VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT AMSTERDAM

FROM IDEA TO UNIVERSITY

WE HAVE 84 NATIONALITIES

103RD POSITION IN THE SHANGHAI RANKING 2019
Abraham Kuyper, Prime Minister of the Netherlands from 1901 to 1905, founded Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU Amsterdam) in 1880. He wanted an independent university, free from interference by either church or state. At first, the university was only open to Reformed Christians who financed the university entirely through private funding and donations (via the famous ‘VU boxes’). In the 1960s the university became primarily state-funded and has since welcomed people from a rich diversity of cultural backgrounds and religious faiths.

At VU Amsterdam, we attach great importance to the societal impact of our education and research. Personal development and social involvement are key parts of our vision on education, in which individual differences are seen as a strength. This allows us to develop innovations and insights that contribute to a better world. The basic philosophy of VU Amsterdam is expressed in our three core values: responsible, open and personally engaged.

FIGURES
Ever since 1880, our university has continued to expand. It now comprises nine faculties and hosts more than 15,000 Bachelor’s and almost 11,500 Master’s students. VU Amsterdam has over 4,500 employees (3,500 FTE), and more than 20% of our academic staff has an international background. The male-female ratio is evenly distributed. Our teaching and research programmes cover a broad spectrum of disciplines, from the Humanities to the Sciences and from Medicine to Theology.

VU Amsterdam is an internationally renowned research university, where we conduct cutting-edge research into problems of major societal and scientific importance. With more than 50 Bachelor’s programmes and around 175 Master’s programmes, VU Amsterdam offers a wide range of study options. The university campus is situated in the south-western part of Amsterdam, in one of the most dynamic and fast-growing business districts in the Netherlands. Proximity to International Airport Schiphol and train connections within Europe make VU Amsterdam easily accessible to the world.

You purchased your dream shoes with bitcoins. These bitcoins you obtained from selling some of your investments through your favourite exchange. All done through a few swipes on your smart phone. But in a world of private currencies and exchanges, far removed from public institutions, can you still rely on your money the way you once could? These are questions at the heart of Albert J. Menkveld’s research agenda. He is Professor of Finance at VU Amsterdam. His research was supported by, among others, NWO Veni, Vidi, and Vici grants. He publishes in the top academic journals in finance and advises various institutions, such as market regulators and central banks the world over.

“IS YOUR MONEY YOURS?”
VU SCIENTIST ALBERT J. MENKVELD
Professor in Finance
INTERNATIONAL RANKING AND POSITION

The Netherlands has a binary system of Higher Education with 13 research universities, including VU Amsterdam, and 40 universities of applied sciences. The Dutch research universities are all of high academic quality, and consistently ranked among the first 250 universities in international rankings. Only the US and UK feature more research universities in the top 200. In no other system except for Switzerland, the proportion of all research universities in the top 250 is this high.

In the Academic Ranking of World Universities 2019 (ARWU, Shanghai Ranking), which focuses on research excellence, VU Amsterdam currently holds the 103rd position worldwide. Furthermore, VU Amsterdam has been ranked #24 in the Times Higher Education Europe Teaching Ranking 2019, and is therefore among the top 30 of best European universities for teaching excellence. The recent rank covers a positive development and is specifically testament to the positive (survey) responses and opinions of students themselves about the teaching environment of the university.

We are among the top 150 universities in the World university ranking of Times Higher Education: this ranking places our university at spot 138. This global performance ranking judges research-intensive universities across their core missions: teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international outlook.

Additionally the QS Ranking (Quacquarelli Symonds) of 2020 places VU Amsterdam 219th in the world, 12 spots higher than the year before. In this specific ranking, academic reputation shows to be the strongest indicator of VU Amsterdam. The recent ranking covers a positive development of increasing scores, and specifically testifies to increasing scores in international ratios (staff/student ratios) and academic reputation.

A FOCUS BASED ON FOUR THEMES

Our academic research and education are characterised by great ambition, encouraging free and open communication and ideas. VU Amsterdam distinguishes itself in research and education through four major themes reflecting its strong level of involvement in current societal issues:

1. Governance for Society: philosophers, economists, lawyers and psychologists join forces under the name Governance for Society. The name already indicates the goal: for society. How can we manage and organise our surroundings contribute to a better society?

