

Year report

Student Council of Psychology and Educational Sciences (PPSR)

Academic Year: 2018-2019



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1. Introduction

PPSR (Psychologische en Pedagogische Studentenraad) is the student council of the faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences at the University of Ghent. The main goal of the PPSR is to represent students of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences. Which is currently done via several commissions and work groups in which professors, post-docs, faculty personnel and PPSR delegates work together. This in order to improve the inner workings of the faculty, to help the psychology and educational sciences students by representing them and more specifically to enhance the level of education at the faculty. This education aspect is taken very broadly, on the one hand we debate about robust curricula and on the other hand we also try to improve common knowledge by providing workshops. This may also be put into practice by just sharing information on our Facebook page.

The general board of the PPSR is elected every year during the last general meeting of the academic year. All psychology and educational sciences students are eligible to run for a specific function on the board. To become eligible, a student has to write a motivation, stating why they would want to join the board. In order to obtain the possibility to vote during a general meeting, a member of PPSR must be present at at least two general meetings during the previous and the present academic year. The first time someone is present at an entire meeting, this functions as an introduction. From the second time on, this person is entitled to vote. This applies to all staff members and students of the faculty.

Currently there are five official roles, namely a president, a vice-president, a treasurer, a secretary and a public relations executive. These students are responsible for the daily functioning of our student council.

As the student council we try to solve problems in the education program and structural problems within the faculty as well as any kind of problem a student may encounter. One of our main goals additionally is to get close to the students of the faculty. Their experiences and ideas grant us the ideal way of assessing what can be improved within the faculty and the education of psychology and educational sciences. This way we can also be an agent to bring professors and academics closer to the students.

We try our best to let the voice of the students be heard through commissions and councils. Another goal is to be as accessible as possible to the students, all of our meetings are open to everyone.

The PPSR is strongly tied to the GSR (Ghent Student Council), this is the superordinate student council of Ghent University. In order to be in the know of all of the recent developments concerning student representation and affairs concerning education, we make sure that each GSR meeting is attended by at least one member of the PPSR board.

We are also closely linked to the *Vlaamse Psychologische en Pedagogische Kring (Flemish Association of Psychology and Educational Sciences)*, the student association of the faculty. Most of the biggest events are organized in cooperation with VPPK.

We would like to become a part of EFPSA because we want to expand the possibilities for psychology students at the faculty on an international level. We would like to be brought together with other academics, psychology students and student councils on a European level. We would like to contribute to the positive impact psychological support can have on society, as well as the way psychological aid is perceived. We are very interested in exploring the multitude of knowledge concerning the field of psychology in different cultures.

2. Student representation

Student representation is the main activity and mission of the PPSR. Students are being represented in the faculty board, faculty committees and education committees.

2.1 The faculty board

First, the **faculty board** is the highest decision-making organ of the faculty and congregates once every month. It determines the faculty's policy on education, research, finances, personnel management, internationalisation and sustainability. Six students participate in the faculty board and are elected for a period of two years. Everyone who studies at the faculty can apply to be a candidate and is able to vote. The six candidates who receive the most votes are elected.

2.2 The education committees

Second, students are represented in four **education committees** namely the education committee of psychology, educational sciences, social welfare and education. A student representative is designated for each bachelor and master programme. The students in the committees are elected annually. They hand in an application form to the faculty education services at the beginning of the academic year and are asked to write a motivation. Afterwards the candidates are chosen in the faculty board based on the quality of their motivation. Within these organs the following topics are discussed regularly: structural problems in the education programme, revisions of or proposals for certain regulations, educational assessments and the appointment of new teachers.

2.3 The faculty committees

Lastly there are the **faculty committees**. The most important ones for students are the committee of education quality control, internationalization and sustainability. Hereafter listed is a summary of all of the faculty committees and what the concerned topics are.

