

Women in the academic world

The RoSa-factsheets aim to familiarise you with the scope of equal opportunities in Flanders. Each factsheet probes the situation in a specific area. Broad themes as well as specific ones are put into the spotlight, depending on the relevance and/or availability of information and numerical data. We do not intend to offer exhaustive information, our primary aim is to sketch the position of women in Flanders in a surveyable and accessible way.

Since its founding in 1978, RoSa is the place in Flanders to look for information and documentation about equal opportunities, emancipation policy and women's studies.

Introduction

Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, universities were only open to male students. In Belgium, the first female students entered Brussels university in 1880. Two years later they did the same in Liège, and another year later in Ghent. In Louvain, women had to wait until 1920 to get access to the university. Nevertheless, due to the lack of professional career prospects and of higher college education, very few women were able to use this opportunity.

In 1890, a law was introduced to give women access to academic degrees, allowing them also to obtain medical degrees. In 1907, the first girls college was created. The presence of women at universities has been growing steadily since then. The different position of women in society and the democratization of universities have led to the fact that today more than half of the universities' students are female.

Nevertheless, universities are still far from being egalitarian. On the one hand, students' choices still produce so-called 'girls choices' (horizontal segregation). On the other hand, the higher level positions at universities do not reflect the equality between students at lower level (vertical segregation).

Students

TABLE 1: Evolution of the number of main registrations

Year	Men		Women		Total	
'90-'91	30912	55.0	25715	45.0	56627	100.0
'91-'92	32124	54.3	27051	45.7	59175	100.0
'92-'93	32980	53.9	28251	46.1	61231	100.0
'93-'94	33430	53.2	29410	46.8	62840	100.0
'94-'95	33945	52.6	30585	47.04	64530	100.0
'95-'96	34624	51.9	32062	48.1	66686	100.0
'96-'97	35050	51.4	33143	48.6	68193	100.0
'97-'98	35059	50.7	34094	49.3	69.153	100.0

Source : Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad, Statistische gegevens betreffende de studentenbevolking aan de Vlaamse universiteiten, academiejaar 97-98, [Brussel], 1999, p. 185.

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During the 1990ies, not only the total number of students has risen, but also the part of female students. Table 1 shows a clear tendency towards equality.

Among generation students, there are more women than men. A generation student is a student who is being registered for the first time at a (Flemish) university. Moreover, the relative participation of women in university education compared to the potential focus group (18 year-old girls living in Flanders) is higher (20.4%) that that of men (17.5%).

TABLE 2: Evolution of the number of generation students (1st year) compared to the potential focus group

YEAR	MEN				WOMEN			
	Generation students N	%	18 year N	%	Generation students N	%	18 year N	%
UNIVERSITAIR ONDERWIJS								
'92-'93	6371	50,4	36199	17,6	6275	49,6	34715	18,1
'93-'94	6376	50,3	34854	18,3	6295	49,7	33164	19,0
'94-'95	6791	49,9	35666	19,0	6805	50,1	34134	19,9
'95-'96	6832	48,7	36284	18,8	7196	51,3	35220	20,4
'96-'97	6834	48,4	36965	18,5	7294	51,6	35674	20,4
'97-'98	6649	48,0	37915	17,5	7207	52,0	35793	20,1
Diff 1st yr	-185	-2,7			-87	-1,2		
Diff 6th yr	278	4,4			932	14,8		

Source: Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad, Statistische gegevens betreffende de studentenbevolking aan de Vlaamse universiteiten, academiejaar 97-98. [Brussel], 1999, p. 250.

Nevertheless, there still remains a horizontal segregation of choices made by men and women for their respective classes. Table 3 shows generation students on 1 February 1998, registered for their first year in their respective classes.

