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Central Election Program VUUR '25

Introduction

The VUUR Election Program for the University Council 2025-2026 is built on five core pillars that aim to transform our university into a more inclusive, socially responsible, and democratic institution. We believe education should be personal and meaningful, social and climate responsibility must take priority, and every student's well-being and safety should be supported by a system that works for them.

Our vision emphasizes true equity and inclusion, where all voices are heard and valued, and where sustainability, both social and environmental, is at the heart of every decision. We are committed to democratizing the university's structures, ensuring that students have a direct say in shaping their academic and social environments. This is our plan for a more just, equitable, and thriving UU for everyone.

We're committed to supporting students based on these pillars, so if you or another student you know has any complaints or suggestions about systematic issues, don't hesitate to contact us at bestuur@verenigingvuur.nl now or throughout the year.

1. Quality of Education (*Do not standardize, humanize!*)

- Education should be personal and inclusive:
- *How?*
    - **Initiate anonymous testing** in every faculty, to ensure that the latest product has been assessed instead of a students' preceding merits.
    - **Abolish** the requirement of a **minimum 4.0** grade for resits to reduce students' work pressure.
    - Aim for **smaller seminar groups** to increase student's personal attention.
    - Allow **lecture recordings** if it is vital for anyone's personal circumstances.

- Education should be creative and innovative:
- *How?*
    - **Decolonize** the curriculum: give more room to non-western perspectives in course curricula.
    - **Permit practical/alternative forms** of assessment, including for theses.
    - Encourage **Community-Engaged Learning** (CEL) and **interdisciplinary** education to connect disciplines, science and society.
    - Recognize the **academic perspectives of AI**, but provide clear **guidelines** for correct, sustainable and morally justifiable use.

"**Education should be about people, not a bunch of digits in an Excel sheet.**" This means smaller seminar groups, space for creativity, flexibility in how we learn and get tested, and attention to diverse perspectives, not just dominant ones. **The current minimum of 4.0 or maximum 6.0 increases the stress of students** and stimulates a culture of 'failing is wrong'. More room has to be created for different needs and experiences, whether that's allowing lecture recordings when necessary or offering alternatives to traditional assessment.

The emergence of AI (artificial intelligence) has become unstoppable, but we need clear guidelines to use it responsibly. Students should be educated on **ethical use of AI** to be well prepared in their future careers. Also, in order to encourage collaboration, broaden perspectives and support better research, **interdisciplinary education** can be a great way to address all these matters. VUUR believes that these points will make education meaningful, inclusive, innovative and grounded in the reality of students' lives.

2. Social & climate responsibility (*In service of society, not companies*)

- The university should be an example on social policies:
- *How?*
    - o **Prioritize student connections** by investing in spaces where they can meet, **socialize**, and build a sense of belonging.
    - o **Prioritize non-profit societal** (research) programmes over financial incentives that aim for profit only. The university is in service of society, not companies.
    - o **Repurpose** used (school) **books** by granting them for free to students with financial issues. The university should find ways to inventorize to whom this applies.
    - o **Enforce solidarity** in wages between professors and temporary hired staff if the CAO goes up. The university should regulate this.
    - o **Pilot student-run kitchens** so students have an option for an affordable meal.

- The university should be an example on climate policy:
- *How?*
    - o Become **CO2 neutral** by 2030.
    - o **Examine ties** regarding polluting and greenwashing companies.
    - o **Stop subsidizing planes** for travel of staff members if trains are an option. Subsidize using the train instead!
    - o **Establish vegan** catering in cantines offering high quality, plant-based meals.
    - o **Promote deposit machines** for bottles and cans at several places in the UU.

- The university should stand for fundamental principles:
- *How?*
    - o **Defend human rights** actively, at the university, in the Netherlands, and globally, by speaking out against transnational repression (e.g. from China) and threats to academic freedom (such as in the U.S.).
    - o **Cut** all **ties** with complicit **Israeli** institutions that support the genocide in Palestine.
    - o **Criticize militarization** of the UU. Collaborations with the military should be closely scrutinized. Books, *not* bombs.

"**A socially and climate-responsible university puts people and the planet before profit**." That means affordable and sustainable choices on the campus, like reusing study materials, offering cheaper plant-based meals, and supporting student-led initiatives such as communal kitchens. In this way, students living outside Utrecht can have dinner close to the university if they need to be in the city until late. **Community building should be a priority**, both among students and between staff, especially by showing solidarity with temporary staff if this is needed. And the university's societal impact should come before financial gain. On climate, more concrete steps are needed. The **UU should be CO2 neutral by 2030**, stop relying on air travel, and actively support train travel instead. The 'Assessment Framework for new collaborations with the fossil fuel industry' should apply stricter rules and review current

collaborations. Fully vegan cantines, deposit machines, and cutting ties with greenwashing companies are part of that same responsibility.

Fundamentally, the university must take a clear stance when it comes to human rights. That includes **cutting ties with institutions complicit in violence or occupation**, and refusing to participate in the militarization of academia. Education should never serve war; it should serve justice, equality, and a livable future.

3. Inclusion & equity (*Talk with them, not about them*)

- InclUUsive in language & communication:
- *How?*
    - **Protect multilingualism** so international students understand conversations, feel welcome and can participate in class or events.
    - Create a student initiative to introduce **international** students to the Dutch language by our own students. This could be done by a peer-to-peer program.
    - **Keep** the use of the **English** language in course curricula.
    - **Break down the barrier** between international and Dutch students by promoting transnational activities and social cohesion.