2. Human Health and Life Sciences: how do we become and how do we stay healthy? Scientists from VU Amsterdam and VUMc work together to answer current and future healthcare issues. From physicists to doctors and from biologists to ethicists and movement scientists.

3. Connected World: a unique association of alpha, gamma and beta researchers at VU Amsterdam examines what it means to live in a world in which everything and everyone are connected. A question that affects us all and has far-reaching consequences for people, companies, governments and science itself.

4. Science for Sustainability: VU Amsterdam integrates all disciplines that can help safeguard the well-being of the earth and the people who live there. From biology to economics and from social to natural sciences. A cross-pollination that seeks answers to the greatest questions of our time.

AN INSPIRATIONAL EDUCATIONAL SETTING

THE MIXED CLASSROOM IN PRACTICE

VU Amsterdam aims to provide an open environment to students with backgrounds that vary on many different dimensions, such as religion, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, and socioeconomic status. Our mixed classroom is an educational approach that builds upon differences to enrich the learning experience for all students present. The term mixed classroom is not used in a descriptive way (in reference to a classroom with a certain level of diversity), but in the name of our educational model, in which students learn how to open up to differences, to co-create an inclusive environment and to capitalise on different perspectives in order to create value. Capitalising on differences does not entail compromising between different perspectives or merging them into one uniform perspective. Instead, it uses the differences and possible tension between perspectives to stimulate critical thinking, develop analytical skills, and generate creative solutions.

A BROADER MIND

VU Amsterdam considers it important that academic, personal and social education of students have a place in education. Together, students and teachers shaped the development of the education programme ‘A Broader Mind’, in which Bachelor’s students work on social questions and self-development. Students learn how to solve societal problems, combining multiple scientific disciplines. The themes of the programme are based on the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). Another part of A Broader Mind is strengthening the educational form of Community Service Learning (CSL) at VU Amsterdam. With CSL, students apply their academic skills in solving current and social issues. In the future, VU Amsterdam wants all students to have the opportunity to do Community Service Learning. Through structured pilots, scientific research and a learning community, VU Amsterdam further supports the development of CSL.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Teaching students entrepreneurial skills is a distinguishing feature of VU Amsterdam’s teaching programmes. At the request of the Executive Board, the newly installed Dean Entrepreneurship has carried out an exploration of entrepreneurship at VU Amsterdam, focusing on the three pillars of entrepreneurship: education, entrepreneurship research and entrepreneurship.

An example of entrepreneurship at VU Amsterdam is Enactus VU, part of the bigger Enactus network and led by students. By finding opportunities in society and creating value by working together with academics and business people, they start projects that become self-sustaining companies. That is how we contribute to a more sustainable world and develop an entrepreneurial mentality.

The Master’s programme Entrepreneurship aims to provide students with cutting-edge knowledge on entrepreneurship, relevant skills, and an entrepreneurial attitude. In addition, the students will be able to bridge theory and practice by applying and creating relevant academic knowledge on entrepreneurship in real life settings to solve challenging problems.

The Research Master’s in Global Health echoes my profound belief in health equality and passion for exploring effective interventions to ameliorate health outcomes. VU Amsterdam’s vision of health that spans the globe and promotes shared responsibility is not only progressive, but is rare to find in a programme. I am fortunate to learn alongside a cohort of students from around the world who are committed to collaborating with health professionals, patients, policy makers, and other stakeholders in order to implement cohesive strategies to influence change. My current internship involves engaging with colleagues from multiple academic backgrounds and nationalities to predict and prevent infectious disease outbreaks in the Netherlands - an experience that closely mirrors that of collaborating with my fellow classmates at VU Amsterdam.

“I AM ENERGISED TO STUDY AT A UNIVERSITY THAT RECOGNISES THE INNATE COMPLEXITIES OF HUMAN HEALTH AND DISEASE.”

BRETT HAHN / UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Master’s student in Global Health
OUR PEOPLE

VU Amsterdam is an environment in which over 4,500 people from different disciplines and backgrounds work together on innovations and on-generating new knowledge. Working at VU Amsterdam means working at the most diverse university in the Netherlands. We recognise the importance to support new international staff in making the move to take up a position at our university. Relocation for work is a major life-changing event, often affecting partners and families too. The university offers services for international staff before and after arriving at VU Amsterdam.

We offer our employees a very attractive package of employment benefits. You can choose some of these yourself in our options model. To ensure the optimum balance between work and private life, VU Amsterdam offers more leave days than the legal minimum. There is also plenty of scope for personal development, opportunities for collective insurance and a good pension for later in life.

