January 2010

Monthly column from your AMIDSt director, Ton Dietz

Dear colleagues,

There is a lot I have to share with you, and some of it is not so nice, and part of that will make you angry. So be it.

**Personal websites**

For quite some months this monthly message has tried to convince you to put some time and energy in making a personal website on [https://home.medewerker.uva.nl](https://home.medewerker.uva.nl). In June I asked all of you to do that before September 1st, and in my August message I gave the 'bonus' list: those people who have indeed done it (sorry Jochem, you should have been included in that bonus list of shining examples). Now it is time to give you a malus list.

Let me tell you that I thank those people who have taken my wish at heart (and some of these personal websites are really nice and informative!). But let me also tell you that I am not amused seeing all those colleagues, who have just ignored it (or pushed it forward to eternity, mañana, or polepole). I can only conclude: they don’t take AMIDSt and themselves serious enough. To make clear that I am serious I am thinking about possible effective sanctions. So it could be announced in the next newsletter that:

**Those members of AMIDSt who have not made their personal website on the UvA pages before 15 November 2009, will not get any research or conference funds from AMIDSt until they have done so (and it should be a ‘real’ one, not an empty one, without information).**

Also, after this date all the CV’s on the AMIDSt website (staff page: [http://www.fmg.uva.nl/amidst/staff.cfm](http://www.fmg.uva.nl/amidst/staff.cfm)) will be standardised: (as the information on this page is mostly out of date, and to stimulate everyone to have a personal page) it will only contain the following information: contact information + specialisation/research interests + the publications 2009 that have been submitted through the usual forms (see the button on the AMIDSt website in the right column), and a link to the personal webpage (if available).

**Example of CV on AMIDSt site**

**Example of Personal webpage**

This current *malus list* consists of the following AMIDSt staff members (and I hope I don’t make mistakes this time; but if I do: you know where to find me):

**Members of staff:**

- Maarten Bavinck
- Albertine van Diepen
- Thea Dukes
- Ewald Engelen
- Michaela Hordijk
- Lia Karsten
- Robert Kloosterman
- Jan Mansvelt Beck
- Olga Nieuwenhuijs
- Wim Ostendorf
- Henk Schmal
- Pieter Tordoir
- Els Veldhuizen
- Sjoerd de Vos
- Maarten Wolsink

Naming and shaming might help. Angry? Turn it into action!

Furthemore, I want also ask all our PhD candidates to make a personal website.

**The Merger**

Last week the dean of the faculty sent a letter to the Faculty Council (ondernemingsraad) with his reasons for pushing for the merger between AMIDSt, ASSR and IMES. The Faculty Council will discuss...
most likely become too complex (next to ONE college and ONE graduate school there are three research institutes, and these are partly overlapping); (2) research funding will become directly related to successes in teaching, so a (2x) 1:1 relationship between teaching and research makes it far more easy; and (3) the current distribution of research funds gives problems – with IMES-ASSR squabbles given as proof. He adds that there are also policy reasons: transaction costs will go down from three to one (TD: but what will be the net result if there will also be decentralisation to the level of research programme groups???); it creates a feeling of shared interests (that may be true, indeed); and it gives room to get rid of outdated practices, and building new standards, norms and practices (but he mainly thinks about ASSR, so it seems). And he adds that there are organisational and scientific reasons too: a better research framework for research programming, with more synergy between overlapping research interests, overcoming avoidance behaviour, and creating faster responses to new trends and potential funding. He also thinks that a new structure will create the incentives for better PhD performance and faster PhD tracks; a better possibility to reward successful researchers; more consistent quality control, and a more direct link between teaching and research (and particularly between research masters/PhD teaching and research). He admits that there might be disadvantages of scale ("er zullen vast diverse overwegingen zijn om tegen schaalgrootte te pleiten"), but he is convinced that there are more advantages than disadvantages of scale (in her editorial in the new edition of the leading Dutch-language social science journal Mens en Maatschappij, Claartje Mulder does not seem to be so convinced…). According to the dean, advantages are also a larger pool for talent and leadership, better visibility, better chances of success to acquire big research funds, and a better balance between competing research cultures (quantitative/qualitative; books or journals; but what would he mean with that???). And he ends by pointing out that next to the disciplinary research programmes (and there should be less than the current 17) there will be more room for interdisciplinarity, with the Zwaartepunten (like Urban Studies, led by Sako Musterd and Jan Rath) and two new Speerpunten (including Inequality, with a.o. Claartje Mulder): a start of a matrix structure of disciplinary columns and interdisciplinary rows.

Soon I expect Anita Hardon to come with contours of the new research institute, based on various think tank groups, which also include some AMIDSt people. For now it is: wait and see…

**Sobering thoughts**

Of course the current financial crisis hangs as a dark cloud over our heads. In circles of university and research leadership there is utter disappointment about a complete lack of adequacy and urgency in implementing the phrase “The Netherlands Knowledeland” in the new government budget and disbelief about the performance of ‘our’ Minister Plasterk. There is general anxiety about the tendencies in the Dutch electorate to move towards the national-socialists of SP or the extreme-right-with-fascist-tendencies of PVV, and also anxiety about these ‘movements’ coming together in an anti-internationalist and xenophobic alliance (when did Europe see that before?). As a member of the worldconnectors I suddenly find myself among scenario thinkers of Green Left, Christian Democrats, Left-leaning Liberals, and Social Democrats preparing themselves for an era with a political dominance of anti-internationalists, hiding behind the dikes.

I also hear far-reaching scenarios about the possible impact of the crisis on our universities. Let me just give you a few: (1) master’s students should start paying a cost-recovery price for their studies; (2) university teachers in the Bachelor’s programmes will not get research time anymore; (3) only people teaching in graduate schools will get research time; or: (4) that research time can only be acquired by national and international competition; (5) PhD candidates should become students again and they should pay a fee, or try to acquire funds for that from national or international funding agencies; (6) research institutes will get baseline funding linked to the success of related graduate schools in getting full-paying students and to the success of acquisition in (inter)national competition.

If I hear these scenarios I tend to regard those as a wake-up call and I think we need a strong research institute and a strong graduate school. But we also need resilience, optimism, and creative leadership. Not only in our universities…. Do I see you in the trenches? Or do we meet on the ramparts?

Make sure then, that your past performance (and your dreams and deeds) are visible on your personal website!

Ton Dietz, September, 2009