

CampusInsight

INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF K.U. LEUVEN | APRIL 2009 | WWW.KULEUVEN.BE/CI/

PATRON SAINT'S DAY

Honorary doctor Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im with promoter Marie-Claire Foblets at his side.

[INTERVIEWS ON PAGE 3]

KATHOLIEKE UNIVERSITEIT
LEUVEN

Research

Leuven geneticists discover switch to turn cancer on and off

PERSPECTIVES FOR NEW TREATMENT

LUC WEST

In collaboration with American colleagues, Wouter BOSSUYT from the VIB Laboratory for Neurogenetics headed by Bassem HASSAN, has discovered how a particular gene causes cancer of the large intestine, or colon.

The cancer develops when the gene is switched off. If the gene is switched back on again, the cancer stops growing and the malignant cells disappear. The experiment was successful in 'in vitro' human cancer cells in cell cultures in the laboratory. The next step is to investigate whether the gene can be

switched on again 'in vivo', in intestinal cancer patients themselves.

Each gene carries information about a specific hereditary characteristic. In effect, genes are switches, they can either be 'on' or 'off' and this determines the course of processes in the cells. The so-called 'atonal' genes

guide the process of cell differentiation. In a manner of speaking, these are the main switches: if they are 'on', they ensure that cells develop into specific types of cells, such as skin cells, nerve cells, bone cells, liver cells, brain cells, etc. and that their separation is controlled. Cancer cells are cells that are less differentiated. They have no specific function and their separation is uncontrolled: thus, they proliferate rampantly. That is how tumours come into existence. Until now, however, it has been unclear whether the loss of differentiation was a cause or a consequence of tumours.

Wouter Bossuyt and Bassem Hassan have demonstrated that a tumour can indeed be one of the consequences of a lack of differentiation. They have succeeded in doing this in the cells of fruit flies, mice and even humans. In the fruit fly, they demonstrated that switching the 'atonal' gene of the eye off, causes cancer of the eye. When they switched the 'atonal' gene on again, the uncontrolled cell separation stopped and the undifferentiated cells died. Not only did the tumour stop growing, it simply disappeared.

In the cells of mice and humans they concentrated on the human variant of the 'atonal'

gene, ATOH1. This gene is involved in the development of two types of cancer: Merkel cell carcinoma, an aggressive skin cancer which is rare and cancer of the large intestine, which is much more common. In the large intestine, ATOH1 causes cells to specialise into slime cells in the intestinal wall.

What did they discover? When ATOH1 is switched off in the large intestine of mice, the cells form polyps and the mice develop cancer of the large intestine. The researchers also discovered that frequently, ATOH1 does not work in humans who suffer from cancer of the large intestine. Thus, Bossuyt and Hassan are the first to prove that there is a connection between the functioning of 'atonal' genes and the development of tumours.

Furthermore, for clinical applications, it is of equal importance that they have succeeded in reactivating an ATOH1 gene that was switched off and that they did so using a fairly simple chemical substance. Now that they have achieved this in human cell cultures in a laboratory, it is very possible that they have paved the way to a cure for intestinal cancer.

A tumour can indeed be one of the consequences of a lack of cell differentiation.

Online
<http://med.kuleuven.be/cme-mg/>

Cover image (© Rob Stevens)

Research

Largest PRIVATE DONATION ever supports research into uterine cancer

[PAGE 4]

Education

K.U.Leuven and Ghent University launch MASTER OF SPACE STUDIES

[PAGE 5]

Alumni

Chairman FRANS VAN DAELE plans to develop network of international alumni

[PAGE 7]

Address
 Campus Insight
 Communications Office
 Oude Markt 13 - bus 5005
 3000 Leuven
 Belgium
 phone +32 16 32 40 13
 fax +32 16 32 40 14
 campusinsight@kuleuven.be
 www.kuleuven.ac.be/ci/

Editor-in-chief
 Reiner Van Hove

Contributors
 Tine Bergen, Régis Duqué,
 Ann Franssen, Ines Minten,
 Wim Troch, Benedict
 Vanclooster, Luc West

Translators
 English: John Arblaster
 Español: Joaquín J. Sánchez
 Gázquez

Design
 Catapult

Layout
 Wouter Verbeylen

Photography
 Rob Stevens

Circulation
 14.000 copies

Print
 Drukkerij Van der Poorten

Publisher
 Ronny Vandenbroele
 Oude Markt 13 - bus 5005
 3000 Leuven

Copyright
 Articles from this edition
 may be used only
 with permission
 of the publisher.

Subscription
 K.U.Leuven alumni
 can ask for their free
 copy by phoning,
 faxing, or mailing
 (address: see above).
 If you would like
 to contribute financially
 to the alumni association
 Alumni Lovanienses
 International,
 you can transfer your
 gift to bank account
 000-0136526-47
 (IBAN BE 22 0000
 1365 2647) of Alumni
 Lovanienses,
 Naamsestraat 63,
 3000 Leuven.

If you no longer wish to
 receive Campus Insight, or
 if you prefer to exchange
 your hard copy for the on-
 line version, please notify
 the editor.



DEAR READER

The magazine you are holding is celebrating its tenth anniversary and its 25th edition. Reason enough, in our opinion, to treat ourselves – and you – to a new title and a new lay-out. In the first issue of *Campuskrant International*, which appeared in June 1999, ‘Emphasis on Insight’ was the subtitle of an article about a new Master’s programme. Now, ten years later, we have promoted the word ‘insight’ and henceforth, it will adorn the cover of the magazine in large letters. It is a well-deserved promotion, seeing as the new title accurately covers the content of the magazine: we not only want to provide you with an overview of everything that takes place on the campuses of our university, we want to offer you real insight into it.

We would also like to receive more insight into you, dear reader. As evidence of this commitment, you will find our new column *Leuven Favourites* a few centimetres below this introduction. This feature gives you the opportunity to express your appreciation for whatever aspect of Leuven attracts you most. In addition, we invite you to send us all your contributions, ideas and suggestions. Do you have plans, as our interviewee in *500 words* does, to found an alumni association? Are you so enthusiastic about your research discoveries that you want to shout about them from the rooftops; or better yet, from these pages? Is your student association organising an event that might get our photographer nominated for a World Press Photo Award? Let us know because after all, this is your paper.

