



Pro Geo

POLICY PLAN

2024/25

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Prepared by the
33rd Board of Pro Geo

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Table of contents

Introduction	2
1. Improving education quality	3
a. Enhancing field-relevant digital skills and broadening intellectual horizons	3
b. Portfolio development	3
c. Protecting the international nature of the faculty	4
d. Decolonial theory	4
e. Availability of practice material	4
f. Smarter Academic Year	5
g. Programme-related costs	5
h. Late grading	5
2. Monitoring student well-being	6
a. Student support structure	6
b. Pre-master involvement	6
3. Increasing student awareness	6
a. Clarifying the role and aims of Pro Geo and PC members	6
b. Pro Geo newsletter	7
c. Online presence	7

Introduction

Dear reader,

We are honoured to present the Pro Geo 2024/25 Policy Plan, which outlines our vision for the year ahead, addressing key issues we consider relevant to the Faculty of Spatial Sciences (FSS). This Policy Plan aims to foster positive change within our Faculty, focusing on three main pillars:

1. Improving education quality,
2. Monitoring student well-being,
3. Increasing student awareness.

We are confident that this Policy Plan will enable Pro Geo to enhance the study experience in our Faculty during the 2024/25 academic year while adapting to dynamic challenges, such as budget cuts to higher education.

Warmest regards,

The 33rd Board of Pro Geo

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1. Improving education quality

a. Enhancing field-relevant digital skills and broadening intellectual horizons

Empower students with field-relevant digital skills and diverse learning opportunities to enhance career readiness and intellectual growth

A recent survey by Pro Geo revealed that many students were dissatisfied with the role digital skills play in their programme. Especially for many Spatial Planning and Design (SPD) students, the current provision of design education restricts their future options, as they need more proficiency in Adobe programmes and 3D design software.

Pro Geo will see how this issue can best be approached through brainstorming sessions with staff members to identify areas for improvement without significantly increasing the workload of lecturers. Additionally, we aim to raise awareness and accessibility of existing opportunities to improve digital skills, such as the Career Service Adobe workshops, the Geospatial Data Science minor, and the workshops that will be organised during the Career Week pilot.

At the same time, Pro Geo recognises the importance of broader intellectual opportunities alongside practical skills development. While the Honours College programme will still be offered to our Faculty students next year, funding security remains uncertain for the following years. Therefore, our goal is to ensure that students continue to have access to challenging and rewarding experiences that broaden their knowledge and skills beyond the standard curriculum. To this end, we will actively promote existing alternatives to the Honours College, such as the option to take electives from other faculties and university-wide summer schools.

b. Portfolio development

Provide students with opportunities to develop comprehensive design portfolios for enhanced master's and career prospects

Currently, students interested in pursuing a master's design programme, internships, or other professional opportunities are limited by the absence of an individual design portfolio. The emphasis on group assignments in the curriculum restricts the number of projects that could be used in a personal portfolio. Rethinking the structure of group assignments in existing design courses and incorporating additional, voluntary portfolio assignments would allow interested students to gradually build a collection of design-related projects throughout their studies. Additionally, the option of creating a standardised portfolio layout on Brightspace that students can fill in throughout the year will be explored.

To raise awareness of the importance of creating portfolios, Pro Geo will consistently promote these opportunities from the start of the programme and throughout the studies via regular announcements and reminders during design courses.

c. Protecting the international nature of the faculty

Safeguard English as the language of instruction and promote diversity in FSS programmes

Despite the Dutch government's announcement of the Internationalisation in Balance Bill (WIIB), Pro Geo, together with the staff section of the FC and the Faculty Board, is united in opposing the shift to Dutch in our Faculty's bachelor programmes. English is the language of instruction across the FSS, and Pro Geo is committed to maintaining this, as we believe it enhances career opportunities for our students both in the Netherlands and internationally. Moreover, an English-taught curriculum attracts a diverse student body, fostering cross-cultural exchanges that enhance the academic experience for everyone. We will advocate for this by promoting protests and other forms of activism related to this topic to the student body, mainly via social media.

Additionally, we will continue the previous efforts of Pro Geo to integrate international cases and examples into course curricula, ensuring that the education provided by the FSS is diverse and not solely focused on Dutch or European contexts. We will achieve this by collaborating with teaching staff to identify effective ways to incorporate diverse perspectives and examples into their courses.

d. Decolonial theory

Promote explicit teaching of decolonial theory to deepen students' understanding of global perspectives

The Netherlands has a colonial legacy, resulting in injustices still visible in the landscapes of these regions today. As an educational institution in the Netherlands, we would like to see the Faculty incorporate decolonial perspectives into its curriculums to help students critically reflect on their positionality and foster a deeper understanding of global perspectives. While some programmes already introduce students to decolonial themes, explicitly incorporating decolonial theory could further raise awareness of its significance in the field of spatial sciences.

