Academic citizenship manifesto

The Maastricht Young Academy

As members of the academic community at Maastricht University we are all—staff and students alike—academic citizens. This situates each of us in a position where we are not acting in isolation, but from which we need to engage constructively with our academic community. That community is academia as a whole: our own university and partner universities, but also our department, team, collaborators, teaching group, unit, lab or research group. Throughout our careers, we will hold various positions in these communities, and collaboration and teamwork will be essential at all stages. We are connected through mentoring; academic citizens are mentored and mentor themselves, regardless of the rank they hold. Academic citizenship is therefore not about what we work on, but about how we work within the academic community.

Such an open academic community, however, is not the current reality. Far too often there is not enough psychological safety to address matters that are not right. This includes excesses, such as abusive behavior by those holding positions of power, but also an unhealthy sense of competition between researchers. The latter often leads to isolation of researchers—even if they work in the same unit—preventing collaboration and often leading to early career researchers having to choose sides between more experienced research leaders. The Recognition and

Rewards initiative[1] in the Netherlands has the potential to address many of these issues, but only when met with a concomitant change in our academic culture. The Maastricht Young Academy (MYA) embraces this change, calling for a shift in focus on what it means to have a fulfilling academic career, and for less emphasis on performance metrics or the idea that everyone must excel in all domains (research, education, leadership and impact).

The MYA considers its academic citizenship initiative important to facilitate a university-wide conversation about what it means to be a good academic citizen and to begin changing our academic culture. This includes positive changes, but also difficult conversations with those who do not demonstrate academic citizenship. For the MYA, the debate about what good academic citizenship means spans many topics. We challenge the Maastricht University academic community to discuss and work with us on five key areas:

1. Human resources

One question to be answered is if HR policy can play a positive role, for example, by fostering development or dealing with bad leadership. We see the need for a culture change in many departments/units that are stuck, especially when it comes to accountability—for junior and senior staff alike. This relates to the current initiative taken by HR on reporting points for undesireable behavior on the work floor, as well as the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) reporting point for social safety. We recognize these measures target excessively bad behavior, rather than everyday problems and subtle slights.

The MYA believes in the importance of an open and continuous conversation around best practices, as well as the very practices in need of improvement. Hiding problems is not a solution toward changing our academic culture. Recognition and Rewards offers an excellent opportunity to improve our HR policy. We are very happy to see a lot happening in different faculties in this respect, but are also worried about the inconsistency in application across

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[1] https://www.universiteitenvannederland.nl/recognitionandrewards/recognition-and-rewards/index.html

departments. *We challenge Maastricht University to develop a more inclusive HR policy in which a fulfilling career for everyone is central.*

2. Leadership

There is an urgent need to collectively work on leadership at our institution. The conversation on leadership is centered on not only investigating whether there are problems, but also addressing deficiencies. Leadership to create change requires courage—especially from those in positions of power—to address problems. It means speaking with deans and others in positions of power (such as PIs and research group leaders) to take action against bad behavior. It also means seeking support from the Executive Board to be able to take action.

We challenge Maastricht University to describe what it views as good leadership and to develop programs that foster it. The deans and the Executive Board should have a discussion on what is considered to be good leadership and then communicate this as well as take action on its basis.

As a transition toward good leadership, we believe that a part of this conversation can revolve around impact—more specifically, around the impact people wish to have and the impact they actually have. Such a positive perspective allows us to focus on awareness of the effects of actions taken by those in leadership positions, not only those with positional power. This feeds back into the issue of human resources addressed above. Proper HR management will mean a university-wide discussion, at all levels, about (career) development. This does not have to be punitive, but rather should be developmental in nature.

3. Service

Academic citizenship includes doing work for others. In fact, service is what makes our institution function. Not recognizing this is part of why many of us feel underappreciated. Because this service work is not explicitly recognized, there is insufficient incentive for many to take on these roles. Thus, not all members of our community are equally committed to take on these roles. As a result, service roles are unequally distributed, often along gendered lines (still).

In our view, service involves helping others with their work (including research and education) ad hoc or in a more structured manner. It can also include personal support when a colleague or student is going through difficult times, which also concerns mentoring (see below).

We challenge Maastricht University to draft and implement policy that explicitly values, recognizes and rewards service roles as a part of our everyday work. This includes a better understanding of the (often invisible) service roles. For example, in some universities there is explicit policy on 'pastoral care' for students, or for recommendations and peer review given to colleagues and students.

4. Community

Academic citizenship means recognizing that we carry out our work within a community and that our own behavior has an effect on those around us. We seek a culture in which we can talk to each other about the effects of our behavior.

We challenge Maastricht University to work on its sense of community and to develop an explicit policy on how to foster a community that provides a healthy and stimulating work environment. This includes incorporating community in performance evaluations as a part of the fulfilling career, in recognition of work and service (see above), and to assist in retention of staff at our institution.

5. Mentoring

Mentoring, in the widest sense of the word, offers us a platform to speak about what we do for others. This does not only concern staff mentoring students, but especially includes mentoring colleagues in whatever capacity. It means recognizing that everyone, whether you are a student or a dean, can benefit from mentoring. It also means that mentoring is a two-way conversation. There is no need to define a mentor and a mentee. Instead, mentoring is a relationship in which both persons learn from each other.

Mentoring is part of our academic community and is part of the space we take within it. It is both a specific form of service as well as a self-standing activity. Good mentorship relationships are not technically administrated, but arise in a

community where there is psychological safety, good leadership, and where service is accepted and normalized in a healthy way. Moreover, good mentorship arises from altruistic relationships, in which competition is suspended or afforded less importance. The struggle for resources that too often is a current reality must not be an excuse for the appreciation and assistance of others.

We challenge Maastricht University to put mentoring at the center of its staff development policy. MYA hosts Growing Up in Science (GUS) events on mentoring and offers starting points to talk more about what is considered to be good and bad mentoring within our organization, as well as to provide a platform for the development of good mentoring. This also connects to the HR and leadership points above; new academic appointments should be introduced with a conversation about what kind of guidance new staff members need in terms of mentoring and/or coaching.

Toward academic citizenship

Academic citizenship provides a vocabulary to have conversations about what we expect of ourselves and of those around us. Recognizing academic citizenship as the central aspect around which we organize ourselves in academia will require a significant culture change. The MYA welcomes the Recognition and Rewards policy initiative that also seeks to change academic culture, nationally and internationally. We see this culture change as an open and inclusive movement toward a new way of carrying out our work, relating to our colleagues, and helping others in our academic community. This specifically includes students and staff, from the most junior to the most senior.

Together, we make up the academic community in which we function, each of us as an academic citizen with our own unique profile and talents. Together, we strive for an open and inclusive community in which we feel welcome, supported and especially encouraged to develop ourselves.

Author biography

MYA is a platform for early career academics at Maastricht University to amplify their concerns, opinions, and ideas on important issues affecting their work. MYA consists of academic staff members who are within 10 years of completing their PhD (with extensions for parental, caring, and other leave). For more information see: https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/research/maastricht-young-academy