Without further ado, I encourage you to discover *Campus Insight*. We are very enthusiastic about it and look forward to hearing your reactions!

Professor Mart Buekers
Vice-President International Policy



Leuven Favourites

Arenberg Park

REINER VAN HOVE

“I would describe the Arenberg Park as heaven on earth, a perfect picture, a place enjoyed by all.” Bachaspatimayum DEBKUMARI does not shy away from using superlatives to describe her favourite place in Leuven.

We understood her choice perfectly when we discovered where she is from: “I grew up in Manipur, a small province in north-east India. It is one of the top biodiversity hotspots in the world, with incredibly rich, unblemished flora and fauna. For example, you can find an enormous variety of orchids in the tropical forests. It is important to me to feel connected to Mother Nature regularly and that is something I can do at Arenberg Park.”

However, the castle in the park is also part of the attraction: “I first came to Leuven as a research student in January 2005. When I saw the Castle of Arenberg, I was immediately transported back to my childhood. As a child, I read many European fairy tales about witches and princesses and when I saw the castle it was as though I was looking at a picture from one of my old storybooks.”

Now, in 2009, the fairy tale has become a reality: Debkumari’s office at the Faculty of Bioscience Engineering is located in the enchanting setting of Arenberg Park. “I returned to Leuven to do a PhD in September 2007. I research the swarming behaviour of *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, a common bacterium which can cause disease in animals and humans. Sometimes my experiments don’t go as I had hoped, which can make my job quite stressful. On those occasions, it is wonderful to be able to go for a walk or a bike ride through the park. I love cycling, which is something you can hardly ever do in India.”

“Of course the park is at its most pleasant in the summer, but I enjoy being there in any weather, as long as it is not raining too hard. Sometimes I take a book and read it while lying on the grass, or I arrange to meet friends there to eat and relax. My favourite place in the park



(© Rob Stevens)

is at a little bridge close to the castle, where you can hear the babbling of the river and also admire the graceful movements of the swans.”

Tell us about your favourite aspect – professor, place, culinary specialty... – of Leuven (max. 400 words). The best entry will be published in the next issue and its author will win a beautiful etching of a university location. E-mail your ‘favourite’ to campusinsight@kuleuven.be

RECTORAL ELECTIONS

In May, K.U.Leuven will elect a rector for the 2009-2013 term of office. Four candidates have received the required number of nomination votes and have accepted their candidature. In alphabetical order, they are professors Koen GEENS (Faculty of Law), Bernard HIMPENS (Faculty of Medicine), Stefaan POEDTS (Faculty of Science) and Mark WAER (Faculty of Medicine).

The first ballot will take place on 5 May. If none of the candidates receives the required majority, a second ballot will take place on 8 May and a possible third ballot will take place on 12 May. The winner of the elections will have until 9 July to select his team of vice-rectors. On that day, the Special University Council will meet to discuss the proposed Executive Board and to recommend its members to the Board of Trustees, who will appoint them officially. The new team will take office on 1 August.

Online
<http://www.kuleuven.be/rectorverkiezing/en/>

BOLOGNA@ K.U.LEUVEN

The Bologna Process, which began in June 1999, has radically changed European higher education. The aim of the process is to develop a fully fledged European higher education area. The realization of this goal continues to demand concerted efforts. Now, ten years after 31 ministers responsible for higher education signed the Bologna declaration and thus structurally reformed European higher education, a new ministerial conference will take place in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve.

On 27, 28 and 29 April, the Benelux ministers Frank Vandembroucke, Marie-Dominique Simonet, Ronald Plasterk and François Biltgen will invite their European colleagues from the 46 countries participating in the Bologna Process, to chart the course of the next 10 years.

K.U.Leuven and UCL are honoured to have been chosen to host this important conference. The choice to hold the conference at these two universities is a symbolic one; it will highlight the substantial role that the academic community plays in achieving the goals of the Bologna Process.

In Leuven, the Central University Library will be converted into a conference centre for a few days. Public areas such as the large and small reading rooms, the reception area and the East-Asian Library, will become temporary conference halls.

In the context of the Bologna Conference, an exhibition entitled ‘Leuven, city of innovation’ will run from 27 to 29 April at the European Parliament in Brussels. It is an initiative of Saïd El Khadraoui, MEP and is a collaboration of the city of Leuven, K.U.Leuven and Imec. The exhibition is intended to attract the 785 members of parliament and 8000 members of staff employed by the European Parliament.

Online
<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna>

Honorary doctors 2009

Each year, K.U.Leuven confers honorary doctorates on persons of exceptional scientific, social or cultural merit. K.U.Leuven and UCL decided to celebrate their Patron's Feast together in 2009 and to confer the distinctions jointly. The two institutions chose the theme 'multiculturalism, interculturalism and diversity'. The four eminent persons below received the title of doctor honoris causa from K.U.Leuven and UCL on 2 February. Marjane Satrapi was unable to attend the ceremony due to illness and Sari Nusseibeh did not consider his presence at a joyful celebration to be appropriate in light of the situation in Gaza.

"HOSPITALITY AS A POLITICAL POSITION"

The Italian Jesuit Paolo DALL'OGGIO is committed to dialogue between Christians and Muslims.



(© Rob Stevens)

In 1992, Paolo Dall'Oglio founded an ecumenical community in the long abandoned monastery of Mar Musa el-Habashi in Damascus, Syria. The residents of the monastery work to create a positive relationship between Islam and Christianity.

Dall'Oglio: "I had visited the monastery for the first time ten years earlier. At that time, there were three priorities in my life. I wanted to strive for a spiritual life, rooted in both the Islamic and Christian traditions. Besides this, I considered simplicity to be the answer to the question of poverty within the Catholic Church and as the answer to consumerism, which is currently a very real global problem. The third and final priority was hospitality. In the Bible and the Koran, Abraham is considered to be the father of hospitality, which elevates hospitality to the status of a very important virtue both in the Christian and Islamic traditions. At the monastery, we also consider hospitality to be a political position."

