Pro Geo Policy Plan
2023-24

Pro Geo

Policy Plan Welcome

Dear reader,

It is our honour to present to you the Pro Geo 2023/24 Policy Plan. This document delves into various issues we consider vital to the Faculty of Spatial Sciences (FSS) and outlines our vision for the year. Emphasising the significance of collaborative efforts among all FSS students to enhance student life, the 32nd Board enthusiastically presents this plan.

In the following pages, the outlined vision and goals are intended to drive positive change for all. To facilitate this, three main pillars have been established for focus:

1. Improving Education at the Faculty

2. Student Well-being

3. The Foundation

It is our hope that this Policy Plan will enable Pro Geo to stay on track during the 2023/24 Academic Year and allow our Foundation to respond to change while remaining faithful to its mission and vision.

Warmest regards,

The 32nd Board of Pro Geo

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List of Abbreviations

FC - - - Faculty Council

FSS - - - Faculty of Spatial Sciences

HGP - - - Human Geography and Planning

PC - - - Programme Committee

SPD - - - Spatial Planning and Design

UG - - - University of Groningen

Pro Geo

1. Improving the Quality of Education at the FSS

a. Digital Skills

Goal: Enabling digital skills development to fit expectations and increase master's and career possibilities

i. Link between digital skills and professional practice

The mismatch between actual training and expectations regarding digital skills in FSS programmes has been a topic in the Faculty Council (FC) and the PCs for a while now. The importance of this was underlined by a recent Pro Geo survey on the matter, which showcased that many students were unsatisfied with the role digital skills play in their programme. Therefore, there is no doubt that for many students, expectations differ from what the programme has to offer.

Even though adjusting expectations prior to enrolment is an option, we would greatly prefer adjusting the programmes to fit students' expectations and enabling them to pursue the master's programme or career they are passionate about. For many SPD students, the current availability of design education limits their options for the future as they lack skills in relevant Adobe programmes and 3D design software as well as support in creating a portfolio. Similarly, HGP students are limited by their lack of skills in Python, for example.

Therefore, in collaboration with the Faculty Council, the Pro Geo Board would like to explore the different avenues in which these issues can be addressed, whilst also not increasing the workload of the lecturers. This can be realised through open dialogue and discussions with several relevant parties amongst the course coordinators and teaching staff. We expect this to be a long-term process to be continued by future Boards.

ii. Promotion of existing opportunities

Next to the lack of possibilities, existing opportunities, such as the Career Service Adobe workshops and the newly-created *Geospatial Data Science* course, are insufficiently promoted. Moreover, accessing these opportunities may prove challenging due to personal expenses incurred in workshops, potential scheduling conflicts with other classes, and the course being available only as an elective in the third year.

Therefore, we also aim to increase awareness of these possibilities in collaboration with Faculty staff.

iii. Integration of digital skills development into programmes

Existing digital skills-related resources are often hard to combine with a student's full-time study programme due to schedule clashes, for example. Sometimes, course organisation requires students to develop digital skills on their own in order to properly realise their assignments. Additionally, students are discouraged by the cost of software and risk not achieving the Learning Outcomes. Thus, we aim to integrate options to improve students' digital skills within courses, for example, in the form of optional non-graded assignments. In discussing this opportunity with the course coordinators, we will propose the possibility of feedback for the students.

As such, we aim to further discuss how digital skills of students can be developed as an integral part of the courses and not as a separate time and financial commitment they have to undertake in

order to successfully complete assignments. This will also contribute to properly preparing students for pursuing master's programmes and entering the labour market.

iv. <u>Realisation through collaboration</u>

With staff well-being and decreasing financial resources in mind, we propose to implement these changes mainly with the help of student assistants familiar with the software. They would give feedback on optional assignments and educate students on the use of design programmes. Teachers and staff with previous experience in design fields would mostly be involved in informing new students and providing them with digital skills and educational opportunities.