STUDENT NUMBERS PER FACULTY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Students per faculty</th>
<th>International students per faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACTA (Dentistry)</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>23 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amsterdam University College</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>277 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral and Movement Sciences</td>
<td>3,798</td>
<td>762 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>3,654</td>
<td>407 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>3,678</td>
<td>313 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>2,362</td>
<td>118 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion and Theology</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>26 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Business and Economics</td>
<td>6,918</td>
<td>984 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>6,911</td>
<td>7,264 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>2,444</td>
<td>220 (10%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on academic year 2019-2020, reference data 1 October 2019. The numbers for Amsterdam University College also include students registered at UvA.

BACHELOR’S PROGRAMMES

Bachelor’s programmes at VU Amsterdam are three-year degree programmes with in-depth focus on the subject area. All of the programmes feature an academic core that is not only devoted to research and learning skills, but also to ethics and integrity, and the historical and cultural context of science and society. 20 of our Bachelor’s degree programmes are English-taught and therefore also open to international students.

AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Amsterdam University College (AUC) is a public Liberal arts college at honours level, with motivated students from more than 60 countries. The college was founded in 2009 as a joint initiative of the University of Amsterdam (UvA) and VU Amsterdam with a particular focus on the natural sciences. Although AUC has its own campus, students can also use facilities of both parent universities.

MASTER’S PROGRAMMES

VU Amsterdam offers a wide range of Master’s programmes of either one or two-year duration, as well as Research Master’s. They all take an analytical approach with great emphasis on research skills. More than 150 programmes are taught in English, and this number keeps increasing. We aim for an international student population and to prepare our students for a globalising world.

PHD PROGRAMMES

Every year, over 400 PhD students complete their doctoral research with a thesis, thereby making an important contribution to academic research at VU Amsterdam. Almost 50% of our PhD students have an international background. We offer them a wide range of teaching possibilities and invest in researchers with talent. Together with Research Master’s programmes, many PhD programmes are offered in Graduate Schools, which are organised per [inter]disciplinary field.

CREDIT MOBILITY

It is possible to study at VU Amsterdam via the Semestern in Amsterdam programme, or as part of an Exchange with one of our 250 partner universities. Each year, we welcome many students from universities abroad. We also offer a Summer and Winter School, where students can learn about a wide range of topics in 2-week courses, combined with a social programme that is related to the content of the course. All students at VU Amsterdam can participate in short or long term credit mobility programmes with renowned universities abroad.

FACULTIES AND PROFESSORS

At the Humanities faculty, Piek Vossen investigates how computers can understand human language. Piek is both a linguist and programmer, combining knowledge from Humanities and Computer Science. Connecting language to situations in the world and concepts in our mind is an important part of his work. “Language is very ambiguous. Understanding a text is more than just knowing words.” The next step is that computers can do this interpretation for us. In 2013, Piek received the prestigious Dutch Spinoza award for his work. After leading the project ‘NewsReader’, where he built reading machines that read massive news streams to extract large structured databases, he received a NWO grant to study linguistic framing and the zwartekracht project Hybrid Intelligence as a co-PI. In his recent project ‘Make Robots Talk’, Piek creates robot models that learn to communicate with us about the world we share.

OUR PROGRAMMES

Dorret Boomsma is a leading scientist in twin and genetic studies of behaviour, health and genetics. The work of her research group has provided fundamental insights on how genes influence health and behaviour, as well as transcriptomics and epigenomics. Studies in Dutch twins revealed for example that ADHD in children is a genetic disorder, that is not the ‘fault’ of the parents. She is founder of the Netherlands Twin Register (NTN). Since 1996, twins and their family members who are willing to participate in scientific and health research are registered with NTN. Dorret is among the best authors in Biomedical Sciences in the Nature Index 2018 and earned the prestigious Spinoza award.

“THERE HAS NEVER BEEN A BETTER TIME TO WORK ON GENETICS. WE ARE EXPERIENCING ONE BREAKTHROUGH AFTER ANOTHER.”

VU SCIENTIST DORRET BOOMSMA

Professor in Biological Psychology

“THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A PERFECT MACHINE AND THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS SIMPLE TEXT. NO WONDER WHY MACHINES HAVE DIFFICULTY EXPLAINING THEIR ERRORS TO US.”