"I often hear young people complaining

about how impossible they find it to believe in a religion, precisely because the various religions are at loggerheads with one another. That is why young people find themselves attracted to our monastery, where actual inter-religious encounters do take place and where, every day, we try to build an intercultural Arabic-Christian community. The way we live is meaningful to young people, who are often very concerned with the way in which their societies deal with the arrival and integration of different cultures." (im)

Online

Read the full interview at <http://www.kuleuven.be/ci/>

"I BELIEVE IN POLITICAL MIRACLES"

Professor Sari NUSSEIBEH is well-known for his views on peace and dialogue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



Professor Nusseibeh is rector of Al-Quds University in Jerusalem. He felt that it was inappropriate to personally attend a festive ceremony held in his honour at a time when his people were suffering from the cruelties of the war in the Gaza Strip, which was raging at the time. He sent a moving video statement, which was shown during the ceremony.

"I believe in political miracles", Nusseibeh said in the statement. "I believe that we, as miracle makers, can plot out a better world for ourselves. Foreseeing the worst of possible worlds can be an incentive for us to create the best of those worlds."

"What is needed most urgently is not humanitarian aid or grand plans for rebuilding Gaza, but a political and infrastructural solution. We should all concentrate our efforts on ending the occupation – whether Israel likes it or not – thus allowing for the emergence of a small but free Palestine – whether the Palestinians like it or not."

"As a university president, I have resisted

all calls for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions and individuals in the recent past. Today however, I believe the circumstances have changed and I would like to extend an invitation to all civil society institutions, in Palestine or abroad, to place a six-month moratorium on all new 'routine' or normal co-operative activities with Israeli institutions or individuals. Not as a punitive measure, but as a rallying cry for all concerned to pressure the Israeli Government into committing itself to a timetable for ending the occupation in return for a full peace treaty with its Palestinian neighbour." (Im)

Online

Watch the video statement at <http://www.kuleuven.be/ci/>

"HUMAN RIGHTS BEGIN AT HOME"

Professor Abdullahi Ahmed AN-NA`IM is internationally recognised as an expert on human rights in Islam.



(© Rob Stevens)

An-Na'im has been connected to the Faculty of Law at Emory University in Atlanta since 1995. "I do not believe that Islam's perspective on human rights is any more problematic than that of any other religion", he tells us from his home in Sudan.

"An incorrect image has been formed in this regard", An-Na'im says. "This is a result of the fact that almost all the African and Asian countries of which the majority of the population is Muslim – more than fifty countries in total – were colonies of European superpowers, in some cases for centuries. A great many problems arose in the post-colonial context as a result of general underdevelopment: lack of education, poverty, political instability and cultural conservatism. Another recent cause of the misconceptions concerning Islam and human rights is the emergence, since the 70's, of militant Islamic factions in the Middle East and Southern-Asia, who want to establish Islamic states to strengthen sharia."

"The central question however, does not concern religion in its abstract form, but how the religious faithful understand and practice

their particular religion. Islam itself is not in need of reform; we must reform the ways in which it is interpreted by Muslims today."

"The guiding principles should be equality for women and non-Muslims, freedom of religion and faith and the cessation of violent jihad. These principles should not only be introduced into the constitution, but must be part of daily interaction between Muslims and others: Muslims and non-Muslims, men and women. Further still, human rights must first be respected at home before we can expect them to be defended legally by the state." (bvc)

Online

Read the full interview at <http://www.kuleuven.be/ci/>

"I DO NOT BELIEVE IN A CULTURE CLASH"

Marjane SATRAPI is an Iranian-French illustrator and graphic novelist.



(© Belga Pictures)

The first volume of Satrapi's *Persepolis* appeared in 2000. In this graphic novel, she humorously tells the story of her youth in Iran, of the revolution in 1979 and the gradual introduction of the Islamic republic, of the war with Iraq and its consequences for the daily lives of Iranians and of her exile in Austria, her return to Iran and her final, definitive departure for France.

Persepolis is often described as being autobiographical, but Satrapi does not like this description: "It makes me think of people who write books about the problems they have with their environment, their friends and their sexuality. I wanted to recount the lives of ordinary people who were confronted with the political changes. There is a lot more to Iran than Scheherazade and religious fanatics. I wanted to show what was happening behind closed doors, in people's houses."

"If you forget that people listen to music and love eating ice creams, you dehumanise them. They become an abstract concept. If that happens, you can call them whatever you want – fundamentalists or fanatics – and drop bombs on their heads. What I want to demonstrate is that an individual stays an individual, regardless of where he or she is and that I can

identify with him or her regardless of the context."

Does Satrapi consider her double identity to be a blessing? "I do not believe in a culture clash. When I was young, I thought things had to be either one way or the other. I do not think that anymore. I always say that I'm sitting on two chairs. It may not be very comfortable, but when I want to stretch out, I can. Those who only have one single identity, only have one single chair. They may be able to sit more comfortably, but they can't lie down. I always say: 'The more chairs you have, the better.'" (rd)

Online

Read the full interview at <http://www.kuleuven.be/ci/>



At the far end of the table: rector Marc Vervenne. Seated on his left: Luc Verelst, Frederic Amant and Ignace Vergote.
(© Rob Stevens)

New fund brings uterine cancer into the limelight

LARGEST PRIVATE DONATION EVER

BENEDICT VANCLOOSTER

Uterine cancer is the fourth most common cancer among women in Belgium. Despite this fact, 'only' 1,350 cases a year have not managed to convince large pharmaceutical companies to invest in research into this 'forgotten' cancer. Donor Luc VERELST is remedying this situation by establishing a fund and a research chair.

Thirty years ago, Luc Verelst, a bio-engineer, founded his own construction company, which grew into a very successful venture. Currently, the company's turnover is approximately 130 million euros in Belgium. In 1999, Verelst sold his shares, distanced himself from the daily management of the company and moved to Switzerland. "Success and status are transitory and increasingly, I am able to put them into perspective", Verelst tells us. "Health, happiness with your family and being able to live as you are, those are the greatest treasures."

