

Policy plan

Studentenraad der Vrije Universiteit
2022 - 2023



SRVU

studentenbond

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Foreword

From the 12th of September onwards, the 76th board of the SRVU has been installed. The six of us have already been working hard and tirelessly on assuring students' rights for the past month, and we are very proud to finally be able to present to our members our policy plan. A policy plan gives a basic outline of the most important policies and ideas of the Board, and you the members will have the opportunity to vote it in and thus make it official SRVU policy.

This is a special policy plan. We decided to format it differently than the previous boards, and have a clear distinction between internal and external policies, the portfolios and initiatives that are advocacy related, and the services we offer as the SRVU. But that's not the only reason why this plan is special. Our Board consists of three international students, and as such, we hope to offer a more diverse perspective on certain student issues or issues at the VU.

In the post-Corona society, we have signalled some important issues. First of all, we've noticed a decrease in Student Participation. We have made this new portfolio, but other policies reflect the importance of increasing the participation of students here at the VU as well. Secondly, students are encountering more and more problems with sustaining a healthy standard of living, due to inflation, the housing crisis and the situation with study finance. Multiple policies hope to improve this situation and alleviate this stressor for students as much as possible. Lastly, after Corona, we saw a huge increase in mental health issues and other well-being-related issues, and we have several policies shaped to combat this.

Because of the diverse and activist voice the SRVU has, we are proud to present a policy plan and a new board that reflects those sentiments. This voice is essential in making sure that each student has a healthy standard of living, equal opportunities, a healthy mind, and a chance to participate and get rewarded and recognized for their unique contribution to one of the most vital parts of any society: its academic institutions.

We are excited about the challenges this year will bring and can't wait to get started and involve you in executing our plans. We hope to be able to look back on a successful board year at the end of September 2023.

Kind regards,

The entire 76th board of SRVU

1. Internal

The SRVU naturally rests on its members. While the Board enacts all policies and bears responsibility for this, the members are the ones who shape and decide on our policies. To strengthen the foundation of the SRVU further, the Board has several plans that we would like to address below.

1.1 Membership

Members are the core of any association. That's why this Board wants to improve, sustain and introduce a couple of plans to attract and support members of the SRVU. For instance, we want to organize several activities to attract new members, such as Tosti Tuesday (but not necessarily on Tuesday...). We also want to organize several activities for our current members, such as Borrels, Movie screenings etc., ideally in cooperation with other associations to increase our network. We also wish to expand and set up several committees, such as expanding the #NietMijnSchuld action committee, setting up a Housing committee, and a social media committee. We wish to attract new committee members by organising, for instance, 'belavonden' (phone evenings), social gatherings and by reaching out to our networks. We'd like to keep our members updated on our activities by sending out an (English) newsletter, at least four times this academic year. We also wish to continue the last board's policy to increase the membership fee to five euros.

- ❖ Organize at least two activities to attract new members.
- ❖ Increase the number of members that are part of committees.
- ❖ Keep our members updated on our activities by sending out an (English) newsletter, at least four times this academic year.
- ❖ Continue the last board's policy to increase the membership fee to five euros.

1.2 Board Meetings

To check up with fellow board members, get updates on their respective portfolios, discuss issues and exchange ideas, it is paramount that the board meets at least once every week, excluding during an exam week, if necessary. Besides this, portfolio holders within the board will have regular contact with their portfolio coordinators. Communication from the board with coordinators will mainly go through the board member of the relevant portfolio. Where necessary, coordinators may attend a board meeting.

- ❖ Come together at least once a week to have a board meeting.
- ❖ Maintain good communication with coordinators through portfolio holders.

1.3 General Member's Meetings

To keep the SRVU representative of its members, the SRVU board will organize a General Member's Meeting (GMM) approximately every three months. This will be an open meeting

where general members are invited to join and participate, including in some cases taking a vote on a particular issue. The agenda of the GMM will state when an issue demands voting on by the members, or simply a discussion.

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

1.4 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 to broaden everyone's network. We also find it beneficial for the atmosphere and the feeling of solidarity within the SRVU to carry out joint activities. In this way, we can unite our members and fight together for student interests.

Now that physical activities are possible again, it is time to put the SRVU back on the map by organizing social activities. Members are of course always free to visit the StudentenD0k, regardless of any activities.

We also aim to organize several activities in conjunction with other organizations.

- ❖ Organize at least two activities for our members, social and activist-related, to increase our networks and the sense of cohesion.
- ❖ Involve other associations to broaden the SRVU's network and promote a VU-wide sense of cohesion and activism.

