

POLICY PLAN

Student Council of the Free University 2021 - 2022



SRVU
studentenbond

SRVU Board

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1. Foreword

Dear members,

After a wonderful year with great activities, it is time to say 'goodbye' to the previous board and to welcome a new one: the 75th Board of the Student Council of the Vrije Universiteit. From September onwards, the five of us will be ready to represent the interests of students again. We will also organize activities for our members, but also for members of the StudentenD0k, where possible physically.

Our policy plan is based on our 3 main pillars: advocacy, education and development. Through these points we want to show how we want to achieve that the organization will run even better. We want to give legal aid a boost and campaign so that nobody can ignore the SRVU.

The importance of SRVU as a student union has only increased through corona. Especially after the past year, in which education took place online, proctoring was introduced and frequently used, the BSA came into question. Especially now that many students, on top of the loan system, are in even deeper economic and mental trouble because of Covid. Especially since the transition back to normal does not seem so normal anymore in an irresponsibly fast growing VU. Especially now, the SRVU sound is essential. This year we hope to make sure that everything is done to allow students to experience their student time as much as possible.

We are excited for the challenges this year brings and can't wait to get started and involve you in our implementation of our plans. We hope to be able to look back on a successful year at the end of September 2022.

Yours sincerely,

The entire 75th board of the SRVU

2. Internal

The SRVU of course relies on its members. Making a name for ourselves outside of our members is important as well. There are, of course, various ways of doing this. Here, we'll lay them out.

2.1. Member base

As SRVU we value our supporters and therefore also our members, which is why it is important to actively involve our members in the work of the SRVU. This is done by organizing, for example, ALV's and other events. We want to think about a system where members can be informed about the developments of the SRVU; for example through the means of a newsletter. In the coming year we also want to work on expanding the membership. Currently we have a membership of 200 members. Not only do we want to increase the number of members, it is also important that the number of actively involved members increases. Together we are combative.

Goals:

- Increase the size of the membership.
- Increase the number of active members.
- Focus on growing the committees with enthusiastic members.

2.2. Board Meetings

To keep a board running, it is important to meet regularly and discuss ideas. We are convinced that this is an important foundation for an organization like the SRVU. That is why we want to meet at least once a week.

Portfolio holders within the board will have regular contact with coordinators of their portfolio. The board's communication with coordinators will mainly be through the portfolio member in question. Where necessary, coordinators can attend a board meeting.

Goals:

- Meet at least once a week as a board (DB)
- Maintain good communication with coordinators through portfolio holders.

2.3. General Meetings of Members

Our members play an important role in keeping the SRVU going. Therefore, it is important that we hold a General Membership Meeting (ALV) often to get members involved with the board and get their consent. We hope that the ALVs will be well attended in the coming year. We want this so that the SRVU remains representative of its supporters. Our aim is to plan an ALV every three months. The ALVs will take place in the form of an open board meeting where members can join and participate in the meeting.

Goals:

- Planning an ALV every three months to involve our members in our decisions.

2.4. Activities

Activities bring members together. It is an opportunity to get to know our members well, but also to let the members get to know each other. We see it as an opportunity for everyone to broaden his or her network. We also think it promotes the atmosphere and the feeling of solidarity within the SRVU to carry out joint activities. This way we can unite our members and fight together for student interests.

Now that physical activities are possible again this year, it is time to put the SRVU back on the map by organizing social activities.

Of course, members are always free to drop by the StudentenD0k.

Goals:

- To organise social activities for our supporters in order to enlarge our networks, to promote the atmosphere among them and to increase the feeling of cohesion.

2.5. Alumni policy

Former board members have experienced the SRVU and of course have experience with the organization itself. However, we want to gather as much knowledge as possible from the former board members in order to optimally promote the SRVU.

Goals:

- Liaise with the alumni and make use of their experiences.
- Get an overview of former boards and approach them if contact has been diluted.

2.6 Democratisation and check and balances

This year we want to review our statutes, our internal regulations and the democratic control procedures within the association. Democratisation and contact with members and supporters is vital for the sustainability of the association and trust in it, so it is important to evaluate this in good time. We will ensure that the Board works more transparently in our year and therefore (as indicated in 2.3, among other things) we also want to continue to properly consult the members at formal and informal moments. In order to make a good evaluation, we will make use of our network within the LSVb of several comparable unions, so that we can optimise our policy on the basis of best practices.