Realising this proposal will involve much collaboration and we aim to connect students, teachers, staff, services (such as Career Services), and professionals in the field in order to make the Faculty's programmes realise their full potential. This will take the form of individual meetings and panel discussions until a feasible course of action is reached.

b. Portfolio
Goal: Establishing an opportunity to obtain a design portfolio

At the moment, students who wish to take part in a master's design programme, internships, or other professional ventures, are limited due to the absence of an individual design portfolio. The focus of the programmes on group assignments has traditionally limited the number of projects that could be used for such a portfolio, making it hard for students to showcase their work. Therefore, rethinking the structure of group assignments in existing design courses and adding optional portfolio assignments would enable interested students to slowly, and with little additional effort, build a collection of design-related projects during their studies.

To make students aware of the possibility and especially the importance of creating portfolios in parts of our field, these optional services should be continually promoted at the beginning of the programme as well as during their studies through regular announcements and reminders during design courses. Staff and student assistants with design experience would inform new students on portfolio requirements and assist in portfolio creation sessions towards the end of the programme in which the accumulated outputs are compiled into one coherent portfolio.

Thus, through the described efforts, we hope that the students are enabled to join urban design or even architecture-related fields and, therefore, broaden their prospective master and job opportunities. Similar to digital skills, we acknowledge that the implementation of this process is a long-term development.

c. Late Grading
Goal: Supervising the status of the late grading at the Faculty

The recurring issue of late grading has been a topic of discussion in the PCs and in the FC. As there is still some uncertainty about the extent of the problem we will continue the efforts started by the 31st Pro Geo Board and continue to closely monitor late grading through the PCs.

All instances of late grading shall be communicated by Pro Geo on a regular basis to the FC. Pro Geo aims to issue a summary late grading report at the end of the academic year.

d. Internationalisation
Goal: Protecting education equality for international students and the diversity of the programmes

Despite the announcement of the Internationalisation In Balance Bill (WIIB) by the Dutch Government, Pro Geo along with the staff section of the FC and the Faculty Board are united in resisting the switch to Dutch in FSS bachelor programs. If the law is adopted by the States General, bachelor programmes could be forced to instruct 70% of their content in Dutch. We plan to make a case for the exemption of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences from the Dutch language requirements.

In addition, we want to continue previous Pro Geo endeavours to integrate international cases and examples in the course curriculums and ensure that education within the FSS is not focused on Dutch or European examples.

e. Use of English
Goal: Monitoring the proper use of English in FSS educational activities

English is the language of instruction throughout the FSS and Pro Geo intends to maintain this arrangement as we believe this improves career opportunities for our students in the Netherlands and abroad. Very few planning bachelor programmes in continental Europe are taught in English and many students are attracted to the FSS for this reason.

Through the Programme Committees and our own work in the Faculty Council, we aim to ensure English is properly used at all times in all educational activities of the FSS.

f. Smarter Academic Year
Goal: Monitoring the implementation of the "Smarter Academic Year" within the FSS

The Dutch national pilot project "Smarter Academic Year" will be tested and implemented in our Faculty with the aim of shortening the academic years as well as reducing stress and improving general well-being. We believe that this should benefit students' mental health without affecting Programme Learning Outcomes or credits.

Pro Geo along with the PC members will monitor the project over the coming years to address potential issues and ensure a high quality of education.

2. The Foundation
a. Pro Geo Visibility

i. Internal Awareness
Goal: Increasing awareness of Pro Geo within the student body

Currently, we have noticed that the student body is not aware of Pro Geo and the activities or work that we are involved in. This is a concerning issue as we are looking to improve the quality of their education, mainly through the PCs. However, if they are not aware of the people who represent them on a larger scale, the students will not be able to relay their issues to the PC members with more frequency. Furthermore, it is pertinent for the students to be aware of the scope of work that Pro Geo is involved in, from the work of the Faculty Council to Programme Committee supervision.

We are hoping to increase awareness about Pro Geo through different means. These include but are not limited to Coffee Hours, social media presence (see point 3.iv), lecture talks and being

involved in Faculty activities. Through these initiatives, we hope that the connection between the student body and Pro Geo will improve.

ii. PC Member Visibility

Goal: Increasing the visibility of the PC members to their respective year group

In order for the tasks to be successfully completed by the PC members, it would benefit the members to be as visible as possible to their respective students. As receiving input is vital to the PC members, we would like to ensure that the student body is aware of their function and how they can be of use.

