

UM Education Research Day 2026 – Research presentations, round 1, 9:40-11:10

Fostering Critical Thinking Skills of Higher Education Students for a Responsible Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

by Catarina Marques dos Santos (SBE)

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools pose an unprecedented challenge to our higher educational system. Students frequently use GenAI to generate text, develop ideas, or even complete assignments. However, their tendency to over-rely on these tools may hinder critical thinking at the individual and team levels. This study addresses a key challenge for higher education: How to ensure students retain and develop critical thinking while effectively leveraging GenAI tools? In a master's level course at Maastricht University School of Business and Economics, 57 teams (177 students) completed a team project that required them to solve a business challenge using ChatGPT. We collected quantitative data (survey data) and qualitative data (focus groups). The quantitative results showed significant interactions between GenAI usage and perceived usefulness with team-level critical thinking and individual preferences for teamwork. The focus groups' analyses suggest that GenAI can support task completion and team processes and help upskill less experienced teammates to be aligned with the team. Analyses also suggest that GenAI usage can create frictions in the presence of misaligned expectations, which can be mitigated through early agreements among team members. This study offers new insights into collaborative GenAI practices and recommendations for developing responsible GenAI competencies in higher education students.

When Failing Becomes Difficult: Failure to Fail in Bachelor's Thesis Assessment

by Anke Wind (FHML)

What if the same relationship that helps students succeed also makes it difficult to fail them? Assessment in higher education is expected to ensure that academic credentials represent students' competence. Yet teachers may sometimes pass students despite concerns about their level of competence, a phenomenon known as failure to fail. This presentation explores failure to fail in bachelor's thesis assessment. While this phenomenon has been extensively studied in clinical education, little is known about its dynamics in non-clinical higher education. I interviewed 18 Public Health and Health Sciences thesis assessors at Maastricht University and used reflexive thematic analysis to explore how they experience these situations.

The findings reveal that failure to fail is not simply a matter of individual leniency. It emerges through the interaction of professional identity, relationships and institutional structures. Supervisors may struggle to reconcile mentoring with gatekeeping; relationships with students and colleagues can shape assessment decisions; and institutional procedures can make failing administratively burdensome, professionally risky, or practically inconclusive. I would like to challenge us to rethink failure to fail, not as an individual assessment problem, but as a systemic challenge to rigorous academic judgement.

Safe to Become: Exploring Identity Safety During Medical Students' Professional Identity Development

by Shika Pai (FHML)

Medical education involves more than acquiring knowledge and skills; students also develop an understanding of who they are becoming as future professionals. But how can educational environments support this development without requiring students to compromise valued aspects of themselves?

In this qualitative study, we interviewed 16 Bachelor of Medicine students at Maastricht University to explore how experiences of fitting in and standing out relate to identity safety, in other words, the ability be one's self without identity-based judgement or devaluation. Fitting refers to the belonging, or feelings of alignment. Standing out refers to the feeling of being unique or different. Literature suggested that experiences related to both feelings can be more challenging to navigate as students from minority and underrepresented groups.

Our findings suggest that neither fitting in nor standing out is inherently safe or threatening. Rather, identity safety was supported when students retained agency over how they expressed or adapted their identities, could belong while remaining different, and had opportunities to develop and demonstrate competence. Importantly, students interpreted these experiences in relation to the professionals they imagined themselves becoming.

This presentation will explore what identity safety can teach us about supporting students' identity development and invite reflection on how educators can create environments where students feel safe to explore, contribute, and become professionals on their own terms.

Individual teacher identities in an educational culture: what is UM's status?

by Hans Savelberg (FHML), Anke Sambeth (FPN)

University staff struggle to balance their research and education efforts. Most UM's research and teaching staff is recruited from persons that were trained to excel in research. How does this kind of bias affect their motivation for and identification with both research and education? We performed a university-wide survey and focus group study to investigate the balancing act of research and education at UM.

We asked UM's academic staff for their appointment and desired appointment characteristics, the distribution of and motivation for their various academic tasks. Moreover, we investigated how they experienced the academic culture and what their personal beliefs on this are.

177 academic staff participated in the survey. Cluster-analysis on the desired appointment revealed that participants could be divided into four groups: 1. Mix of research and education with a focus on research (50%); 2. Research focus (21%); 3. Mix of education, research and management tasks (12%); 4. Education focus (16%). These groups differed with respect to experienced and desired academic culture, support experienced from supervisors and peers and motivation for the various academic tasks. Data of focus groups are currently being processed and will be presented.

This study shows diversity of academic profiles within UM staff. Within this diversity motivation for research tends to prevail over education and management tasks. Academic profiles are associated with differences in experienced and desired culture.

Mend the Gap – bridging work along the teaching-research nexus

by Kai Heidemann (UCM)

The gap between research and teaching is a familiar problem for academics: universities ask us to excel at both, yet the two are often treated as separate and sometimes competing parts of academic work. So what do academics actually do to bridge this gap? Drawing on an EdLab research project, this presentation explores “bridging work”: the creative, often everyday ways academics find opportunities to connect their teaching and research. We examine how academics at UM enact this bridging work and how connections between teaching and research can generate reciprocal benefits for scholarly work.. Our findings suggest that bridging research and teaching can spark new ideas, strengthen academic identities, foster collaborations, and contribute to research development. We also consider what this means institutionally: how can UM cultivate conditions that give academics the autonomy, space, and encouragement to experiment creatively with teaching and thus build meaningful connections between teaching and research?