1.5 Alumni policy

When in doubt, it's always a good idea to consult the wisdom of the boards that came before us. That is why this year we have an advisory board we can turn to for guidance and recommendations. It is our goal to remain in good contact with the Advisory Board, by having them sit in on our Board Meetings, schedule coffee talks and reach out to them regularly for information if needed. We also hope to organise a social activity with the Advisory Board. Additionally, we would like to digitalize the SRVU archives this year to get a better overview of our history as a student union and even get into contact with long-lost alumni. We will digitalize (the now) physical SRVU archive by putting it on the website, and posting archival items on our social media. Lastly, with the recent change from a free to a paid membership, we would like to create an initiative that lets alumni sponsor new members.

- ❖ Maintain good contact with the Advisory Board.
- ❖ Digitizale the SRVU archives through the website and social media.
- ❖ Form an alumni file and allow them to sponsor new members.

1.6 Checks and Balances

The previous board did a good job of installing the Audit Committee and the Review Committee. The Audit Committee is a legal requirement and consists of two persons outside the Board, who is in charge of checking the finances. Our goal is to assure there is an Audit committee for the next academic year. The Review committee is a recent instalment which concerns itself with reviewing important documents like the HR. Its task is to see which gaps there are in the internal law of the SRVU and how to improve upon our legal structure. This year, the chair and vice-chair are part of the committee. Our goal is to make the Review committee a success and a useful addition this year. This committee will be regarded as successful when they have held at least two meetings this academic year, and have given their feedback on the internal structure of the SRVU at an ALV towards the end of the academic year.

- ❖ Secure the Audit Committee for the upcoming academic year.
- ❖ Make the Review Committee a success and a useful addition.

2. External

Even though the SRVU's foundation is its members, the SRVU's reach and influence stretches beyond. The goal of this Board is to make that reach even stronger and further. We have several policy plans for this, as we will explain below.

2.1 LSVb and sister associations

The LSVb is the national student union in the Netherlands. They are a federation and we fall under their organization as such. There are already several LSVb campaigns we are a part of, like #nietmijnschuld and #drukvandeketel. Because we work together closely with them, it is important to remain in good contact. This way, we also make sure that the SRVU has input on a national level. This is why we as a Board want to attend the GMMs of the LSVb, keep in regular contact with our buddy, attend any (social) activities they organize and cooperate with them on campaigns.

Several sister unions fall under the federation of the LSVb. The most important one for the SRVU is the other student union in Amsterdam, ASVA. We already cooperate with them on multiple campaigns, such as the BSA campaign that was recently launched, have several joint action committees, and even an ASVU group chat. To make sure that we can achieve as much as possible for issues that concern all students in Amsterdam, we want to remain in good and close contact with them. We will do this by investing in the action committees and workgroups, attending (social) activities together, and continuing to cooperate on campaigns.

Lastly, we want to organize our own Constitution Borrel and invite the LSVb and all (active) sister associations.

- ❖ Attend LSVb GMMs and (social) activities.
- ❖ Keep cooperating with LSVb on national campaigns.
- ❖ Keep good contact with the LSVb, like having regular calls with our LSVb contact person.
- ❖ Attend ASVA (social) activities.
- ❖ Keep cooperating with ASVA on Amsterdam-oriented campaigns.
- ❖ Keep good contact with ASVA, like using the ASVU group chat to better organize and communicate.
- ❖ Organize our own CoBo.

2.2 Medezeggenschap

This year the SRVU faction participated again in the USR elections, and we are really happy we have a majority 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, such as student-wellbeing, housing, internationalization and student participation. We will work together by helping them out with certain initiatives like we're already doing with accessibility for disabled people at the VU. Through having meetings with USR members and aiding them with searching for active students who want to help out, or helping them out ourselves, we hope to attain this goal. Besides this, the Board has already invested time in creating bonds with most FSRs. This not only expands our network and increases familiarity with the SRVU at the VU, but also creates opportunities for working together on certain portfolios, such as student well-being and student participation.

- ❖ Cooperation with the USR on VU-wide issues such as student well-being, sustainability, housing and student participation.
- ❖ Keeping short lines of communication with the faction and the entire USR and a good relationship, such as having formal and informal meetings at least once every month.
- ❖ Cooperation with the FSRs on portfolios such as student well-being and student participation.

2.3 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 two years, with regular media posts and appearances. 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 upcoming year, we want to continue and expand this trend. We also want to remain in good contact with Ad Valvas.