Goals:

- Examine the control and democratisation structure of sister unions and, where necessary, use it as an example for an evaluation of its own policy.
- Improve transparency towards the members
- Encouraging feedback from the members and the ALV at formal and informal moments

3. External

3.1. PR

PR, short for *Propaganda*, is a multi-faceted concept. We believe that the press, media and social media are crucial in spreading the SRVU's messages. Given the quiet years that the SRVU has been going through, we have been actively profiling ourselves on social and traditional media for the past year. We report actions to the press and are in close contact with Ad Valvas. We also make active use of social media to share and spread our messages. In the coming year, we want to continue and expand this trend. We also want to be in good contact with Advalvas.

Goals:

- Make the SRVU more widely known by involving the press.
- Raise the profile of the SRVU by organising protests.
- Regularly collaborate with Advalvas and post a piece.

3.2. Social media

Social media is the most widely used medium to connect with the entire outside world. Its use has only increased in recent years and it will continue to grow. Therefore, in the coming year we want to make good use of this medium to keep members and non-members informed about our actions and activities. By making smart use of Facebook and Instagram for example, we can increase the involvement of members and non-members.

Goals:

- Raise the SRVU's profile among members and non-members through the use of social media.
- Increase member and non-member involvement with the SRVU.
- To provide information about our activities.

3.3. Sponsorship

Generating a source of income for an organisation is always good. This will give you more space and means to organize actions and activities. This will of course improve the atmosphere within the SRVU, because we will have more to offer our members. That is why we want to recruit sponsors in the coming year by planning company visits. For this we want to make sponsor packages which the companies can buy from us.

Goals:

- Entering into discussion with the Executive Board to discuss funding from the educational institution.
- Bring in sponsors for the SRVU so that we can generate more income for actions and activities and additional staff.
- See if we can make use of subsidies

3.4. Website

A website is the digital face that people see. It contains a portfolio of the organized actions and activities. The website of the SRVU was adjusted and improved last year. In the near future we are busy as a board to put the final touches here. We want our website to also be accessible to our international members.

Goals:

- Add features like forms to promote functionality.
- Make website fully English usable

3.5 Internationalisation

It is important that SRVU is accessible to every member. This means that newsletters, social media posts and other forms of communication are in English or that we show an English translation of the Dutch text. The Vrije Universiteit must also remain an accessible university for international students, so that they can fully participate.

Goals:

- Newsletters, social media posts and other forms of communication must be in English or an English translation of the Dutch text must be available.
- Fighting for housing for international students in the short and long term.

4. Protecting interests

Student unions exist so that they can fight for the interests of students. This is the main pillar of the SRVU. It is important that every student has a voice and feels represented within the university. To achieve this, we have several sub-pillars.

4.1. Actions

We find it crucial to fully focus on campaigning this year, as this sends a direct message to students, university and politics. After a year in which our students were forced to follow Zoom education, it seems that this year more will be possible again. It is important to ensure that lectures with more than 75 students will be offered physically, now that this is allowed again, and that a hybrid option remains possible for those students who prefer this. The loan system also needs to be changed, which is why we are taking a proactive role in the #NietMijnSchuld campaign. In addition, we are closely following the emerging 'Woonprotest' movement, and are participating in and organizing protests on the subject of housing.

Goals:

- Set up actions regarding abolition of study financing #nietmijnschuld
- Setting up actions with regard to physical education
- Actively set up new actions regarding new developments

4.2. Student Complaints

It is crucial that we, as a student union, continue to keep track of the problems students are struggling with. One way to pick up on these signals is for students to come to us directly with their complaints. This is why we set up the Complaints Desk, a contact form on the site where students can tell us (anonymously) about the problems they are facing. Students also DM us via Instagram or Facebook with their problems, so it is good to keep an eye on our conversation requests.