In the past months, Verelst has subscribed to this philosophy more than ever. His main priority at the moment is his sister, who has been diagnosed with uterine cancer. "The diagnosis was like a bolt from the blue. After all, the word 'cancer' in a diagnosis is equated with a death sentence by most people. But this need not necessarily be the case."

Lately, Verelst has steeped himself in scientific literature about uterine cancer and has engaged in discussions with doctors and specialists from the medical sector. His conclusion is very clear: "Nowhere did I find an unequivocal answer to the question of what the best method of treatment is. There is a pressing need for further research and it is high time to bring expertise from across the globe together."

It is not in his nature to waste time and so Verelst has founded and personally financed the Verelst Uterine Cancer Fund Leuven, which operates with a starting capital of 1,250,000 euros – the largest private donation the K.U.Leuven has ever received. Part of the money will be used to establish a chair for research into new treatments of uterine cancer. Professors Frederic AMANT and Ignace VERGOTE, who treat Verelst's sister, have been appointed to the chair.

"The research of the fund and chair is focused on uterine cancer", Professor Vergote tells us. "This type of cancer occurs more frequently than cervical cancer, against which more effective preventive measures can be taken. Despite this fact, uterine cancer has received almost no attention from pharmaceutical companies. Their reasoning is based on market shares and potential return. Breast cancer is the third most frequent cancer among women and prostate cancer is the third most frequent among men. Based on these figures, the pharmaceutical industry's calculations are quickly made. It is very frustrating that very often we have to combat certain types of cancer using old methods, even when those cancers are just as deadly and

sometimes deadlier than other types of cancer that receive a lot more attention."

The first stage of research will focus on one particular molecule: anti-PIGF or Placental Growth Factor, an antibody developed by Professor Peter Carmeliet's research team in cooperation with ThromboGenics, a Flemish bio-technology company. It has been discovered that anti-PIGF inhibits the growth of a number of tumours without damaging the healthy cells. The substance is still being tested, however. ThromboGenics tests this molecule on the most common types of tumours.

"The power of the economy threatened to exclude uterine cancer and other types of gynaecological tumours from the planned experiments", Professor Amant tells us. "Luckily, thanks to Mister Verelst's donation, we can subvert this power. It is our intention to participate in the experiments and to carry out the tests with anti-PIGF on uterine tumours as well."

The research that has been made possible by the Verelst Uterine Cancer Fund Leuven will take place in the context of the revolutionary development that is currently taking place in oncological therapy. "Molecular-oriented therapies are becoming increasingly prevalent", Vergote explains. "On the other hand, research into new chemotherapies is becoming increasingly uncommon. Classical chemotherapy kills all the cells that separate quickly. You could compare it to an atomic bomb. Molecular-oriented therapies only destroy the cancer cells that display certain molecular characteristics, which normal cells do not display, or only display to a much lesser extent."

It is Luc Verelst's dream, a dream he shares with the scientists involved, to develop improved methods of treatment for uterine cancer by means of the fund and the research chair. "We hope to be able to use the new molecules to cure more people and/or to ensure they live longer. We have not reached our goal yet, but we are moving in the same direction as the treatment of HIV. In some cases of advanced cancer we are increasingly managing to extend the lives of patients and to make cancer more of a chronic disease. The development of new products with as few side effects as possible is particularly crucial in this regard", Professor Amant concludes.

For more information

Send an e-mail to Isabel.Penne@rec.kuleuven.be

INSULIN SAVES CHILDREN'S LIVES

Children admitted to intensive care units often have increased blood sugar levels. This has long been considered to be a favourable reaction to illness and stress. Supposedly, the body produces the sugar to use it as fuel for the brain and the immune system. However, it has become apparent that high blood sugar levels can also have harmful effects. They increase the risk of infections, damage to organs and death.

Professor Greet VAN DEN BERGHE's research team monitored 700 critically ill young patients at the Department for Intensive Medicine of the University Hospitals, Campus Gasthuisberg. The patients either received an insulin treatment to keep their blood sugar level at a normal value for their age, or the increased blood sugar levels were left as they were. It appeared that the children who received the intensive insulin treatment were twice as likely to survive, despite their blood sugar levels sometimes dropping below the normal value. They also suffered fewer infections, less damage to the heart and they were allowed to leave intensive care slightly earlier. A follow-up investigation is intended to discover what the effects of the intensive insulin treatment are in the long term.

COLDNESS DETECTOR

From cool to ice-cold, our bodies are equipped to assess any decrease in temperature in our surroundings very accurately. If we are in an extremely cold environment, we feel a severe pain signal that serves to warn us about frost injuries.

Researchers at Leuven's Laboratory for Ion Channel Research have identified the protein that is responsible for making us feel this pain. The protein involved is called TRPA1, which forms an ion channel: a microscopic sluice through which charged particles can flow in or out of the cell. The researchers demonstrated that TRPA1 functions as a detector for extreme coldness in nociceptors, the nerves that are responsible for the sensation of pain. If the temperature in the nociceptors drops below 15 degrees, TRPA1 activates. This leads to an electrical signal that is transmitted via the nerve axon (or channel) to the brain and causes a pain reflex. Medications that influence the functioning of TRPA1 could be used for the treatment of painful oversensitivity to cold, such as in cases of nerve damage, infection or tooth decay.

Master of Space Studies ready for lift-off

THE RIGHT COMBINATION AT THE RIGHT TIME

TINE BERGEN

As of next academic year, K.U.Leuven and Ghent University will offer a Master's of Space Studies; a one-year programme about space travel and space research. The Master's is the first of its kind in Europe and will be taught in English. Students graduating from this programme will not be astronauts, but masters with a thorough knowledge of space travel. "It is an interdisciplinary programme, rooted in a broad academic framework," Professor Christoffel Waelkens, one of the founders of the programme, tells us.

"Society is concerned with space travel on various levels," Waelkens adds. "Everyone spontaneously thinks either of the technology that is constantly being developed for it or of the scientific research that is carried out, but one must also consider the developments in telecommunication, Earth observation and climate studies. Defensive policy and other policy issues are also important factors. Take agricultural policy for example. From space, it is possible to track precisely which crops are being cultivated and how they are developing. In short, space travel has an enormous impact on the world and this impact must also be regulated. The European Union will only be significant in the world if it holds its ground with respect to space travel."

