Advisory Committee for International Students (ACIS)
No. 02/2015-2016 – 13:00
MTC 02.11

Minutes

1 Approval of minutes from ACIS meeting on October 6, 2015

Minutes were approved by the present members of ACIS.

I. Wouters mentioned that the issue of felt isolation by some PhD students came also up at the doctoral meeting with the PhD representatives. Yet, it has to be concluded that only a limited number of PhD students is interested in taking part in social activities organized by the Faculty such as e.g. the yearly doctoral excursion.

L. Pedregosa clarified his previous comments by explaining that he felt that the Faculty could be more conducive to meetings of PhD students, e.g. by creating space for such meetings – the current library policies do not allow conversations, nor is there any appropriate community space available. An additional meeting opportunity may be provided by the new courses for PhD students remodelled at the level of the research units for 2015-2016.

Follow-up: B. Lemmelijn will present the approved minutes to the Faculty Board.

2 Composition of ACIS in 2015-2016

I. Wouters informed ACIS members that the information about the current composition of ACIS has been updated on the webpage and that the list of all members is also available on Webdoc.

All members introduced themselves.

S. Tautz asked to include “Southern Europe” in the description of the region he represented.

P. Chalupnicek reminded ACIS members that they can ask Mrs. Wouters for the list of e-mail addresses of the students from their regions. It may be a good idea to send them a message about ACIS, so that they know whom to contact should the need arise.
3 Feedback on the meeting with Wereldmissiehulp on November 9, 2015, and future perspectives

M.-C. O'Reilly-Gindhart informed ACIS members about the successful meeting with WMH. About twenty people came and at least ten project proposals were submitted to WMH. Dr. W. Smit from WMH was interested in turning the meeting into a regular once-a-year event. The date of the next meeting is yet to be determined. M.-C. O'Reilly-Gindhart suggested that the date for the next meeting could be fixed during the last meeting of ACIS this academic year.

Follow-up: Possible dates are to be discussed at the last ACIS meeting of 2015-2016.

4 Opportunity for ACIS members to give feedback regarding the kind of services they would like the Faculty to offer to new and residing students (which are not being provided at the moment)

I. Wouters informed ACIS members that the Faculty is always looking how she can improve the services offered to the international students, so it would be interesting to have proposals from the students themselves. These services can be included in future project applications. An example might be the Faculty subsidizing English language classes for international students needing to improve their English language knowledge.

P. Chalupnicek responded that many students indeed struggle with English, especially in the written form and they often need help with the proofreading of their texts. Currently there is no official provision of proofreading services or a database of available proofreaders at the Faculty. When this matter was discussed in the past, the Faculty did not have any resources to provide this service. Other issues were related to the monitoring of the quality of the service. V. Blanco agreed that many native English speakers would be interested in providing proofreading service, but are not that well connected with other international students, because they are for example in the BA programme. Those few who are connected tend to be overwhelmed by proofreading requests. I. Wouters asked if this could be solved via informal means, such as creating a proofreading group on Facebook. P. Chalupnicek said that Facebook could be a good start, although not all international students are on Facebook. I. Wouters suggested that additionally an e-mail message could be sent to all native English speakers and the list with names of those interested in proofreading could be distributed to other students once a year or on request. At the same time it should be clearly mentioned that the Faculty does not guarantee the quality of the service. Before this can be arranged, it needs to be examined if the Faculty has no (legal) objections to such an arrangement.

M. O. R. Okwara said the Faculty could provide elementary Dutch classes for international students in order to make everyday communication easier for them. Many official documents or information from the Town Hall are only in Dutch. I. Wouters asked if many students would be interested in this service, since many already take other language courses required for their studies, such as German or French. S. Tautz added that in addition to practical advantages, the knowledge of Dutch has also social and psychological benefits, as it can improve connections between the international and the Dutch-speaking students. The fact that international and Dutch-speaking students in the new Research Master programme share a programme should also improve the situation.

I. Wouters raised the question of services for students upon arrival to Leuven. Faculties can pay for a “VIP package” for visiting professors, which includes pick-up at the airport and further assistance in Leuven. Would something similar be also appreciated by the newly arrived students? M. Richards mentioned there is the “Buddy System” organized by the University. P. Chalupnicek said that our Faculty traditionally belongs to those who participate least in the “Buddy System.” Every year the SAINTS get calls from the University to recruit more theology students who for some reason are not interested in participating. I. Wouters asked other members if they had any experience with the “Buddy System.” V. Androsova said she had a buddy from our Faculty. M.-C. O'Reilly-Gindhart said she applied for a buddy twice, but no one ever showed up, so she had to figure out everything herself. It is
a bit of an unofficial tradition at the Faculty that various communities assist their new incoming members outside of the official “Buddy System.” Several ACIS members confirmed that they were met by someone from their community upon their arrival. M. O. R. Okwara suggested that the willingness of students to participate in the “Buddy System” could be increased if the Faculty offered a compensation of the students’ costs related to this service, such as reimbursing the train ticket to the airport when picking-up a new student.

L. Pedregosa asked if there is “Lost and Found” service at the Faculty. I. Wouters responded that the caretaker has found items in his office located in the MTC building. When students come to the Student Secretariat because they lost or found something, they are directed to him. V. Blanco said SAINTS would inform students about this fact via flyers and Facebook.

5 Student concerns

V. Blanco asked ACIS members what kind of events they want SAINTS to organise in order to be able to attract a larger share of the international students, especially the non-European ones. It is usually the same group of people who are interested in SAINTS events now. In order to find out what other international students would be interested in doing, she asked ACIS members to talk to the students they represent and let know her personally or SAINTS at leuvensaints@gmail.com. She also invited all ACIS members to come to the free “Coffee and Chai” which takes place every Friday between 1 and 3 pm at the Student Lounge. J. Kuriakose responded that many international students are active in their own communities and they often do not have much time or need to participate in other events. L. Pedregosa suggested that sports events might be interesting to other students. P. Chalupnicek said sports usually require a large group of people, but Katechetika is organizing sport events throughout the year, yet international students do not join them. V. Blanco mentioned that last year SAINTS made several attempts to organize hiking tours or city excursions on weekends, but with one exception the interest of students was minimal.

P. Chalupnicek said he talked to several PhD students and got complaints about the lack of teaching opportunities for PhD students at the Faculty. When compared to other PhD programs, our students are not expected to teach during their studies, which then means they have a disadvantage when they are looking for a job. Also, in one particular case, a PhD student who used to teach last year complained that the research unit newly offers teaching only to students with a contract (researchers, AAP-BAPs), but PhD students without a contract are no longer offered this opportunity. I. Wouters responded that this has been a long-term concern at the Faculty. The organisation of teaching assignments is located at the level of each research unit, so students who are interested in teaching should contact the coordinator of their research unit to discuss the matter.

6 Varia

ACIS members thank I. Wouters for chairing the meeting while B. Lemmelijn was ill.

ACIS members are asked to communicate any student concerns to B. Lemmelijn and P. Chalupnicek so that these can be added to the agenda of the next meeting.

Pavel Chalupnicek
ACIS Secretary

Bénédicte Lemmelijn
ACIS Chair