Goals:

- Promoting the SRVU complaints hotline on the website
- By receiving complaints Ad Hoc take action, if possible in collaboration with the student

4.3. Activism Hub

In Amsterdam and around the VU you can find many activist groups, action groups that pursue goals relevant to us. As SRVU, we want to offer a central point where activist students and groups can go for action support and advice. In this way, we can also support unguided student groups in setting up their own action group. Examples of such action groups are XR VU, students talk about yes, SJP, VUpride, etc.

Goals:

- Activist students guide actions

- Staying in touch with activist groups in and around the VU
- Take on the role of a VU activism hub in which all VU-related activism can be discussed and accommodated

4.4. The Lobby

Besides campaigning, we as a student union talk to different organizations, government bodies and (the management of) the VU. Through our contacts and conversations, we try to bring the interests of students to the attention and influence policy by voicing the student perspective loud and clear.

Campaigning can be complementary to lobbying because it can be used as a means of exerting pressure. In recent years we have been involved in housing consultations with the municipality of Amsterdam and have drawn up a student housing agreement together with coalition kennisstad.

However, certain aspects of our lobby could be improved. For example, we do not have structural talks with the Executive Board of the VU, as is the case with other unions and the USR. Also, in the coming year, we will have to strengthen our ties with the Amsterdam branches of the political parties, because of the municipal elections in March 2022.

Goals:

- Building up contacts with local council parties in Amsterdam to lobby for, among other things, student housing, due to the upcoming local council elections.
- Schedule/arrange annual meeting(s) with the Executive Board

4.5. LSVb and sister unions

As SRVU we are part of a national network of student unions, through the federation of the Landelijke Studentenvakbond. The contact with the LSVb and its sister unions helps us with our professionalization, because we can learn from other unions and we can work together with other unions to tackle national issues. It is especially important to maintain good cooperation with the ASVA, since they have many shared interests on an Amsterdam scale. We want to maintain contact by going to union days, participating in app groups and setting these up, and by participating in constitution events. We also want to visit LSVb ALVs and working group evenings. In addition, it is important to build mutual cooperation on campaigning, so that there is a joint block of student advocacy issues that covers the city of Amsterdam, or the entire Netherlands.

Goals:

- Participating in joint actions with other student unions/the LSVB
- Visiting union days
- Visiting the ALVs and working group evenings of the LSVb
- Maintain and promote contact with the ASVA by getting together and working/acting together
- Organizing your own constituency drinks

5. Services

We are very much aware that besides setting up actions, we should also focus on providing services. In recent years, these services have been forgotten, so we have to rebuild a lot. However, we are motivated to make this year a success.

5.1. Legal aid

Our legal aid is currently the best running service we can provide. Contact with the legal aid coordinators has improved over the past year. So far legal aid is every Tuesday and Thursday from 1pm to 4pm. At the moment legal aid is being called and emailed, but we are striving to make legal aid a big part of the StudentD0k. In this way we hope to create more awareness for their office (0D-03), where students can walk in themselves. We can imagine that some students would benefit more from personal contact than contact by phone.

Goals:

- Organising action days in HG
- Make legal aid more widely known so that people can visit it

5.2. StudentD0k

The student dock falls under the SRVU. A lot of progress has been made since last year and this year we hope that the student dock can become a better vibrant place which helps to contribute to the VU Community feeling. We therefore want to organise theme evenings for all directors of the VU so they can talk informally with each other and get to know each other.

We also think it is important to give more attention to the non-faculty student associations. We want to listen to their problems, complaints or approvals in order to take them into account in the choices we make. For this we want to organize serious meetings, but also informal get-togethers. We think this will improve the general atmosphere in the StudentD0k.

Goals:

Organize theme evenings every 6 weeks for boards.

- Listening to the complaints and problems of member associations.
- Organizing **informal get-togethers** for member societies, where possible; physically.

5.3. Menstrual products

Last year we successfully launched our menstrual poverty initiative. In the student dock is now a red box where anyone who needs it can get menstrual products. This has led to great enthusiasm among members, students, other organizations and the media. Now we have to question: what to do next? We would like to expand our initiative in steps so that eventually there are free

menstrual products on every toilet at the VU. A first step would be to have a collection point in every building, which we hope to realize this year.