- Internationalization: They discuss everything that has to do with ties to other international universities, Erasmus-projects of Internationalization@Home.
- Educational Quality: In this committee all the presidents of the educational committees sit together with the educational president of the faculty, a few students and members of the faculty educational services. They monitor the quality of all educational programs provided at the faculty. This is, along with the educational committees and the faculty board, one of the most important committees of the faculty.
- Diversity: The members of this committee discuss issues concerning diversity.
- Secondary Activities: This committee concerns all activities the professors and teachers of the faculty have besides their teaching job and the scientific research they do.
- Scientific Research: This committee provides recommendations to the faculty board, concerning the research policy of the faculty. This committee also forms recommendations on the spending of funds that can be provided in support of scientific research.
- ICT: The faculty has one of the last remaining large computer classrooms of the university. In this committee, members decide what should happen with all the computers in the faculty building and other issues regarding ICT.

- Test practicum: At the faculty there is an office that is able to perform various psychological tests. Researchers, but also students, need the resources for these test to provide them with knowledge for their research or thesis. The office is equipped with all kinds of assessment instruments. Within this office, there is additionally a committee that decides which instruments they will purchase and put to use.
- Library: This committee discusses all topics concerning the faculty library.
- Reception: Members of this committee are involved in all welcoming activities for new students and visitors. They discuss how those activities will be organized and what kind of information should be available for new or future students.
- Sustainability: This committee discusses all issues concerning providing an enjoyable environment in and around the faculty, as well as how this relates to the wellbeing of students and employees. This committee deals with how the faculty can minimize environmental pollution.
- Societal impact: Members of this committee talk about what the faculty can mean for society. They deal with the following questions: How can we connect with all neighbours of the faculty? How can we spread knowledge to all people in Belgium (or even wider)? How can we contribute to a positive image of psychological assistance?

Thus, the faculty board is the highest decision-making organ while the education and faculty committees function as advice organs.

The student representatives of the faculty board and the committees are supported by the executive committee, being the PPSR. These are students who are elected at the beginning of the academic year and some of them join the board or a committee. They organise a monthly general meeting, which the representatives are expected to attend. Topics relevant to students that were discussed in the board or the committees are reviewed during the meeting. Students can always contact the representatives through e-mail and stay in touch with them through Facebook groups. There is also a PPSR Facebook page to which students can send messages. If a representative is contacted by a student, for example in case of a problem/ issue, this will be placed on the meeting's agenda. Subsequently the topic can be reviewed in one of the committees, therefore the representative contacts the president of the appropriate committee. General meetings are open to everyone, so students who are interested in taking part in student representation or that have ideas or come across a problem can always join the assembly. Data and locations are communicated through the Facebook page of PPSR and Ufora, the online learning platform of Ghent University.

The student representatives and the members of the executive committee are supported by a coach. He or she is part of the faculty education services and attends the general meetings. The coach knows about the organisation of the faculty and is always available for the student representatives' questions. Students of the faculty board and the committee prepare the meetings by reading the agenda that they receive approximately one week before. When they come across important topics they can always contact the coach or make an appointment with the dean for advice.

3. Events

All members of the PPSR attach great importance to maintain close bonds with the students of the faculty. Therefore, we have organized multiple events in the past, along with the Vlaamse Psychologische en Pedagogische Kring and staff of the faculty (the student association of the faculty).

Plant! Action - 6 november 2018: An event organised by the PPSR, the VPPK and academic and faculty staff. The event took place at one of the courtyards on the faculty. On this day trees were planted, benches were placed and there was a bake sale, where pastries made by several different students and staff were sold. Students could sell and buy second-hand items and small plants were given away free of charge. Furthermore, a workshop was organised by *StuJardin* with more information about taking care of plants. The aim of this action was to provide an opportunity in which everyone who studies or works at the faculty could meet each other in a relaxing and fun way. In addition, it was organised to upgrade that courtyard since it looked very industrial and boring. Now it is a busy place where students can eat, chat and work together while being surrounded by nature. Several hundred students showed up. This event resulted in improved relations between all the parties involved which is beneficial for future collaboration between the PPSR, VPPK and the faculty. The profits from the bake sale were donated to a good cause. This cause was “Overkop Ghent”, this is a “safe house” for children and adolescents up to the age of 25. In an Overkop-house visiting children and adolescents can partake in several activities in order to take their mind of whatever they are dealing with. They can also reach out to professional therapeutic help or can just find someone to talk to.