TABLE 3 : Belgian generation students registered for the first year per area on February 1998

	M	V	Tot	M %	V %	Tot %
Philosophy	124	93	217	57	43	100
Religion	11	26	37	30	70	100
Literature	315	678	993	32	68	100
History	276	216	492	56	44	100
Archeology and art sciences	127	252	379	34	66	100
Law	973	1065	2038	48	52	100
Psychology	330	1005	1335	28	75	100
Economy	1159	695	1854	62	38	100
Social sciences	456	545	1001	45	55	100
Social health sciences	8	73	81	10	90	100
Physical education	263	254	517	51	49	100
Sciences	930	538	1468	63	37	100
Applied Sciences	598	163	761	79	21	100
Applied biological sciences	327	262	589	56	44	100
Medicine	206	346	552	37	63	100
Dental medicine	20	35	55	36	64	100
Veterinarian medicine	91	154	245	37	63	100
Pharmaceutical sciences	78	228	306	25	75	100
Combined classes	110	263	373	29	71	100
Total	6402	6891	13293			

Source: Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad, Statistische gegevens betreffende de studentenbevolking aan de Vlaamse universiteiten, academiejaar 97-98. [Brussel], 1999, p. 41, eigen bewerking

Classes showing a majority of women are religion, literature, psychology, educational sciences, archeology and art sciences, social health sciences, pharmaceutical sciences, and the combined classes.

This category includes, along with the biomedical sciences, seven other classes, described as literature and philosophy, which only confirms the fact that women represent a majority of students in this area. They also are a majority among students in political and social sciences, medicine, dental medicine and veterinarian medicine. Classes showing a majority of male students are sciences and applied sciences.

Following these figures, it can be said that the problem of typical girls' choices still exists: women prefer the 'soft' rather than the 'hard' sciences. This is certainly the case for the applied sciences. When considering the science classes more closely, this tendency can only be confirmed. Computer science and physics do not even count 10% of female first-year students.

TABLE 4: Science Classes

	M	V	Tot	M %	V %	Tot %
Mathematics	61	56	117	53	47	100
Computer science	391	40	431	81	9	100
Physics	51	5	56	81	9	100
Chemistry	78	77	155	50	50	100
Biology	155	205	360	43	57	100
Geology	23	24	47	49	51	100
Geography	65	54	119	55	45	100
First year sciences	41	37	78	53	47	100
First year maths and physics	65	40	105	62	38	100

Source: Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad, Statistische gegevens betreffende de studentenbevolking aan de Vlaamse universiteiten, academiejaar 97-98. [Brussel], 1999, p. 42, eigen bewerking.

Vertical segregation

Women are largely underrepresented among scientific personnel at Flemish universities, especially at top-level positions. At the level of the so-called in-stream of the scientific personnel, the situation is more satisfactory. But the follow-up on high-level positions is still problematic.