Thus, to increase the members' visibility, we will have lecture talks, host coffee hours in the Ibn Battuta Coffee Room, and ask the members to inform their year group both in person and through social media (e.g. WhatsApp group chats or through Instagram stories). However, we believe that a combination of word of mouth and lecture talks would be the most effective method.

iii. Faculty Council Newsletter

Goal: Informing the FSS student body about the Faculty Council's updates

The Faculty Council is the elected body where wider educational issues and the functioning of the Faculty are discussed. Pro Geo acknowledges the importance of the FC and frequently uses it as an opportunity to both stay informed and bring to the table any issues that have been observed and that may alter the quality of education.

Upon talking to fellow students and based on our own observations, it becomes apparent that the majority of FSS students are unaware of the FC's work and function. The lack of visibility of the FC is not ideal as students may not know where to go with their issues or may not be aware of what is currently being discussed. Neither current FC conversation topics, nor prior "successes" of the FC are easily accessible, thus making it difficult to build credibility and encourage discussions.

In an effort to counter this, we want to make the work of the FC more accessible and visible to all students of the FSS. The student body should be informed of what issues are currently under consideration in the FC, as well as what subjects have already been discussed.

We aim to achieve this goal by instating the concept of a "Faculty Council Newsletter". After every one or two meetings of the FC, we wish to send a newsletter to the interested students about what has been discussed, what input Pro Geo has given, and what educational issues are on the agenda. In addition, we also want to explore a collaboration between Pro Geo and Girugten whereby the FC Newsletter would be published in the magazine's future issues. All of the updates will also be shared through our social media accounts.

iv. Online Presence

Goal: Improving Pro Geo's online presence and having more engagement with posts on the varying platforms

Considering the importance of social media and online presence in this day and age, improving Pro Geo's digital presence is of great importance. Currently, the main platforms used are Instagram and the website. To increase visibility with the students of the Faculty, Instagram will be the main platform used. Considering the method in which the algorithm works, it is important to have a set social media plan as posts can further be boosted through more traction on the page. Considering the

current growth rate of the page, we would like to reach 600 followers by the end of our Pro Geo Board tenure.

In order to reach our goal, we have established a social media plan which we intend to follow and continue to create new content to promote the activities of Pro Geo and PC Members.

     v.   <u>External Awareness</u>
Goal: Increasing the visibility of Pro Geo to external parties

Similarly to the internal awareness concerns, the Pro Geo Board would like to improve our visibility to external parties such as other boards, CIT Services, the UG's Participation Coordinator, etc. It is hoped that through these efforts, the role that Pro Geo takes will be made aware of to the other parties and that they are able to reach out to us for collaboration for initiatives or other closely related affairs.

The main way in which this will be achieved is through communication by word of mouth and in different events or meetings. In addition, through the obtained list of University Boards, an introductory email will be sent describing the foundation of Pro Geo and introducing the Pro Geo Board members.

b. Rebranding

     i.   <u>Brand identity</u>
Goal: Revamping Pro Geo's corporate identity

The Pro Geo corporate identity has remained unchanged for many years and its appearance is outdated. We aim to rebrand Pro Geo with a new brand identity in the "house style". This should include a staple colourway of the Foundation, clean design elements, and consistency in all visual aspects.

We aim to produce a short document with all the graphic elements related to Pro Geo so that our successors can maintain this clear identity. In addition, the story behind the logo and other visual elements will be elaborated on our website.

     ii.   <u>Logo</u>
Goal: Creating a new meaningful logo for the foundation

At the moment of writing, it appears that no one knows the story behind the logo, nor is there a clear visual connection to Pro Geo's mission.

Of course, in the digital age, brand image plays a role in the success of an organisation. We want the Pro Geo logo to both be visually appealing but also to tell the story of who we are and what we do. We believe this will contribute to the visibility goals of our Pro Geo Board, but it would also make the entire foundation more appealing to students and more in keeping with our times.