- ❖ Make the SRVU more widely known by involving the press.

- ❖ Regularly collaborate with Ad Valvas and post a piece.

2.4 Social Media

We want to make good use of social media to keep members and non-members informed about our actions and activities. By making smart use of Instagram for example, we can increase the involvement of members and non-members. We want to come up with a format for Instagram that is both informative, attention-drawing, and works well with the algorithm. We intend to make use of a PR committee for acting these points out. We also hope to use LinkedIn to reach out to alumni. The use of other social media, such as Facebook, Tiktok and Twitter, will also be delegated to the PR committee.

- ❖ Raise the SRVU's profile among members and non-members through the use of social media, for instance by aiming to post three times a week.
- ❖ Come up with a useful, aesthetically pleasing and strategic social media format.

2.5 Website

Last year the website became more accessible to international students. This year we want to go further. We want to improve the visuals, accessibility and organization of our website drastically. We believe that there are many improvements to be made, which would draw more immediate attention to our activities, our appearances in the press, social media posts, forms, and membership applications. Through reenvisioning the visuals and organisation of the website, we hope to improve the accessibility, by making it clear where you can find what information and what the SRVU has been up to. Examples of this would be having social media posts visible on the website homepage, having a button on the homepage to become a member, having a personalised log-in option for our members and moving away from WordPress.

- ❖ Improve the visuals, accessibility and organization of our website drastically.

2.6 Sponsorships

This year we as a board have an ambitious plan to gain university funding which is the standard for student unions. For this, we are in close contact with VU rector Jeroen Geurts for a temporary grant. Besides this, we are actively looking for new sponsorships with companies (with the requirement that they are ethical and their policies don't contradict ours) and Alumni. This will give us more space and means to organize actions and activities. We also hope to get subsidies from FNV Young & United and LSVb.

- ❖ Entering into a discussion with the Executive Board to discuss funding from the VU.
- ❖ Explore the option of bringing in sponsors for the SRVU, so that we can generate more income for actions and activities and additional staff, such as Alumni.
- ❖ Explore the option of getting subsidies from FNV Young & United and LSVb.

3. Advocacy

One of the main functions of the SRVU is to be an activist group for students at the VU. This means being directly in touch with students of the VU, campaigning and lobbying for specific issues, and coordinating and cooperating with different non-profit organizations and action committees.

3.1 Amplification of Student voices

This year, we want to support associations and other organizations at being able to operate at the VU. Examples of such action groups are UR, students talk about yes, SJP, VUpride, etc. As SRVU, we want to offer a central point where activist students and groups can go for action support and advice. We want to stay in touch with activist groups in and around the VU, by using our networks, keeping them updated on (relevant) press releases, and inviting them to social and activist activities.

- ❖ 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.

3.2 Housing

Decent housing is crucial for studying; the enormous growth of the VU and the worsening housing crisis have caused many students to live precariously. We will stand up for these students and fight for their basic right to housing. In addition, the rents charged for student rooms and studios are ridiculous; students, when left to the unregulated private market, often fall victim to exploitation and scams. In the coming year, in collaboration with organizations such as ASVA and !Woon and with our legal aid, we will make every effort to inform students about their tenancy law. In addition, we will continue to campaign to raise awareness and ensure that the massive crisis and shortage of student housing are addressed. Promoting our hotline remains crucial for this. We will advocate, wherever possible, for more social student housing, where - according to Kences' yearly Lokale Monitor Studentenhuisvesting - living for students is the safest and most affordable.

- ❖ Actively participate in housing moments with the LSVb and municipal consultations.
- ❖ Actively use and promote the housing hotline.
- ❖ Campaign for more, and affordable student housing.
- ❖ Continuing to lobby for the development of student housing at Kronenburg.
- ❖ Recruiting hosts for the NoRoomforUs platform.
- ❖ Working with organizations combating the housing crisis for the wider Amsterdam population.
- ❖ Researching the extent of the student housing crisis at the VU.
- ❖ Campaign for measurements to combat the energy crisis, for instance by checking the Amsterdam Municipality regarding the Energietoelag and providing information on how to reduce energy use and apply for the Energietoelag.

3.3 Decolonisation

This year, we want to stimulate the decolonisation process within the VU. We want to address this by lobbying for the inclusion of more diversity of thought within the university curricula. We want the VU to commit as an institution to stronger anti-racist, anti-colonial principles and to see these principles enacted at the VU, such as not allowing exclusionary (political) parties on the VU campus. We also propose discussing the BDS movement, for which we will host a BAS meeting within the SRVU. The Board also acknowledges the important intersection between decolonization and sustainability.