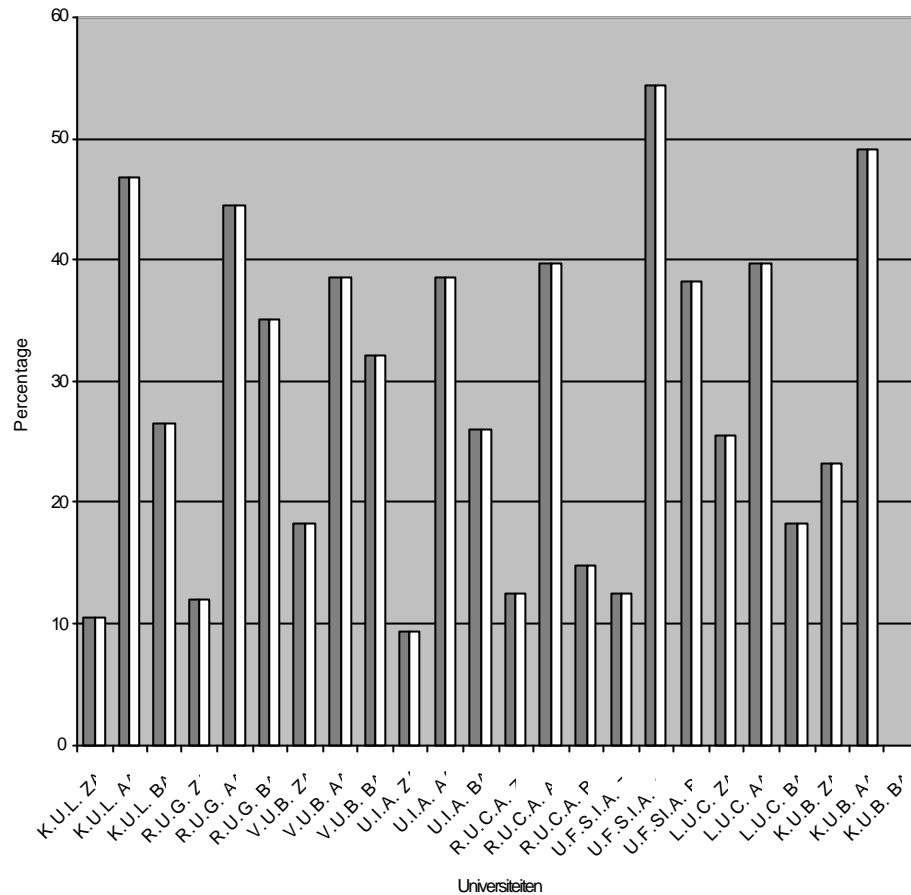
Academic personnel is being divided into three groups. Assisting Academic Personnel mostly consists of people preparing a doctorate and assisting the director of research in lecturing activities. Those assistants are being financed through an internal procedure, and mostly work under two-year contracts, extensible to six years.

The Special Academic Personnel are scientific researchers free of teaching obligations. They prepare doctorates using a grant, do project research (as scientific collaborators), or lead postdoctoral research. They are being financed through external procedures.

The Independent Academic Personnel evolves through different career stages, respectively as a lecturer, main lecturer, ordinary or extraordinary professor.

Chart 1

Source: Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad, Statistische gegevens betreffende het personeel aan de Vlaamse universiteiten, telling 1-2-99. [Brussel], 1999, p. 7-46.



Women are well represented among assisting personnel: in 4 out of 8 universities they represent more than 40% of the AAP. Among Independent Academic Personnel only one Flemish university has more than 20% of women, the lowest score being below 10%. Chart 1 also shows that a large number of women among assistants does not necessarily mean more women among the Independent Academics.

At the UFSIA in Antwerp, for example, more than 50% of the AAP, and about 40% of the Special Academic Personnel is female, whereas the Independent Academic Personnel does not represent more than 10% of them. The best results are those at the Limbourg LUC, with more than 25% women among the Independent Staff, although figures for the other staff there remain rather low.

TABLE 5: Independent academic staff (on 1 Februari 1999)

	# Men	#Women	Total	% Men	% Women
Extraordinary professor	31,84	0,30	32,14	99 %	1 %
Ordinary professor	655,80	46,00	701,80	93 %	7 %
Professor	460,97	48,05	509,02	91 %	9 %
Main lecturer	482,92	73,71	556,63	87 %	13 %
Lecturer	352,82	106,54	459,36	77 %	23 %
Librarians, etc.	43,65	28,95	72,60	60 %	40 %
Total	2028	304	2332	87 %	13 %

Source: Malfliet Katlijn (e.a.), Eerste Gelijke-Kansenrapport, Gelijke-kansenbeleid en Universiteit. K.U Leuven, 1999, p. 45.

Figures for the different categories of Independent Academic Personnel clearly show that the number of women diminishes as soon as the level raises. The total number of

women at Independent level at Flemish universities in 1999 is 13%. That figure does not only hide large differences between the Flemish universities, but also between the different academic degrees. The absence of women among ordinary professors is especially problematic, since this category has a large influence on recruitment and promotions.