Goals:

- Set up an SRVU menstrual products collection box in each VU building
- Inform other associations/organisations in order to set up this initiative locally as well

6. Development

The SRVU wants to contribute to the development of the VU, but also to the self-development of students. The SRVU stands for more than just studying.

6.1. Education

The quality of education is currently under pressure. The VU is growing out of its seams, and this is leading to a shortage of teachers, shortened lectures, and difficulties in finding study places. In addition, we are in transition back to physical education, a process that requires a watchful eye; potential neoliberal policies to reduce costs (at the expense of the quality of education) must be avoided. In a broader context, of course, this is largely due to the cuts in education year after year, we will be pushing hard for decent funding for higher education.

As SRVU we are committed to ensuring that the quality of education is and remains at a high level; complaints about the quality of education can be submitted via the contact point. As long as proctoring remains in effect we will fight to ensure it is used as little as possible. We aim to make physical education possible again for everyone; this also means no discrimination on the basis of vaccination certificates. All students should have the option to have their education fully on campus. This also implies that there be no limits on how many students can attend lectures or working groups. We should strive for optional online education as well when necessary.

In order to place our vision on education in a broader context, we remain in active contact with the ASVA and LSVb. In the coming year we will further intensify our contact with these two unions. For this contact, and the contact with the members, we will also organise activities in the coming year.

Also, the board of the SRVU will work together with active members to start a working group. The working group will cover the international student housing crisis, about the housing problems of international students. In addition to this we will, in cooperation with active members, look into possibilities to provide lenience to international students that have had problems with finding housing.

Goals:

- Making physical education possible for every VU student
- Commitment to minimal use Online Proctoring
- Organise activities for other federations and members
- Keeping an eye on the hotline about education

- Being actively involved in the formation and improvement of education at the VU

6.2. Housing

Decent housing is crucial for a proper study; the enormous growth of the VU has, among other things, caused many students to live in precarious conditions. We will stand up for these students and fight for their basic right to housing. In addition, the rent charged for student rooms and studios is ridiculous. In the coming year, we will work together with organizations such as ASVA and Iwoon and with our own legal aid to inform students about their rental rights. In addition, we will continue to campaign to put the problem on the political map, and to ensure that something is done about the enormous crisis and shortage of student housing. Promoting our own hotline will remain crucial in this respect.

Goals:

- Actively participate in the housing moments with the LSVb and municipal consultations.
- Represent rights and interests of students in and around their homes.
- Actively use and promote the housing hotline.
- Campaigning for enough and affordable student housing.

6.3. Sustainability

This year we have added sustainability as a portfolio. We will orientate the coming year on the best way to make steps regarding sustainability. Options include contact with Green office, Green Team and USR, but also actions and connect with national actions and marches against climate change. This can be very small, but also very large-scale.

In addition to this, the board of the SRVU will work together with members on an exchange initiative, this will entail the exchange of books, clothes and/or other second-hand objectives.

Goals:

- Participating in the VU sustainability meetings
- Organising/participating in actions.

6.4. Student council cooperation

This year the SRVU faction participated again in the USR elections, and we have a solid representation. Because of this, we see opportunities for close cooperation with the USR. The SRVU and USR often have the same interests but a different sphere of influence, so we can work on complementary policies.

Goals:

- Cooperation with the USR on VU-wide issues such as student welfare, sustainability and housing
- Keeping short lines of communication with the fraction and the entire USR

- Speak out more loudly where this is impossible for the USR due to its ties with the Executive Board
- Municipal and national policy feedback to USR

6.5. Member retention

An active membership base is the backbone of a student union. In the coming year we aim to build up a core of active members, who participate in informal meetings, go out on the streets and join committees. It is important that our membership grows significantly in the coming year, but most important is that our members actively participate in our activities.

Goals:

- Increase the number of members
- Recruit active members, who participate in committees, and in actions/informal meetings.
- Generate more active attendance at ALVs, where members have a say.

7. Afterword

With great enthusiasm and a positive outlook for the coming year, we have written this policy plan. We hope to achieve as many points as possible so that the SRVU can only experience positive growth. We are also convinced that our plans and goals for the coming year will help the SRVU.