- ❖ Encourage the discussion about BDS to be able to table a vote on a BDS motion.
- ❖ Organize educational events and discussions about BDS.
- ❖ Support efforts to decolonise curriculums.
- ❖ Supporting efforts for the VU to divest from Shell.
- ❖ Lobby VU to extend support offered to students from Ukraine to students from all conflict-affected regions.
- ❖ Continue and extend the last board's plans to make the SRVU an activism hub.
- ❖ Lobbying the VU for transparency and accountability about its affiliations with foreign universities.
- ❖ Pushing for a further commitment from the VU to anti-racist principles.
- ❖ Lobbying for parties that have exclusionary politics to be excluded from the VU campus.
- ❖ Continuing efforts for NSBers to be removed from the VU war memorial.
- ❖ Supporting educational events addressing Dutch colonialism and its legacy.

3.4 International students

The SRVU must be 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. Furthermore, we believe that accepting new international students can only happen ethically, if the VU provides good infrastructure and information flow, for instance with housing, getting a BSN number and enough study spots and classrooms at the VU. To make sure that any internationalization of studies or study programs happens in a way that is both fair to international students already in the Netherlands, and new ones, we have several ideas that we want to investigate. First of all, we would discourage the creation of new international studies here at the VU. It is unethical to lobby for and invite new students from abroad, while subsequently making them homeless. Second of all, we would investigate the option of a Numerus Fixus in certain fast-growing studies that have an English and Dutch track, with luck deciding whether Dutch and International students get a spot. And lastly, we will keep lobbying for the VU to create better infrastructure, such as improving the facilities of the International Office and lobbying for Kronenburg.

- ❖ 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.
- ❖ Lobby for a better information flow to current and future internationals.
- ❖ Discourage the creation of new international studies here at the VU.
- ❖ Investigate the option of a luck-based Numerus Fixus in certain fast-growing studies that have an English and Dutch track.

3.5 Study financing

We believe that the loan system needs to be drastically changed, which is why we are taking a proactive role in the #NietMijnSchuld campaign. This year, the campaign's focus is mainly on preventing interest on current loans and increasing compensation. In light of this, we will participate in national actions and protests. We also participate in the Action Committee Amsterdam #NietMijnSchuld together with ASVA, LSVb and FNV. In this committee, we discuss our national participation in the #NietMijnSchuld campaign and come up with our local actions. We want to increase involvement with the committee, by recruiting new members or active participants in our actions and protests.

- ❖ Taking a proactive role in the #NietMijnSchuld campaign, by attending LAR meetings regularly.
- ❖ Participate in national actions and protests from #NietMijnSchuld.
- ❖ Participate in local actions and protests from the Action Committee.
- ❖ Increase involvement within the Action Committee and attract new members.

3.6 Student Participation

Since the Corona Crisis began, student participation has been going down. Students don't attend their lectures or workgroups as often, within associations there has been a huge loss of knowledge and experience, and it becomes harder and harder to recruit students to do a board year. We want to converse with the USR and the Executive Board this year to figure out ways to improve this situation. Examples of things that could be done are to expand the space for associations on campus (by giving them separate study and social rooms), organize events in cooperation with other associations to increase their and our visibility, and lobby for an increase of the Profileringsfonds to make students active again in Medezeggenschap. Also, the points made under 3.1, Amplification of Student Voices, bear similar goals, especially concerning the Activism Hub.

- ❖ Enter the conversation with the USR and Executive Board about Student Participation.
- ❖ Lobby for more space for associations on campus.
- ❖ Organize events in cooperation with other associations to increase visibility.
- ❖ Lobby for an increase of the Profileringsfonds to make students active again in Medezeggenschap.

3.7 Student Wellbeing

For the past year, the only initiative under the Wellbeing portfolio has been the menstrual cabinets. We would like to expand this 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. Furthermore, we are promoting a survey that investigates the state of Menstrual Poverty among students, an initiative by Neighbourhoudfeminists. We also want to launch other initiatives. The first one is to offer a template for a Code of Conduct for each association. This way, we can help them deal with social unsafety and mental problems students may have, by giving them guidelines and installing safe persons. Besides this, the SRVU wants to investigate the working conditions of students employed by the VU, such as student assistants and interns. We hope to investigate the legality of their contracts and their practical implementation, the amount of pay, and to what extent students feel heard, recognized in and rewarded for their hard and important work. We also want to investigate the viability of this plan within the SRVU itself and implement our own Code of Conduct. Secondly, we want to make the VU as accessible as possible for students with a disability. This can be done by creating better infrastructure at the VU campus and creating more silent rooms. Lastly, we want to support and cooperate with initiatives such as the Student Wellbeing Point, for instance with the menstrual cabinets.