VU SCIENTIST PIEK VOSSEN

Professor in Computational Lexicology
RESEARCH WITH AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

For VU Amsterdam it is important to contribute with its research to solving major social issues. Challenges like this ask for an interdisciplinary approach – it forces us to look outside our own field of research and discuss our views with people with another perspective on the topic. Education and research are directly linked to each other. We lead students to research areas where they can excel, and where there is a high demand for well-trained professionals.

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH INSTITUTES

VU Amsterdam’s research covers many topics that often cross disciplinary boundaries. To promote and accommodate this interdisciplinary research, VU Amsterdam set up Interdisciplinary Research Institutes. In this environment, researchers meet, share their knowledge and joint forces to work on today’s challenges that require interdisciplinary teams. The Research Institutes have a national and international reputation for the scientific quality and social impact of their research. They are known for their successful PhD and Research Master’s programmes, worldwide recruitment of staff and students, active participation within international networks and excellent research facilities.

AMSTERDAM SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTE

An example of such an institute is the Amsterdam Sustainability Institute (ASI) of VU Amsterdam: a cooperation platform in the field of sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Before its establishment in 2019, research in the field of sustainability was not optimally bundled. The ASI brings researchers into contact with each other and encourages interdisciplinary research by financially supporting activities with an innovative character.

NETWORK INSTITUTE

Another example is the Network Institute. They study the interaction between digital technology and society, or what is often called: the Digital Society. With its interdisciplinary focus, its extensive size, and its well-established organization, the Network Institute is uniquely positioned. Many researchers have benefited from their Network Institute-based collaborations, and the institute has introduced interdisciplinary research work to a generation of young VU Amsterdam scholars.

AWARD-WINNING RESEARCH

VU Amsterdam is home to many award-winning professors. An example is professor Yvette van Kooyk, who heads the Molecular Cell Biology and Immunology department. She was awarded the Spinoza Prize 2019 (the Dutch ‘Nobel Prize’ for Science) for her research in the field of immunology. Prof. Van Kooyk unravelled the mystery of how cancer, autoimmune diseases and infectious diseases (such as HIV/AIDS) are able to disrupt the immune system. At the University Medical Centre (Amsterdam UMC), she develops nanomedicines that help the immune system fight cancer and other diseases.

AN EXTENSIVE NETWORK

AURORA NETWORK

VU Amsterdam is a proud member of Aurora. Aurora is a network of research-intensive universities in Europe who are committed to match world class academic excellence with commitment to societal engagement and impact. We aim to achieve the best match between excellence and research relevance. Aurora universities collaborate intensively on four main themes: Diversity & Inclusion, Societal Relevance & Impact of Research, Students, and Innovation of Teaching & Learning.

CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

VU Amsterdam is committed to society and wants to cross traditional frontiers. The Centre for International Cooperation of VU Amsterdam (CIS-VU) facilitates, supports and coordinates capacity building projects and has links to a vast international network of partners in developing and emerging countries: academic institutions, small and medium enterprises, industry partners and civil society. CIS-VU is a central hub, linking up researchers and professionals to innovative projects.

AMSTERDAM ACADEMIC ALLIANCE

VU Amsterdam and the University of Amsterdam (UvA) together constitute the Amsterdam Academic Alliance (AAA). By collaborating and pooling our resources in various educational and research fields, we aim to progress to a leading international position in a number of academic disciplines. By working together, we can strengthen each other in terms of academic results, attractiveness to talented individuals and as partners to businesses and non-profit organisations.

There are numerous things that make VU Amsterdam the perfect destination to pursue your study. Firstly, its location right beside ‘Zuidas Amsterdam’ where all the big companies are located. Of course, as a business student, this is very beneficial since there is an easy access for you to get in touch with your future employer. Secondly, as an international student, the diversity in the university helps you to prepare yourself to work in the multicultural environment. Lastly, the multidisciplinary courses are well organized together with amazing teachers and will definitely prepare you to achieve your personal goals.

“VU AMSTERDAM REALLY HELPED ME PREPARE MYSELF FOR A JOB IN A MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT.”