Thus, we wish to change the Pro Geo logo and create a clear brand identity. We aim to consult with other students and choose a design that is clearly recognizable and representative of our mission statement.

     iii.   <u>Merchandise</u>
Goal: Advertising Pro Geo's new visual identity

To enact the change proposed by switching the Pro Geo logo and enhancing visibility, we aim to reorder some of the vital pieces of merchandise utilised by Pro Geo. Such items include a flag, pens, stickers, banners and more. Conveniently, the stock of such merchandise branded with the current logo is already running low, so the timing of this change coincides with the need to order new items.

c. Programme Committees

    i.   <u>Preparation of Members</u>
Goal: Ensuring the proper training of PC members

Programme Committees represent one of the main avenues for improving the quality of education within the FSS and Pro Geo plays the primary role in selecting their members and preparing them for their role. Well-trained PC members are likely to perform better and have a more enthusiastic approach to their role.

To achieve this, we have decided to reintroduce the concept of the PC handbook, a comprehensive guide containing all the necessary information for being a PC member. From how the Faculty works, to Pro Geo itself, to how to prepare for (pre-)meetings, writing evaluations, and all other functional aspects of the role, the Handbook aims to be a document that the students can always refer to. The document was already distributed to the PC members upon their selection and was met with highly positive feedback. Equally, we consider the Handbook to be a good starting point for future Board members who may not have insights into how the FSS PCs work. Our successors can utilise the Handbook and adapt its contents to any changes that may occur during their tenure.

In addition, we have continued the tradition of organising a PC Introductory Training, where we go over all relevant aspects of being a PC member and where the involved students get the chance to ask any questions. This meeting should be organised well in advance of the first PC meetings.

    ii.   <u>PC Application Process</u>
Goal: Streamlining the PC application process to facilitate students' applications and ease the workload of the Board

The PC application period is a busy period for both the Board and applicants as it happens during the busy months of September and October. In order to streamline the process, we aim to establish good practices that will hopefully aid our successors. Firstly, we encourage the use of a centralised Google Form to collect all applications, so that no applications (documents) are lost in the inbox and so that clear statistics about the applicants can be retrieved. We want to create a "template form" that can be utilised in the future.

In addition, we want to facilitate the interview process. Time scheduling web applications can be used for the interviews. Such processes can counter time management issues for all participants and we aim to further explore methods of facilitating the process.

Lastly, when conducting the application process, and upon the interviewee's approval, we aim to take clear and detailed minutes of the interviews. This is in order for all Board members to get a clear impression of the applicants despite not attending their respective interview. Compliance with the GDPR will be ensured in this process.

    iii.   <u>Social Cohesion</u>
Goal: increasing the social cohesion between the PCs

Despite being a politico-educational organisation, Pro Geo has a history of fostering networking and interaction between the PC members. Building upon last years' experience, we have decided to focus our efforts on both having more opportunities for building social cohesion and enhancing the quality of such events. In this regard, we want to experiment with changing the format of events. An example is the PC Introduction Event held on 26th October 2023, where the first half was destined to PC training and the second half took the form of social drinks. Seeing the success of this, we want to implement more activities meant to enhance social cohesion between the different PC members: a policy plan review by PC members; the New Year's Reception; an end-of-semester drinks, which will double as an opportunity to share to best practices of being a PC member; an end-of-year drinks; and other trainings

iv. PC Payments

Goal: Ensuring PC members receive timely financial compensation

During last year, issues arose around PC members receiving their financial compensation for the meetings they attended. Payments were either delayed or did not come through due to various reasons. In Pro Geo, we understand the importance of receiving the promised financial compensation in time and with no additional effort, thus we want to keep track of any recurring issues and intervene when necessary.

d. Archiving and Secretarial Report

Goal: Keeping a record of Pro Geo's work and ensuring a smooth transition for future Boards

In order to ensure a proper transfer to our successors and maintain a good record of our work, we aim to conduct proper archiving of all Pro Geo undertakings. Notes from all the meetings we attend will be uploaded to the Pro Geo Drive, as well as any other documents, graphics or materials used during our Board year.