Consequently, there is a great need for highly trained specialists, who know the field of space travel. Waelkens: "All the more so because the 'generation of pioneers' is disappearing slowly. The field of space travel needs engineers, but those engineers need to be trained in management as well, for example. Conversely, it is important that policymakers know which techniques exist so they know what is possible and what is not. It is this interdisciplinary approach that defines the uniqueness of our programme, as well as the broader academic environment in which the programme is rooted. For example, I am not only an astronomer with respect to space travel. Professor Jan Wouters is specialised in international law and considers the European Space Agency to be an international institution with an individual character, in the broader context of international law."

"We are convinced that the students we are looking for could come from every possible sector, though their background would have to consist of the right combination of elements. For example, humanities students who are not afraid of formulas or engineers who are aware of the fact that they should also understand social issues. Besides the 'basics', which all students are taught, the students are permitted to choose a legal, scientific

or technological specialisation, depending on their field of expertise."

The programme is an unsubsidised advanced master's programme. Waelkens: "But it is a programme that equips the students for fairly high-level careers and from this perspective, the expensive enrolment fee of 5600 Euros is a good investment. The sector also provides a lot of sponsoring in kind. For example, the industry provides topics for Master's theses and experts who come to teach."

"The pioneers of the first generation are also involved in the programme. After all, they do not only have expertise, but connections as well. ESA has also promised to send people. As a result, we can offer our students an immensely rich and varied programme. We hope the government will also provide sponsoring through scholarships, for example. Ultimately, our aims are also theirs."

The programme originated and developed at the Interdisciplinary Centre for Space Studies (ICSS). Waelkens: "This centre was founded in response to the fact that we were all concerned with space travel within our own fields of expertise, but that we didn't really communicate with our colleagues who were researching space travel from other perspectives. We are currently trying to combine all this expertise in the ICSS. It is when you speak to one another that ideas take on new forms. Moreover, in my experience, the best way to learn from one another is by teaching your own material."

"In the meantime, the Master of Space Studies has found its own way and LASA, the Leuven Centre for Aeronautics and Space, Science and Applications, has developed out of the ICSS. Projects based on the co-operation of various disciplines are central at LASA as well. For example, we are currently collaborating with the engineers who make our instruments. Not only do we test them and design software to use them, we have now reached the point where we participate in designing and devel-



Christoffel Waelkens (© Rob Stevens)

oping them. As a result, we are an interface between the scientific world and the industry."

The Master of Space Studies is not the best option for people who want to become astronauts. Waelkens: "But it may help. Astronauts are trained very thoroughly and of course we hope that ESA will also send them to us to participate in our programme, because it will certainly be enriching for them."

"I don't feel the urge to travel into space personally. There are so many places on Earth that I will never see and the cost-benefit analysis would not be advantageous to me either. Manned space travel is incredibly expensive and current technology is so advanced that I am able to look at beautiful images from space without having to travel there myself. Understanding the cosmos is what directs my life, though the Earth itself is perhaps the most wonderful thing in the whole universe."

"Space travel primarily causes technological developments, but on a broader social scale, its most important contribution is the image of the Earth it has given us. We had to travel into space to be able to see what a fantastic Earth we inhabit."

Online

<http://www.kuleuven.be/EMASPACE>

Space Research

MARS PROJECT

Professor André AUBERT and his colleague Dr. Bart VERHEYDEN of the Department of Experimental Cardiology research the effects of a journey into space on the heart and blood vessels. The research team is taking part in the Mars Project in Moscow, which started on 27 March.

Aubert: "We already know what the effects are of a journey into space on the heart and blood vessels and we also have sufficient exercises to counteract those effects. Simply put, our heart is controlled by our brain, which is accustomed to gravity here on earth. In space, there is no gravity and the brain starts transmitting incorrect information. The results of this are, for example, that our bones become more brittle and that the heart has to adjust. In a certain sense, you could compare it to the normal symptoms of ageing, except that we have techniques to make these harmful effects disappear after one has returned from space."

"The Mars Project consists of six people of differing nationalities living together in a large enclosed space, similar to a submarine,



Inside the Mars-500 'spaceship' (© ESA)

for 500 days; the time it takes to travel to Mars. We consciously chose a multicultural group, because this causes more stress. The effect of stress on our cardiovascular system is precisely what I intend to research in this project. Our body is a composite whole and I want to discover what effect a psychological aspect such as stress might have on the heart and blood vessels. Though this project is a simulation, it is relevant to the next flight of the Belgian astronaut Frank de Winne. After all, he will be the commander of a long haul flight with six people of differing nationalities on board." (tb)

SEISMOLOGY OF THE STARS

Professor Conny AERTS' team from the Department of Astronomy carries out seismological research of the stars. "By examining a star's oscillations, we discover more about its core and it is the core of a star that actually directs its entire life. The stars, in their turn, direct

life in the universe. We have been using this method since 2001, when we discovered that the oscillations we can see in the sun appear in other stars too. Previously, our technologies were simply not good enough to measure the oscillations."

"We are interested in heavy stars because they will explode as supernovas and in giant red stars because our sun will become a red giant too. The sun is five billion years old now, so it has reached the middle of its life approximately. If we collect information about other red giants, it will be much easier to predict when exactly the sun will die and become a red giant."

"Until recently, we did not even know if there were oscillations in red giants. Thanks to the European CoRoT satellite, we can analyse information about hundreds of stars. The NASA Kepler satellite was launched at the beginning of March. It will collect similar information about approximately one thousand stars."

Leuven's asteroseismology team is part of the Kepler Asteroseismic Science Consortium (KASC), which is composed of more than 200 researchers from 50 institutes. The consortium will endeavour to discover new properties of stellar cores with unprecedented precision from the data that has been collected. Aerts: "We will have to be patient though. It will take five years for the information to be ready for analysis." (tb)

K.U.Leuven co-operates in European exchange programme with India

INDIAN STUDENTS INCREASINGLY PREFER EUROPE

WIM TROCH

Thanks to the *Erasmus Mundus External Co-operation Window* project, students and academic staff from across the world are given the opportunity to study and to work at European universities and vice versa. K.U.Leuven was already participating in a project with Russia, but is now also actively co-operating with India. In January, representatives of the universities involved and of the European Commission met in Leuven to make definitive arrangements concerning the concrete organisation of mobility.