FRANCINE HAMBERG / Indonesia

Bachelor’s student in International Business Administration

Jaap Seidell is professor in Nutrition and Health at VU Amsterdam and director of Sarphati Amsterdam, research for healthy living. As an expert in his field, he advises various national and international scientific organisations, including the World Health Organization and the Health Council. He is also a member of the Royal Academy. As a regular columnist for newspapers Het Parool and Het Financieele Dagblad and public speaker, he actively participates in the social debate. Jaap published books such as ‘The food labyrinth’ and ‘Juggling with food’ and tries to answer questions like: What is healthy and what is not? Do I have to follow hypes or not? And is my food actually produced sustainably and animal-friendly?

“OBESITY IS LIKE A ZIP CODE LOTTERY. THE NEIGHBORHOOD IN WHICH YOU WERE BORN PREDICTS WHETHER OR NOT YOU WILL ENCOUNTER IT AS A CHILD AND ADULT.”

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VU SCIENTIST JAAP SEIDELL

Professor in Nutrition and Health
In recent decades VU Amsterdam has engaged in an open dialogue with different faiths and ethical systems. Convictions, whether personal or scholarly, form the basis for critical reflection on the value, function, content, limits and effects of science. Such reflection is invested in all of our education and research activities, resulting in academic pursuits that are bound by personal responsibility and marked by a keen focus on issues of societal relevance.

Our student population has a diverse background: many students descended from immigrants, or are the first in their families to pursue higher education. VU Amsterdam regards diversity, whether in culture, conviction, nationality or prior education, as a source of innovation and progress, and hence as a special strength. We encourage students and scholars to discuss academic issues with those who hold different views and perspectives, and to do so with respect and an open mind. This way, our students can learn from one another.

Griffioen is the cultural centre of VU Amsterdam. In addition to courses, Griffioen organises films, music, theater and dance performances. The Events Office can host all kinds of cultural activities and various rooms are available for rent.

The VU Amsterdam Orchestra is the student orchestra of VU Amsterdam and was founded in 1962. Together, the students mainly perform late-romantic and twentieth-century music in the most beautiful halls at home and abroad.

In the Summer of 2019, the Déjà VU Summer festival was held at the VU Campus. With many performing artists, food trucks and an informal atmosphere, students and staff celebrated the end of the academic year.

SUSTAINABILITY IN EVERYTHING WE DO

Sustainability is an integral part of teaching and research, operations management and the buildings at the VU campus. Since 2014, VU Amsterdam has its own sustainability platform: Green Office. The mission of Green Office is to make sustainable and significant impact by empowering the VU Amsterdam community. They do so via for example waste separation, the ‘Bring your own cup’ campaign and the FoodHub, where people can buy organic, locally grown food.

We also have a roof garden with a size of 800m². It serves as a green and sustainable meeting point for both students and staff.

VU Amsterdam strives to maintain its position amongst the top of the most sustainable universities worldwide. In 2017 we ranked 4th in the Environmental Studies section of The Center for World University Rankings (CWUR) overview. In the first Times Higher Education University Impact Ranking in 2019, VU Amsterdam ranked 16th worldwide. In this ranking, universities are assessed based on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in order to measure the impact of the universities on society.

SPORTS ACTIVITIES

The VU Sports Centre brings people together. With two locations on campus, there is a sport for everyone: from fitness to yoga, and from futsal to boxing. Both students and staff can use the facilities at a competitive rate.

Every year an enthusiastic group of students take part in the Race of the Classics, the biggest student sailing race in Europe. Also during the internationally known ‘Dam tot Dam’ running competition, a big team represents VU Amsterdam.

VU and criminologist Barbora Holá is Associate Professor in International Criminal Law and Criminology at the Faculty of Law and senior researcher at The Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR). She specialises in the study of international crimes, international criminal law and transitional justice after mass atrocities. Barbora proved that the punishments of the Yugoslavia Tribunal and the Rwanda Tribunal are consistent and therefore not, as many claimed, a form of Russian roulette. Her work has been quoted in judgments of the International Criminal Court. She is also co-director of the Center for International Criminal Justice, a renowned knowledge center on mass violence and international criminal law.

“DISCOVERING MORE AND MORE, BUT ALSO REALISING HOW LITTLE WE KNOW, IS SOMETHING THAT REALLY DRIVES ME.”

VU SCIENTIST BARBORA HOLÁ

Associate Professor in International Criminal Law and Criminology
FACTS AND FIGURES

>4,000
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

>175
MASTER’S DEGREE PROGRAMMES IN TOTAL

26,370
STUDENTS IN TOTAL

>50
BACHELOR’S DEGREE PROGRAMMES IN TOTAL

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