To achieve this, we will engage with programme coordinators to discuss the relevance of decolonial theory to their respective programmes and explore how it can be integrated. Additionally, we will utilise the PCs to monitor the inclusion of decolonial theory and gather student feedback on its relevance to their studies, identifying which courses would best suit its implementation.

e. Availability of practice material

Ensure that students have sufficient practice material to prepare well for assignments or exams

Students must have sufficient practice material to effectively prepare for graded assignments or exams. To better understand the extent to which sufficient practice material is unavailable, we will monitor developments via the Programme Committees (PCs) and student feedback. We aim for every course in every programme to offer at least one voluntary mock exam that

closely resembles the actual exam. Additionally, we propose that all practical courses, such as GIS and Statistics, include at least one extra voluntary practical assignment. These assignments, designed for individual completion, could also help students develop field-relevant digital skills and provide material for inclusion in their portfolios.

f. Smarter Academic Year

Monitor the effect of the implementation of the Smarter Academic Year on students and staff within the Faculty through surveys and focus groups

The Dutch national pilot project *Smarter Academic Year* has been implemented in our Faculty this year, aiming to shorten the academic year while reducing stress and improving overall well-being. We believe this initiative should positively impact students' mental health. Pro Geo will monitor student feedback on this pilot throughout the coming year via the PCs to address any potential issues and ensure the quality of education remains high. Furthermore, Pro Geo will organise focus groups for further monitoring twice throughout the year.

g. Programme-related costs

Increase transparency and awareness of programme-related costs through improved communication

Before enrolling, prospective students should be aware of what expenditures they can expect during their studies. Next to the tuition fees, which are well-communicated, students also have to pay for trips such as the *Power of Design* and *Landscape* excursions, the Fieldwork Abroad and software (e.g. Adobe Suite). Currently, information regarding the cost of the trips is insufficiently communicated to people taking an interest in one of the programmes. To increase transparency, we seek to make this information available before enrolment. We believe that it would be best to add the estimated yearly costs to the description of the programmes on the University's website, which is accessible to all and frequently visited by those who are considering applying for one of our programmes. The PCs can also be used to monitor whether costs that were not declared well in advance arise.

h. Late grading

Monitor the status of late grading

The recurring issue of late grading has been a topic of discussion in both the PCs and the Faculty Council (FC). In general, teachers have ten working days to finish their grading. However, the grading often takes longer, and the reason why is not always communicated clearly to students. To reduce potential tensions between staff and students regarding this issue, we will continue the efforts of the 32nd Pro Geo Board and closely monitor late grading. Pro Geo will document all instances of late grading via the PCs, which will be reported to the FC.

2. Monitoring student well-being

a. Student support structure

Provide a complete overview of persons and offices for FSS students to contact in any situation

An extensive student support system is in place, but students may feel uncertain or hesitant about whom to approach. 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. The support structure overview will be available on our website and social media, as well as in the Ibn Battuta Coffee room and around the faculty. We aim to promote this Student Support Structure to all students of the FSS by placing the document on Brightspace.

b. Pre-master involvement

Ensure the proper representation of pre-master students

Pre-master students lack direct methods of communication and platforms to evaluate or comment on their pre-master programmes. We acknowledge that there is no PC for the pre-master students because the other bachelor and master PCs are evaluating their courses. However, we believe that it would also be beneficial to have a platform for the pre-master students to provide feedback about their feelings regarding the programme. In this respect, the position of pre-master representative was created and filled by one of our Board members, who will stay in close contact with the pre-masters. We will coordinate our actions with Study Advice, as they also hold responsibility for pre-master students.

We want to experiment with an open meeting and a survey for pre-master students to attend after each block. This would mirror the PC meetings but will not have the official processes in place, and contributors will not be paid. We will also create an informal online shared information point for pre-master students to add resources they are willing to share with future pre-master students in the faculty.

3. Increasing student awareness

a. Clarifying the role and aims of Pro Geo and PC members

Increase awareness of Pro Geo's goals and the role of PC members within the student body

It has come to our attention that many students are not fully aware of Pro Geo and the PCs and the scope of our work. This is a significant concern, as our primary goal is to enhance the quality of their education. With a clear understanding of who represents them and what we aim to achieve, students are more likely to voice their concerns to us and the PC members.

We have introduced several initiatives to improve awareness and understanding of Pro Geo's aims. Coffee Hours are now held every Monday, offering students an opportunity to discuss

concerns or learn more about our activities. Posters will be displayed across Faculty buildings, and efforts will be made to inform students directly about Pro Geo's role. Our social media presence will be maintained with regular Instagram posts every two weeks and active participation in Faculty events. Promotional items such as stickers will also be distributed to increase our visibility.

To ensure clear representation within the PCs, all PC members will give a lecture talk to introduce themselves and explain their roles to students. PC members will also be encouraged to host additional lecture talks and send messages in their year's WhatsApp group chats.

b. Pro Geo newsletter

Inform the FSS student body about the general updates from the Pro Geo perspective

Our presence in the FC ensures that student concerns are consistently brought to the table. Even though minutes from the FC meetings are available on the university website, many students are unaware of what the FC works on and what Pro Geo contributes. Therefore, we plan to send a newsletter highlighting Pro Geo's role in advocating for students and its achievements in improving the FSS experience. The newsletter will be shared through our website, social media platforms, and potentially via Brightspace announcements to ensure it reaches as many students as possible. Additionally, we plan to explore a collaboration with Girugten magazine to include the Pro Geo newsletter in future issues, further expanding its reach and visibility.

c. Online presence

Improve Pro Geo's online presence and have more engagement on various platforms, including contact with external parties

Considering the importance of social media and online presence, improving Pro Geo's digital presence is crucial. Currently, the main platforms used are Instagram and the website. The previous Pro Geo board has started to create a social media plan, which we will develop further. We aim to create a social media plan that would generate one post every two weeks.

Additionally, we plan to update and redesign the website to improve its layout and make it more informative. As part of these improvements, we will include a dedicated section for updates relevant to students. This section will provide regular updates on Pro Geo's initiatives and activities and important developments within the Faculty, such as the implementation of budget cuts and other changes affecting students.



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