"The primary aim of this specific project is to strengthen the ties between India and the European Union," Dr. Sidsel HANSSON of Lund Universitet (Sweden), the co-ordinator of the project, tells us. "We want to create awareness in India concerning the European Union and more specifically, European education. Twelve European and eight Indian universities are co-operating on the project. Thanks to this exchange project, a total of more than 300 students, doctoral students, post-doctoral researchers and academic staff members will travel to Europe from India. But one of the exceptional aspects of this project is that approximately one hundred students and researchers will also travel to India from Europe."

"Until the 70's, the tendency of Indians who were given the opportunity to study abroad was to go to the United Kingdom. Later, the United States became a popular destination, but now people are increasingly favouring Europe," Professor Narendra JADHAV, the representative of the Indian University of Pune, adds. An Huts, head of the International Policy Unit at K.U.Leuven, agrees completely: "Leuven has a long tradition of students from India. There are currently approximately 180 students from India in Leuven. But the number of staff members and students who travel to India from Leuven is rather limited."

This will be changing shortly. Hansson:

"When students and researchers spread across the world, knowledge spreads too."

SIDSEL HANSSON

"Thanks to the *Erasmus Mundus External Co-operation Window*, the whole world can become acquainted with European education, but we can also get to know the rest of the world. Currently, there are active projects with a number of countries in Asia, Africa, Latin-America, etc. This increases mobility between universities across the globe. When students and researchers spread across the world, knowledge spreads too."

Huts: "During the meeting in Leuven, we established the selection of students and researchers from India. The first students and researchers departed for their new universities in March and the aim is to ensure that everybody reaches their destination by 1st September 2009."

Jadhav: "Our university already co-operates with a number of European universities, but this exchange offers our students a unique opportunity to have an extraordinary experience." Hansson: "Perhaps this is also the ideal occasion to point out that the Indian universities attain a very high level. The high quality of Indian universities is not necessarily very well known in Europe, but it is a fact. The universities are organised based on the British system and are thus entirely compatible with European universities. This project really is a fantastic opportunity for everyone concerned."

"This programme will give K.U.Leuven the opportunity to welcome 30 students and staff



The first EMECW students from India are welcomed by their supervisors and the International Office staff.

members from renowned Indian universities to Leuven each year and to allow its own students and staff to travel to India for a certain period of time. In February, a second call was made encouraging applications from European students and staff members who would like to go to India. They will depart for their new universities before August 2009," Huts concludes.

The Indian consortium members are the University of Delhi, University of Pune,

University of Kerala, Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, TATA Institute of Social Sciences, Pravara Institute of Medical Sciences, Jadavpur University (Kolkata) and Anand Agricultural University.

Online

<http://www.erasmuswindow15.org>

More information about the Erasmus Mundus project with Russia can be found on: <http://www.utu.fi/iii>

En Español

"Los estudiantes belgas pueden aprender mucho de nosotros"

NUEVA COLABORACIÓN INSTITUCIONAL CON UNIVERSIDAD PERUANA

ANN FRANSEN

Encontrar "a su media naranja". Éste era el cometido principal de la delegación peruana de la UNALM (Universidad Nacional Agraria La Molina), que aterrizó en Bélgica a principios de marzo. Nada más llegar, los peruanos se mostraron entusiasmados con Lovaina.

La visita de la delegación peruana se produce en el marco de la colaboración interuniversitaria entre la UNALM y las universidades flamencas, bajo la coordinación de la K.U.Leuven. El programa está compuesto por siete proyectos, unificados en tres grupos: "Estudio de la gestión sostenible de agroecosistemas"; "Formación"; y "Fomento institucional de la capacidad y desarrollo de infraestructuras". Durante las actividades de casamiento, cada uno de los siete jefes de proyecto peruanos salieron en busca de su "media naranja" en Bélgica. El programa, cuyo inicio está previsto definitivamente para abril de 2010, tendrá una duración de 10 años.

Bélgica y Perú se eligieron como países socios. ¿Una elección evidente? Efectivamente, así lo parece. Según el Profesor Eddie SCHREVEVS, coordinador de la K.U.Leuven: "El objetivo

principal del proyecto es el desarrollo rural sostenible. Si nos fijamos en los principales temas de investigación de La Molina, vemos que éstos se encuentran en el dominio de la gestión sostenible de agroecosistemas. Esta mirada conjunta a la agricultura y ecología es lo que resulta tan importante para Perú."

"Perú también es un país con una gran diversificación. El 80% de los ecosistemas del planeta se encuentran en Perú. Si, por ejemplo, queremos estudiar agrosistemas, Perú ofrece innumerables posibilidades, ya que dispone de una gran variedad de ecosistemas, cada uno con sus técnicas de producción específicas. Este país cuenta además con una excepcional diversidad cultural y social."

El Profesor Roberto UGAS, director del proyecto "Cambios de valores", añade: "Perú no sólo es un país con una gran diver-

sificación, sino también un país muy pobre. En este momento la biodiversidad no conlleva la creación de productividad encaminada a eliminar la pobreza. Esto es lo que queremos cambiar. Queremos modificar los sistemas de producción con el fin de bajar las tasas de pobreza, pero sin perder de vista el medio ambiente. Los proyectos que proponemos para ello parecen muy técnicos, pero también tienen un importante componente social. Vamos a involucrar a la población local y pretendemos que participe un gran número de estudiantes."

El Profesor Víctor GUEVARA, vicerrector de la UNALM y coordinador peruano del proyecto, considera las ventajas de una colaboración más bien a nivel académico. "Esta colaboración permitirá estrechar aún más los lazos entre los académicos y estudiantes belgas y peruanos. De esta forma podremos realizar proyectos conjuntos de investigación, intercambiar conocimientos de gran utilidad, organizar conjuntamente talleres y clases, etc. Los estudiantes belgas pueden aprender también mucho de nosotros acerca de la globalización. Si todo va bien, Perú puede además convertirse en ejemplo para el resto de la región. También esto es muy importante."

