# Electoral Program
# University Council 2022

Dear Colleague,

Since 2014, TiU International has advanced its Core Values in the University Council, which is the main elected body where staff and students advise, consult and consent with decisions of the Executive Board of the University. Personnel elections matter and we need your vote!

Our electoral program focusses on advancing our core values at a time when Tilburg University faces increased uncertainty, new challenges, but also several opportunities. We have grouped our program around four broad themes: *Putting people first*, *Knowledge knows no borders*, *Excellence in research and teaching*, and *Promoting good governance.* Each theme consists of a mixture of general objectives, projects of ongoing concern and new initiative proposals.

Kind regards,

TiU-International Board,
TiU-international University Council List

## Putting People First

A university is as good as its students, academics and support staffers. All should be given the opportunity to advance themselves and shine. HR policy should become pro-active in nurturing and retaining those core assets and be fairly implemented throughout the university. An open corporate culture should favor responsibility and make no place for bullying. Work overload, unmanageable stress or burn-out, affecting academics, support staffers or PhD students, should be systematically prevented, identified, and addressed without waiting for events to unfold.

**Improve our HR Practices**

The centralization of support services under BEST, the increased workload due to higher student numbers and the procedural definition of many tasks have led to an increasingly impersonal bureaucracy and excessive work pressure for many colleagues.

- We will work to improve this by putting our smart and resourceful colleagues in conditions to turn these challenges into an opportunity to become a more effective organization, where skills and initiative are rewarded

We often observe that it is difficult to retain good academic and support staff members.

- We believe that a combination of a pro-active HR policy and a better and more transparent governance can provide staff members and academics opportunities to participate in challenging and rewarding activities. We will also push University leaders towards building a supportive environment that values solidarity and commitment.

**Managing work pressure and preventing burnouts**

Following our discussions on work pressure in the University Council, the Executive Board has agreed that for large initiatives, not only the financial consequences but also the effects on work pressure and job satisfaction should be assessed.

- We are preparing a proposal to organize personnel surveys to identify the precursors of burnouts among our employees to identify whether there are general risk parameters across the university.
- More generally, work overload, unmanageable stress, or burn-outs should be prevented, detected and addressed without waiting for events to unfold.

**Improving prospects for PhD students**

Ph.D. students are one of the key elements contributing to the visibility and recognition of the university. Candidates should realize top positions on the domestic and international labor markets of their choice, in and outside of academia,

- This requires tailored and responsive supervision, expert coaching on soft skills, help in building a professional network, a constructive work environment and good facilities.

**Protect vulnerable positions**

Colleagues in vulnerable positions i.e., support staff and postdocs on short-term contracts, tenure-track positions, or PhD candidates require additional attention. Task description, evaluation, and career prospects should be clear and appropriate.

- We already took initiative to define minimal working conditions for tenure-trackers based on NWO golden rules, and we will continue pushing for colleagues in vulnerable positions to be given clear perspectives.

**Fairness and inclusiveness on the work floor**

Inclusivity is a major issue to staff, both in terms of job description and career perspective. There are still too many gaps between pay scales that were not addressed during the BEST process. For a significant number of jobs, there is no matching UFO profile; leadership should support and encourage staff that take on more responsibility to move up to a matching profile with matching remuneration. Ignoring such ambition has frequently led to unplanned loss of qualified staff.

- We will take this issue to the University Council, as its resolution cannot be left to individual initiatives by unit managers.

**Improving teaching evaluations**

For many academic staff, education is one of their main tasks. In many schools, the teaching assessments are almost entirely based on student surveys. It is clear to us that any assessment of teaching performance cannot be solely or primarily based on student evaluations. There is convincing evidence that student evaluations are a bad proxy for teaching performance, that is how much students actually learn, and evaluations may be prone to different types of biases.

- We believe that (1) student surveys should be designed on sound scientific basis, (2) the evaluation of teaching performance should be based on a broader set of signals than student evaluations. We are currently preparing an initiative proposal for the University council on this topic.

## Excellence in Research and Teaching

TiU should excel in education and research at the international level. This requires an international perspective and a benchmarking of our practices to those of our competitors in Europe, the US, and Asia. This also requires that decision-making focusses on both core outputs without oscillating between giving priority to one and then priority to the other. Teaching quality should take the form of on-demand practical training as opposed to formalistic or bureaucratic monitoring of teachers. For teaching, research, and administration, mentoring possibilities by experienced and successful seniors should be effectively developed.