- InclUUsive in gender & identity:
- *How?*
    - **Support** the **LGBTQI+-community** by implementing inclusive practices and specifically accommodating the needs of trans people during their transition.
    - **Ensure** all UU buildings include at least one **gender-neutral toilet**, while still maintaining separate bathrooms for those who prefer them.
    - **Integrate** themes of **gender, identity** and the experiences of marginalized groups into regular courses across disciplines, so these **perspectives** reach all students.
    - **Focus** on more **diverse and marginalized perspectives** in our curricula that are currently underexposed, such as feminist and non-western perspectives.

- InclUUsive in religion:
- *How?*
    - **Create** more silent rooms to pray, meditate or destimulate.
    - Be more **flexible** with deadlines and exams for students' **religious** holidays.
    - **Organize** celebratory events to celebrate **religious** holidays like Eid-al-Fitr

- More equity for UU:
- *How?*
    - **Support** students who struggle to meet the high costs of **tuition** financially.
    - Improve **facilities** for **neurodivergent** students by being more flexible with accommodations and offering support that fits individual needs.
    - Provide a **grant** to all students that are a **caregiver** ('mantelzorger'), even if they do not care for direct family members.

"**Inclusion and equity start with listening to the people before making any policies.**" That means **involving marginalized voices directly in decision-making**, not just talking about them from the outside. Language should never be a barrier: **multilingualism** in student spaces

needs to be protected, and English should be more present in the curriculum to make education accessible to all.

We need concrete steps to **support trans students, provide gender-neutral toilets, and offer proper education on gender and identity**. Silent rooms for prayer or reflection should be easy to access, and flexibility around deadlines and exams, for example during religious holidays, should be standard, not an exception.

Equity also means recognizing that students' situations vary widely. From better support for neurodivergent students to financial relief for those struggling with tuition, and inclusive caregiver policies that go beyond traditional family structures. These things *matter*. **Everyone should feel welcome here**. That's why we support initiatives like Cultural Appreciation Week, and why we believe inclusion is only real when it's embedded into policies, daily practices, and the university's entire way of working.

4. Student wellbeing & social safety (*Caring sometimes takes change*)

- <u>Care about mental health:</u>
- *How?*
  - o Tackle **performance pressure** through flexible deadlines, diversified assessments and realistic study pacing.
  - o Improve the planning system of **student psychologists** and **increase** the amount of study advisors to fight the shortage.
  - o Invest in **peer coaching programs** to improve the UU-experience of students.
  - o **Collaborate** with **non-profit organizations** for students' mental health support.
- <u>Care about student wellbeing:</u>
- *How?*
  - o Improve the **liveability of USP**: end the monopoly of the SPAR, build (more) supermarkets, sport facilities and cafés to make the campus a nice place to live in.
  - o **Provide free, well-accessible menstrual products** for all students.
  - o **Strengthen student organizations**, especially the study associations and foundations by granting them more money and better spaces.

- <u>Care about social safety:</u>
- *How?*
  - o **Prioritize** the principle of **'consent is key'** in all spaces and interactions both between students or between students and staff.
  - o **Enforce** all student organizations and faculties having a clear **code of conduct**, which is complied with consistently ('three strikes and you're out' is applied).
  - o Provide mandatory **training** on **social safety** for all members of the UU-community.

"Student wellbeing and social safety shouldn't depend on individual resilience; it's the system that needs fixing." There's too much focus on output, which fuels performance pressure and burnout. We need an improved planning system for student psychologists, better access to study advisors, and real investment in peer support. Working with non-profit organizations can also strengthen mental health care beyond the university's walls. Wellbeing also means creating a campus people actually want to be on or keep having access to free menstrual products. **Student communities need to be strengthened**, as they provide a support system to our students.

Social safety is a shared responsibility, which is why proper training at all levels of the university is essential. Effort matters, but we're asking for more than that. We want a system that truly supports and protects its students. **Student organizations play a big role in shaping the experience, so their codes of conduct should be clear, inclusive, and enforced. No empty rules.** Especially when it comes to protecting minorities, fostering consent, and creating safe spaces for everyone.

5. Democratization (*By the students, for the students*)

- <u>Defend democracy on the UU:</u>
- *How?*
  - o **Organize democracy** talks where fundamental issues about representativity at the UU are discussed.
  - o **Arrange referendums** after a democracy talk. Only if a serious voter turnout is applied, the UU can test how the rest of the community thinks about a topic.
  - o **Improve** communication and information about **elections** and how UU politics work.
  - o **Require** faculties to appoint **participation coordinators** to ensure student input is considered.
  - o **Provide** more funding and support for **student parties** and elections.
  - o **Protect demonstration rights**, for teachers and students.

"**Democratization means giving students a real voice and making the university system more transparent and inclusive.**" We need to organize deep democracy talks and debates at the UU to get everyone involved in the conversation. Faculties should appoint participation coordinators to ensure that student input is heard at all levels. Students deserve better information about elections and the workings of UU politics: knowledge is power. To make this happen, the university should provide more funding and support for student parties and elections, helping to amplify student voices. The responsibility to be visible and well-functioning should be on the shoulders of the university boards, not the participatory bodies themselves.

It's also essential to **protect the right to demonstrate, both for students and teachers**. If we want real change, we need to give people the tools to shape it. Organizing referendums with a serious participation threshold is one way to ensure that decisions truly represent the community. This isn't just about making the university function; it's about making it better for everyone.

Also, well-mannered debates about other topics should be encouraged by the university. **The outcome of these debates and deep democracy talks should be seriously considered as policy, and referenda (with a minimum voter turnout) should be held** to test if the extended community agrees. This holistic approach ensures that the university not only functions but evolves in a way that genuinely reflects the collective voice and concerns of its members.