TABLE 6: Assisting Academic Personnel (on 1 Februari 1999)

	#Mannen	#Vrouwen	Totaal	#Mannen	#Vrouwen
Assistant	768,43	615,42	1383,85	56 %	44 %
Practical	77,28	77,55	154,83	50 %	50 %
Doctor-assistent	63,15	29,55	92,7	68 %	32 %
Tijdelijk Pedagogisch en Weten. Medewerker	43,35	37,7	81,05	53 %	47 %
Totaal	952	760	1712	56 %	44 %

Source: Malfliet Katlijn (e.a.), Eerste Gelijke-Kansenrapport, Gelijke-kansenbeleid en Universiteit. K.U Leuven, 1999, p. 46.

It is clear that there is no sufficient follow-up between the Assisting and the Independent Academic Personnel. Therefore it is necessary to look for explanations. A number of publications, that will be mentioned briefly in this regard, have indicated different causes. The existing research is rather poor in Belgium, and although it does give a certain idea of the situation, it makes any comparison with other countries difficult. On the one hand, the Netherlands have a comparable situation, but the specific academic culture is different, which makes any comparison relatively difficult.

Explanations

Not only figures have been used, also quantitative analysis using queries from people concerned, as well as complaints. The obstacles women encounter when pursuing an academic career are not always easy to show, or to quantify. The academic world is a closed world, with its own culture and lots of unwritten rules.

A certain number of external and society-generated factors can be put forward, opposing equal opportunities at academic level. There is a large underrepresentation of women in leading positions, so too at universities. Moreover, there is a shortage of legislation in this area. Although imposed by law in public administration, equal opportunities legislation does not include universities.

Another reason concerns the choice women make, together with the ongoing socialization of traditional role models. Focusing on the academic world, it should be stated that the moment when doctorates are obtained, and the moment women get children largely coincide. The combination of work and family often makes the prospect a university career look more difficult. The same applies for people residing abroad, at foreign institutions, who generally benefit from that experience for nominations and promotions, but who are mainly men. Finally, universities are very reluctant to adapt to family situations. The pressure at work does not make family life or pregnancy much easier to deal with.

Another group of difficulties are the personnel management and business culture of the universities. Because women are only part of the academic community since about a century, and only recently at top level, there still is little room for gender-based differences in norms, values and qualities. There is not enough diversity. This is shown by a recent research project (Van Haegendoren and Noelanders) on recruitment and promotion procedures at Flemish universities. Because the criteria are unexplicit, and also because

of the fact that those in charge of selection and promotion are chosen within a single group of people (Belgian middle-aged men), diversity is far from being a reality. On the other hand, universities where a number of women do take part in the decision-making process, show that participation alone does not necessarily bring a solution. A minority of women is clearly not enough to bring about a change in the management culture. In other sectors equal opportunities have not emerged that quickly either. The 'glass ceiling' through which women do not succeed to pass, can only be removed by conviction, and by a planned strategy.

The academic culture has not yet lost its traditional roots, where men play a decisive role. Universities have been restricted to men only until the end of the nineteenth century. That could in itself be an explanation, but other institutions, like the judicial system, did succeed to get more feminized. A recurring explanation is the fear for deconsideration of the profession, as soon as too many women fulfil it.

Too much pressure is also a much recurring reason. Universities expect from their personnel full commitment, something women not always seem to combine with their family.

The lack of transparency, not only in recruitment procedures, but also regarding qualifications, function profiles and evaluation processes can create inequality. Through the lack of transparency, subjective criteria can play a decisive role.

In general, it can be said that the situation at Flemish universities is far from ideal. There is both a horizontal segregation (course choice) and a vertical segregation (academic occupation). Because the remains of the past still play a major role in academic culture, together with a number of external reasons such as the lack of legislation, the equal opportunities policy at Flemish academic level is still far away from being a reality.

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