**Fundamental research is our core business**

A university is defined by the creation of knowledge through the research of its scholars, which then translates into high-level education and societal impact. The need for societal impact now sometimes seems to be overstated. Fundamental research is and remains a "must". We want to keep investing in fundamental research to make sure we can deliver excellent teaching and have societal impact. This long-term vision on the key role of fundamental research and theory-driven approach is the root of excellent scientific practice essential to our knowledge society.

Nowadays, research is too often conducted during residual time, it takes a back seat after teaching and administrative tasks. The intensification of teaching and the growth of our university has put time for fundamental research under pressure. In the past, the Executive Board promised that academics will receive at least 20% research time, but on the work floor this is not always implemented.

- We want to push for the creation of an Independent Research Council at University level representing research interests, or the appointment of a dedicated member at the Executive Board responsible for research.

**Optimized support for grant applications.**

Grants are instrumental to generate external financing while at same time increasing our international prestige and visibility. Collaboration between national and international institutions is essential. To achieve the best possible results, our researchers need time and resources while our grant support teams need access to accurate and relevant information (more lobbying, more involvement) to make sure our research staff gets a head start.

- We propose to increase the funding to the grant office for attracting second and third money.

**Internal and External Impact**

Some of the strategic initiatives at the central level of the University focus on impact and external visibility (The Tilburg Society, the Impact Program, the University Entrepreneurship program, the sustainable campus), but spillovers to education and research activities should be improved.

- We want to continue pushing for such initiatives to be explicitly linked back to our core processes.

**Teachers need to have better training options**

Effective teaching is not an innate skill. Training and access to international best practices should be available to every teacher. Teaching quality should take the form of on-demand practical training as opposed to formalistic or bureaucratic monitoring of teachers. Teachers should be able to develop their own teaching styles and receive sufficient time to experiment with teaching methods.

- Short, specialized training modules (e.g., how to interact with large audiences; how to use case studies) should be designed, taught by teachers who actually do have experience teaching at an academic level.

## Knowledge Knows No Borders

A university, by its very name, can only be international at heart. Academics, staffers, and students must find in Tilburg University (TiU) a welcoming and vibrant environment irrespective of their origin, nationality or gender. A lot still needs to be done, in particular to engage international students into student life and representation bodies or to enable employees to experience best practices at top universities abroad through sabbaticals, exchanges or job shadowing.

**Tilburg University: an inclusive community**

We are an international community. Language training should be offered (and time provided to take the courses) to both improve English and Dutch skills. International sabbatical leaves are common at top universities and foster the standing of academic staff.

- We want international sabbatical leaves to be encouraged for academics at all Schools, as they lead to new research opportunities, collaborations, further exchanges, teaching opportunities, and a stronger visibility of Tilburg University.
- Support staffers can also benefit from exposure to best practices from top international universities, in the form of short stays or job shadowing, leveraging the Erasmus Plus possibilities.

**Activating international students**

There is still insufficient cultural awareness of discrimination within our academic community. “Dutch-only” advertisements on housing sites are still common and many. Asian members of our communities felt unsafe leading up to the Corona Crisis.

- We would like to propose concrete actions to address this (1) specific protocol signed by all students organizations and housing organizations, (2) Advisory committee of international students which interacts with the Rector, (3) International social activities (e.g., Chinese new year) on campus.

## Good Governance

A university is here for the long term and decision-making should focus on it! Too many decisions are taken without a proper assessment of their likely consequences or identification of what top universities actually do. We want the management to benchmark the university against international best practices and make decisions on the basis of reliable evidence. Our internal organization (including the outcome of the BEST operation) should be periodically assessed and adjusted to avoid unnecessary bureaucracy and organize clear and efficient support. Participation bodies should be actively set-up and associated to decision-making. Only engaged leadership can inspire engaged staff, academics and support staff.

**Improve the quality of the institution**

Our University has many motivated and hard-working members with a passion for their jobs, and strong independent Schools, sometimes with well-defined profiles. However, as an organization we are not always as effective as we could be. In the past, we were plagued with a number of scandals, had at times trouble finding candidates for the position of dean or rector and made for the only Dutch university for which the quality agreements with the Government did not pass the first round. Potential synergies with JADS and TIAS remain unexploited.

- We want to work with the incoming Executive Board and the Board of Governors to address and fix those structural weaknesses.

**More active Personnel representation**

The TiU-International monitor on the Transparency of Committees and Councils shows that the agenda, documents, minutes, and regulations of Committees and Councils are often not available for the public. Several committees have insufficient candidates to fill all open positions.

- We propose that the Executive Board, in collaboration with the Deans and Directors, works towards improving the visibility and transparency of the Councils and Committees and makes the active participation by personnel representation more attractive.