- ❖ Set up a SRVU menstrual products collection box in each VU building.
- ❖ Inform other associations/organizations to set up the Menstrual Cabinets initiative locally as well, and cooperate with the Student Wellbeing Point on this.
- ❖ Using the survey that investigates the state of Menstrual Poverty among students.
- ❖ Offer a template for a Code of Conduct for each association.
- ❖ Make the VU as accessible as possible for students with a disability.
- ❖ Cooperate with initiatives that focus on Student Wellbeing.
- ❖ Investigate the working conditions of students employed by the VU, such as student assistants and interns.

3.8 Sustainability

This year, we have several initiatives we want to sustain or expand within the Sustainability portfolio. First of all, we want to keep hosting the Clothing Exchange market here at the D0k, preferably twice a month. Second of all, we want to cooperate with the University Library in setting up a Book Exchange, where students can leave and take books for free. Lastly, we want to attend any Climate Protests or cooperate with organizations that want to increase sustainability.

- ❖ Keep hosting the Clothing Exchange market here at the D0k, preferably twice a month.
- ❖ Cooperate with the University Library in setting up a Book Exchange.

- ❖ Attend any Climate Protests, or cooperate with organizations that want to increase sustainability.

3.9 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 a broader context, of course, this is largely due to the cuts in education year after year, so 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. We also want to lobby for the abolishment of the use of Proctorio software, since it is discriminatory.

To keep the VU as accessible as possible, we want to keep options for students that cannot go to campus. That is why we want to lobby for either other proctoring software, which is ethical or investigate other examination options. We also think that hybrid lectures or recordings of lectures should be available to students who cannot go to campus.

- ❖ Lobby for the abolishment of the Proctorio software.
- ❖ Lobby for either a more ethical proctoring software or investigate other examination options.
- ❖ Promote hybrid lectures or recordings of lectures.

4. Services

4.1 Legal Aid

This year, we want to improve the structure and organization of the Legal Aid. We have several ideas on how to do this. First of all, the portfolio holder of the legal aid will have regular contact with the legal aid coordinator(s) and volunteers. Second of all, we want to enter into a conversation with the Faculty Board of Law to increase the reimbursement or reward the volunteers get. And lastly, we want to attract new volunteers and appoint a new coordinator.

- ❖ The portfolio holder of the legal aid will try to reestablish regular contact with the legal aid coordinator(s) and volunteers.
- ❖ Enter a conversation with the Faculty Board of Law to increase the reimbursement or reward the volunteers get.
- ❖ Attract new volunteers and appoint a new coordinator.

4.2 The StudentenD0k

This year, the structure between the D0k and SOZ will change immensely on several points. To assure the SRVU can use the D0k in a similar and better way than before, we have several ideas. First of all, from this year onwards, the portfolio holder of the D0k in the Board will be the D0k coordinator, to ensure a clear and fair distribution of authority. Secondly, we want to push for the desk workers to get an MUP contract, instead of a volunteer's compensation. Thirdly, we want to push for a better contract with SOZ, where we assure more financing and a better way to have mutual accountability to improve the relationship.

We also want to remain the first point of contact for all the D0k users. This will be done by keeping our desk workers and striving to have them at the D0k every day and having a D0k coordinator who is at the D0k on most days of the week.

Lastly, we want to push for the renovation of the D0k to be finished this academic year. We want to be involved in the discussion of the renovation, and want to facilitate members and the D0k users in bringing forward ideas.

- ❖ Have a Board member as the D0k coordinator, and assure this standard for next academic year.
- ❖ Push for the desk workers to get an MUP contract.
- ❖ Push for a better contract with SOZ, for instance with more financing.
- ❖ Remain the first point of contact for all the D0k users.
- ❖ Push for the renovation of the D0k to be finished within this academic year.

Epilogue

With great enthusiasm and a positive outlook for the coming year, we have written this policy plan. We hope you have become just as excited as we are for the upcoming academic year. We hope we will be able to achieve a lot of positive change and progress and offer a platform where you can grow with us. In the meantime, any feedback, comments, input and participation are welcome. Our (metaphorical) door is always open!

Love, the 76th Board of the SRVU.