¿Cómo les está yendo la búsqueda del "socio perfecto" y la visita a Lovaina hasta ahora? "¡Estoy comprometida!", dice la profesora Liliane MENESES, directora de proyecto. Una unión exitosa, que los colaboradores ya pueden anotar en su haber. También los demás tienen una actitud positiva. Ugas: "En los últimos días hemos conocido a muchas personas interesantes, aunque ha sido en Lovaina donde hemos encontrado a las personas más idóneas. La Universidad de Lovaina es muy amplia, mientras que la UNALM es tan sólo una universidad agraria. Esto nos ha permitido contactar con departamentos muy diversos y de esta forma aprender mucho los unos de los otros."

Online

<http://iuc.vliruos.be/>

A little historical insight

LOOKING BACK ON TEN YEARS OF CAMPUSKRANT INTERNATIONAL

REINER VAN HOVE

June 1999: Yugoslavia and NATO signed a peace treaty, Thabo Mbeki became the new president of South-Africa and parliamentary elections took place in Belgium... The one event of *truly* historical significance, however, was the publication of the first issue of *Campuskrant International*. In this article, we look back with Professor Guido LANGOUCHE, one of the initiators and Toon BOON, the first editor-in-chief.

When the magazine was founded, Toon Boon, who is a legal advisor at K.U.Leuven, also worked for the International Relations Office on development co-operation projects: "Sometimes we visited foreign embassies and alumni associations. They often had brochures and flyers from other institutions, but there was never any information available about the biggest university in Flanders: the K.U.Leuven."

This situation changed as a result of an external stimulus, Professor Langouche, vice-rector of exact sciences at the time, tells us: "We were contacted by an enthusiastic Chilean lady named Mrs. Delvaux, who wanted to devote herself to the Latin-American students in Leuven. We provided her with the necessary logistical support – a table and a chair, so to speak – to make a newsletter for those students. We realised immediately that we should expand this initiative.

With a magazine, we would be able to provide our alumni, who we consider to be ambassadors for our university, with a recruiting tool. After all, many of our alumni end up working in higher education."

This tool became *Campuskrant International*, an 8-page magazine that first appeared in June 1999 and was sent to international alumni and embassies twice a year for the first few years. The majority of the texts were taken from *Campuskrant*, the magazine's Dutch equivalent and consequently, the concept of both magazines was the same: articles related to research, education and every other aspect of university life. Boon: "From the very beginning, we were able to rely on many enthusiastic volunteers from amongst our alumni and staff members to translate the articles into English and Spanish. We also decided to keep the title *Campuskrant*, although there were discussions about this choice because the name cannot be understood by people who don't speak Dutch. It is this consideration that has now led to the change of name."

One difference that was present from the beginning was the paper. Langouche: "I was very happy that we were able to have *Campuskrant International* printed on nice glossy paper. Several people even asked if we couldn't have the Dutch *Campuskrant* printed on the same paper."

The magazine hit the bull's eye, as was apparent from the many positive reactions from across the world. "Reading the articles I remembered the wonder years I spent in Leuven", one alumnus from Bolivia wrote. "It is a good start to establish exchange, links and friendships between fellow alumni world-

wide", one Indonesian reader informed us. One of those fellow alumni, from Mexico, went even further in his praise, saying: "You have made me so happy, first to have news about what is going on at the university and second that you haven't forgotten your students."

All this positive feedback contributed to the decision, in 2003, to enlarge the target audience; international students and staff members also started receiving the magazine. Simultaneously, the frequency of publication was increased, from two issues per year to three. Throughout the years, the magazine's layout also underwent a metamorphosis every so often, in line with its Dutch-language big brother.

Now, on the occasion of the double anniversary – tenth birthday and 25th issue – the magazine has been given its own name and its own lay-out for the first time. Fun fact: the fonts of the words you are reading now are Le Monde Sans and Le Monde Journal. This is entirely appropriate, in our opinion, for a journal with *mondial* ambitions. While the new title is still related to *Campuskrant*, it is more understandable for an international audience and also clearly reflects the magazine's ambition: providing insight. Moreover, in a readers' survey of ten possible titles, *Campus Insight* was by far the most popular title.

To conclude, we wondered whether the original driving forces behind the magazine had any tips for their reborn creation. Boon: "Oh, I don't see any reason to be paternalistic. I think the magazine is doing very well." Langouche: "I am still especially proud that this magazine exists; it really is a must for any self-respecting university. Whether I have suggestions related to the content? I am currently involved in a co-operation project between K.U.Leuven and the UNALM University in Peru, which certainly deserves to have an article devoted to it. Perhaps you could highlight one of the English-language master's offered by K.U.Leuven as well." Coincidence or not, before this interview took place, we had already planned to include an article about the Master in Space Studies programme and a Spanish article about the co-operation project with Peru...

"I am still especially proud that this magazine exists; it really is a must for any self-respecting university."

INITIATOR GUIDO LANGOUCHE

Online

All previous issues can be found at <http://www.kuleuven.be/ci/>

"INTERNATIONAL ALUMNI ARE VERY IMPORTANT FOR OUR IMAGE"

ALUMNI-CHAIRMAN FRANS VAN DAELE

REINER VAN HOVE

At his various diplomatic posts, from Athens to Washington, Baron Frans VAN DAELE regularly encountered fellow K.U.Leuven alumni. Since last year, he has been their symbolic godfather; in July 2008 he was appointed chairman of Alumni Lovanienses, the umbrella association for K.U.Leuven graduates.



(© Rob Stevens)

Van Daele studied Romance languages at K.U.Leuven and subsequently embarked on an impressive diplomatic career. He held diplomatic posts in Athens and Rome and was later appointed a member of Belgium's permanent representation to the UN. After holding this post, he became director-general of political affairs at Belgium's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Belgium's ambassador to the European Union and ambassador

to the USA. Currently, he is Belgium's ambassador to NATO.