In addition, we aim to start a tradition of writing a Secretarial Report at the end of each board year. Such a document will include information about events, attendance numbers, and how successful we were in realising the goals stated in the Policy Plan. With this, any future Pro Geo Boards can find any information related to a specific year in one centralised document.

3. Student Well-Being

a. Complaints

Goal: Creating a proper environment for confidentially sharing complaints

At the forefront of Pro Geo's mission statement is the representation of all students within the FSS. However, study matters can often be personal and students can have a hard time directly addressing any issues they may encounter because of fear of being judged, of possible repercussions from professors and possible social stigma.

Building on Pro Geo tradition, we want to continue the use of anonymous complaint forms on our website. In addition, we want to use our social media to include anonymous forms as well where students can share any concerns they may have.

Lastly, we aim to continue the 31st's Board initiative of utilising a physical feedback box. Our goal is for the location of the feedback box to be well-known so that all students will have access to it. The box will be locked so that all complaints shared are truly confidential. This feedback box shall be promoted on the Pro Geo social media accounts in order to increase awareness.

b. Student Support Structure
Goal: Providing a complete list of persons and offices for FSS students to contact in any situation

There exists an extensive system for student support but one can be unsure or hesitant on who to go to. Pro Geo has compiled a comprehensive list of people and offices in the Faculty, University, and beyond that can provide help for study-related problems, assist in cases of misconduct, and advise about health, administration, and more.

This list will be published on our website and social media, and posted in the Ibn Battuta Coffee Room and other FSS educational areas. We aim to promote this Student Support Structure to all students of the FSS.

c. Pre-master Involvement
Goal: Ensuring the proper representation of pre-master students

Pre-master students lack direct methods of communication and platforms to evaluate or comment on the instruction methods of their pre-master programmes. We acknowledge that there is no PC for the pre-master students due to the students enrolling in courses that are being evaluated by the other bachelor and master PCs. However, we believe that it would be beneficial to also have a platform for the pre-master students to provide feedback about their feelings on the programme, especially as the courses that they will be undertaking are helping them to prepare for their desired master's programme.

In order to ensure that the pre-master students are aware of how they can provide feedback about their study programme, we will attempt to reach out to the students through different mediums. This includes, but is not limited to, presenting ourselves at the Master's Open Day and working in collaboration with the student advisors as they have the most contact with the students at the moment.

d. Training
Goal: Increasing Pro Geo's and PC member's ability to perform their duties

Through the various training sessions that the university has to offer, the Pro Geo board aims to attend as many as possible. This initiative stems from the Board wanting to learn about different and innovative ways to help students at the Faculty. At the time of the publishing of the Policy Plan, the Board has already taken part in the Active Bystander training and the mental health meeting, both of which informed us about methods of ensuring a healthy environment for the students at the faculty. In addition, the Pro Geo Board has also signed up for the CIT Student Panel.

We also aim to inform the PC members and the rest of the student body about potential training sessions that they can take part in.

e. Programme-Related Costs
Goal: Increasing accessibility and awareness of programme-related costs through improved communication

Before enrolling, prospective students should be aware of what expenditures they can expect during the course of their studies. Next to the tuition fees, which are well-communicated, students also

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have to pay for trips such as the *Power of Design* and *Landscape* excursions, the Fieldwork Abroad and software (e.g. Adobe Suite). As of now, information regarding the cost of the trips, even though available, is insufficiently communicated to people taking an interest in one of the programmes.

Therefore, we seek to make this information available before enrollment and increase awareness on the matter. The issue will be brought to the attention of the FC and we aim for the informative materials of each programme to specify any such costs.

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Concluding remarks

We believe that this Policy Plan reflects our commitment to creating a more prosperous future for all students at our Faculty.

Moving forward, it is important to note that the success of the plan will depend on the collective action of everyone involved. Therefore, we encourage you to actively engage, share ideas and collaborate with us to create the best possible environment for all students and staff at the FSS.

Warmest wishes,

The 32nd Board of Pro Geo

Pro Geo