Strategies for gender balanced higher education

Prof. Veerle Draulans & Vice-Rector Prof. T. Baelmans
Brussels, November 30th, 2012
Structure of our presentation

1) brief received from Leuven Diversity Council and the reason for the Diversity Council's instruction

2) the vision and method of the temporary 'gender and students' working group

3) facts and figures

4) possible initiatives
Brief ad hoc working group 'gender and students' 

1) to examine whether it is up to the university to provide steering in gender imbalances among students on certain courses

2) to compile a list of best practices for this country and abroad

3) to recommend the feasibility of and methods for increasing recruitment from the underrepresented group and how the minority group concerned is best dealt with in courses with a gender imbalance
Answer working group

Yes, it is up to the university
- to study gender imbalances on courses
- to pinpoint problem areas
- to initiate actions where this is advisable and required
- to co-ordinate and/or support, respecting the final individual choices made by students

-debate: how forceful is ‘steering’?
Clearly consensus:

1) non-desirability of a binding steering mechanism, since the students' individual choices need to be respected.

2) KU Leuven: social responsibility; must encourage its departments to ensure the student population reflects social ratios and dynamics.
Working group: process

- collect facts & figures

- comparison facts & figures Flanders & abroad

- literature study

- needs workplace

- pre-existing initiatives (focus: European context)

- proposal recommendations
Figures: looking at study subjects, not at faculties

- In 2011-2012, women slightly overrepresented inflow & outflow

- 54.9% students embarking on higher education ♂
- 54.4% bachelor’s students ♂
- 56.1% of master’s students ♂
- 68.4% teacher training ♂
- 57.4% master’s degrees 2010-2011 issued to ♂
Figures: looking at study subjects, not at schools or faculties

- conclusion: analysis ♂/♀ ratios student population: level of specific academic training programs

-e.g.:

- inflow in bachelor’s courses in the Faculty of Arts: fairly evenly balanced gender distribution.
- but: Language & Literature: predominantly ♀
  History course: predominantly ♂
- but: ♀ students underrepresented Engineering course
  ♀ majority Architectural engineering course
Looking at study subjects, not at schools or faculties:
% **female** students gender imbalance in bachelors courses

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Figures: some results

-over 20 years: no reduction, but an escalation of the gender imbalances for these courses

-other Flemish institutions: similar gender imbalances

-campus size does not matter

-significantly more male students discontinue courses in which they are in the minority
Why attention to ♂ as a minority?

- ♀ minority in technical and scientific studies: most attention
- ♂ men minority: barely any attention

-however: occupational associations expressed serious concerns: quid male role models?
-factors limiting inflow ♂ students?
-research needed: how male and female students experience being in a small minority on a course
2000: KU Leuven: equal opportunities group in sciences, engineering and technology

- purpose: active gender mainstream policy - increasing inflow ♀ students - correcting the negative image of engineering occupation

- numerous initiatives have been developed

- dedication admirable: inflow ♀ +/- unchanged
Recommendations

University Services

- Diversity policy
- Course advice
- Communication
- ‘Education and learning’

Faculties/schools: Councils, Permanent Education Committees, Diversity Teams

Teacher training courses

Students and student organisations

Policy makers in our society
Possible initiatives

1. students & lecturers
2. engagement with the workplace
3. for the university:
   - further investigation
   - training for academic staff
   - communication materials
4. research:
   - stressful: ♀/♂ belonging to minority/ course
   - decisive factors drop out, specifically for members of gender minorities?
   - explanation gender imbalances have increased?
   - research in Leuven: psychology/general engineering
Our thanks go to

- Tom Bekers

-members KU Leuven ‘gender and students’ working group

for their tremendous collaboration.