Professional Education (Hoger Beroepsonderwijs)
OpCie	Programme Committee (Opleidingscommissie)
OWI	Educational Institute (Onderwijs Instituut)
PSF	Progressive Student Party (Progressieve Studenten Fractie)
SB	Supervisory Board Wageningen UR (Raad van Toezicht Wageningen UR)
SC	Student Council (Studentenraad)
SSC	Student Staff Council (Gezamenlijke Vergadering)
VeSte	United Students (Verenigde Studenten)
VHL	Van Hall Larenstein university for Professional Education (Hogeschool Van Hall Larenstein)
WEP	Wageningen Environmental Platform
WSO	Wageningen Student Union (Wageningse Studenten Organisatie)