Now he has yet another post. Van Daele: "When I was asked to become chairman of Alumni Lovanienses, I gratefully and enthusiastically accepted the position because of the fine example set by my predecessor Karel Vinck, amongst other things. I have always continued to feel a connection with Leuven very explicitly and it has become very clear to me that most alumni feel this connection too and want to maintain it. Perhaps we should encourage those who have just graduated a little more, though after a short period of time the need to reconnect with Leuven becomes very clear."

The same is true of international alumni, of which there are not a few. Van Daele: "We currently have almost 11,000 alumni living abroad. Of those, 4,500 studied in Dutch and 6,400 studied in English. The majority of the latter did postgraduate studies. The figure does not include the plethora of students who studied in Leuven in the context of the Erasmus programme. Our international alumni are thus a very important part of our university's image."

"That is why we want to develop and structure this network. To this end, we are currently completing our database of addresses and e-mail addresses. We use this information to send our alumni our regular electronic e-newsletter as well as *Campus Insight* of course."

"Maintaining contact is not only important because it promotes our university's international image, but also because it helps to attract new students. Many of our alumni work in academic and professional environments where they meet people who are interested in postgraduate education. We hope that our alumni look back at their own experiences in Leuven with great pleasure and that they encourage others to choose Leuven."

"Contacts with alumni also contribute positively to fund-raising, which is an essential supplement to the funds we receive from the government. As well as the large donations, such as new research chairs for example, smaller grassroots donations are also important. An association with many members, such as Alumni Lovanienses, can also make a contribution in this area."

Further, Van Daele would like to stimulate and expand the local chapters: "Regional groups of alumni have developed or are developing in a number of countries. For example, we have active groups in Beijing and Shanghai, where Chinese alumni have committed to building a network. We have similar chapters in Washington, New York and Kinshasa, though these are mostly composed of Belgian expats. An alumni association is also being established in Kenya (see article on p. 8). From within K.U.Leuven, we would like to give these ambassadors the necessary incentives for these pursuits. That is why, in the future, we plan to organise an activity for them in Leuven during the Christmas season, which will strengthen the bonds between us."



The evolution of the magazine's lay-out from its first issue in 1999 until the issue you are holding now.



(© Rob Stevens)



(© Rob Stevens)

The skeleton's new clothes

On Friday, 27 March, the renovated Museum of Zoology at the K.U.Leuven was opened. The museum hall, the arrangement of the collections and the information panels have been adapted to current knowledge of the animal kingdom and the demands of a modern didactic museum. The Museum of Zoology was founded in 1817 and currently contains over 5,000 pieces; primarily animals preserved by taxidermy or by liquid preservation. The most impressive specimen is the skeleton of a Bowhead Whale, which dates to approximately 1880. To highlight the 150th birthday of Darwin's evolutionary theory, the museum organised an exhibition related to evolution at the beginning of April.

<http://bio.kuleuven.be/darwin2009.html>

Erasmus plays ball

LOKO, K.U.Leuven's student body council, organised a sporting event for international students from 30 March to 1 April: the Erasmus Cup. Participants from the four corners of the world competed with one another in the sports centre of K.U.Leuven and the sports hall of KHLeuven. They played football, basketball, volleyball and indoor football. In total, 80 sports(wo)men took part, divided into 12 teams. Team Lynn (photo left) beat The Spartans in the exciting volleyball final. The players and their supporters ended the competition with an International Party. The Erasmus Cup is the successor of the LISST competition, which brought teams from European universities to Leuven to compete in various sporting events.

<http://international.loko.be/>

500 words

“We want to develop an expert team of Leuven alumni in East Africa”

KENYAN ALUMNUS AND EDUCATIONIST NYAMBURA OWINYO

REINER VAN HOVE

Dr. Nyambura OWINYO studied educational sciences and obtained her doctoral degree at K.U.Leuven. Recently, she has taken the initiative to establish a Leuven alumni network in East Africa. Owinyo is the interim secretary of the new association.

“In 1997, my husband received a scholarship from the Faculty of Theology in Leuven. My daughter Brenda and I joined him a year later. I obtained a Master's in educational studies and later applied for a doctorate, for which I researched school vandalism in Kenyan schools. I am indebted to IRO, the interfaculty council for development cooperation, which offered me a scholarship and to Professor Danny Wildemeersch and Professor Jan Maaschelein, who were wonderful promoters!”

“Leuven was quite a challenge when it came to the language, although I did manage to learn *een klein beetje Nederlands* (laughs). It is not always easy to establish new relationships in a new environment, but I made good friends and I am still in contact with most of them. What I miss most about Leuven is the excellent accommodation for cyclists and the enriching intercultural mosaic created in the city by its diverse residents.”

“Back in Nairobi, I met Rev. Dr. Peter Gichure, who was one of the founding members of LEASU, the Leuven East African Students Union. We realised that we had both kept in touch with many of our Leuven colleagues. So we decided to try to bring everyone together and thus the idea of an East Africa Leuven alumni community was born. We worked out the logistics and on 15 February we had a wonderful reunion at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa where 20 members gathered in a wonderful garden setting. Stella Artois beer and sandwiches covered the tables – typically reminiscent of our Oude Markt experiences! The oldest alumnus had been in Leuven in 1982, and the youngest had just returned in 2008! There was great enthusiasm about the initiative, so we got off to a perfect start.”

“The network cuts across the various disciplines at Leuven: we have theologians, pharmacists, engineers, educationists, biostatisticians, philosophers, etc. Our members come from the region of East Africa: Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Most of those who attended live and work in and around Nairobi, but we are in close association with other alumni working at various institutions in the region. As for me, I am currently working as a lecturer and an assistant co-ordinator of a programme offered by DePaul University (USA) in partnership with Tangaza College, here in Kenya.”

“With the alumni network, we hope to develop a strong team of experts who can engage in dialogue with our leaders, based upon our various fields of expertise. We also hope to liaise with the Leuven umbrella alumni association and the Belgian Embassy, not only to promote Leuven in Africa but also to give something back to the community. To this end, we hope to establish and develop viable and transformative initiatives that will not only benefit our people here in the South, but hopefully also those in Belgium.”



Want to know more?
For more information, send an e-mail to:
ealeuvenalumni@gmail.com