Exam schedule construction meeting - beginning of december: A meeting organised by PPSR to which all students were invited to participate and give their opinions on the proposed make up of examination dates. Students could give remarks concerning the amount of time provided between each exam date. Thereafter the remarks and insights were transferred to the faculty education services. Subsequently, the faculty education services contacted the professors.

Welcome & introduction days - 16 & 23 march 2019: An event organised by faculty staff together with help from the PPSR and the VPPK. The event took place inside the faculty. The aim was to provide useful information for both future students and their parents. This was achieved by tours around the faculty given by faculty staff as well as students. There were stalls filled with textbooks, syllabuses and other study materials. This way, visitors could easily go through these books and materials and ask questions to the available students. This helped to form a better image of the kinds of courses the faculty provides. Both the PPSR and VPPK had stalls in order to promote our student organisations and explain the opportunities we offer. This is typically a very busy event, we welcomed about 600 visitors.

FPPWeek (Week of the faculty of psychology and educational sciences) - 1 to 5 april 2019: This week is annually organised by mostly the VPPK, whereas the PPSR also helps to organise this week. The goal is again to promote our student organisations among the students and to improve the relations with faculty staff. During this week, lots of activities are organised such as a free breakfast, an opening event with live music, a bounce castle where students could participate in sport, a flea market, workshops on presentation skills and job application skills, which are given by professionals from Hudson and other HR companies. Furthermore, a psychiatrist came to give a lecture about fear and anxiety (about 90 students and faculty staff present) and a journalist came to present her book in which she describes the relationship between imprisoned moms and their children (about 220 students and faculty staff present).

Furthermore, employees of the local academic bookstore were also invited and provided the students with an overview of the newest psychology and educational science-related books. More specifically, they had a stall in front of the faculty's library where they gave information and had the opportunity to sell books.

At last, the week ends with a job and internship fair where around 20 organisations and companies were present. This way, students are given the opportunity to network and explore opportunities (in Belgium every psychology and pedagogy student has to do a 6 months non-paid internship in their second master year).

Again, this week is mostly organised by members of the VPPK, however the PPSR is very motivated to improve our contribution to improve this week.

Blok@Dunant - 16 december 2019 to 31 january 2020: During the exam period of January an event called "Blok@Dunant" was organised. The library is always accessible to all students. With permission from the faculty, we kept the faculty library open during longer hours than during the school year and encouraged students by providing them with a goodie bag including pens, a pencil case, ear plugs and a lucky charm doll. We also handed out multiple snacks and drinks, such as pancakes, coffee and energy drinks on several days. This was truly a success, as the whole library was filled during that period.

We hope to organize even more events in the future, as well as to become involved in the events EFPSA can provide us with.

4. Critical reflection

The PPSR is a stable and functioning organisation, nevertheless there is still room for improvement. A first challenge is the fact that a large proportion of the students is not really familiar with PPSR. Each year the organisation, its mission, values and members are introduced to the freshman students. However, a lot of students still do not know what the PPSR is about and what we can mean to them. Thus, the PPSR suffers from marketing problems since it does not reach all of its students. In order to overcome this issue we plan to inform students as much as we can by speaking more regularly in the auditoria about the general meetings, the committees and the possibilities to engage. Further we want to intensify the collaboration with the student association, VPPK, that has a wider outreach.

A second challenge is finding motivated representative candidates for the committees. At the beginning of every academic year an appeal is made and spread through the Facebook pages. Additionally, posters are put up across the faculty to reach students. Despite this, we still struggle to find interested candidates and this is also related to the former problem. In order to solve the issue we are intended to make announcements before lectures accompanied by an informative and attractive PowerPoint presentation.

We also want to collaborate with professors and encourage them to explain students the importance of student representation. Lastly some of the representatives stop attending the general meetings or the meetings of the board/committees after a period of time. One explanation is that students have a six month internship during the second year of the master program which makes it difficult to attend the meetings. In order to cope with the problem we will make sure that general meetings are organized after the office hours. Furthermore we ensure that every group of representatives (faculty board, the education committees and the faculty committees) is coached by an executive committee member. At last we will state more clearly what we expect of the representatives so they can make a considered decision about whether or not to apply and make a commitment.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, marketing and recruitment challenges exist within the PPSR, several solutions are proposed and attempts will be made to tackle these problems next academic year.