Netherlands, Utrecht
2013 Spring Program Handbook

The Utrecht, Netherlands program is offered by International Academic Programs (IAP) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in conjunction with Utrecht University. This IAP Program Handbook supplements handbooks or materials you receive from Utrecht University as well as the IAP Study Abroad Handbook and provides you with the most up-to-date information and advice available at the time of printing. Changes may occur before your departure or while you are abroad.

Questions about your program abroad (housing options, facilities abroad, etc.) as well as questions relating to your relationship with your host university or academics (e.g. course credit and equivalents, registration deadlines, etc.) should be directed to IAP at UW-Madison.

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Contact Information

ON-SITE PROGRAM INFORMATION
Your primary contact will be:

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Utrecht University
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Utrecht University
Mailing address:
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3584 CS Utrecht
The Netherlands

UW-MADISON INFORMATION
International Academic Programs (IAP)
University of Wisconsin-Madison
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Madison, WI 53706
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EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION
In case of an emergency, call the main IAP number (608) 265 6329 between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday; after-hours or on weekends call the IAP staff on call at (608) 516 9440.

U.S. EMBASSY REGISTRATION
All program participants who are U.S. citizens must register at the U.S. Embassy before departure as this will help in case of a lost passport or other mishap. You can register on-line at https://travelregistration.state.gov. If you are not a U.S. citizen, register at your home country’s embassy or consulate.

United States Embassy
Lange Voorhout 102
2514 EJ The Hague
Program Dates

**Semester II (Spring Semester 2013)**

| Period 3 | February 4, 2013 |
| Orientation | TBA |
| Period 4 | April 22, 2013 |

(Semester usually ends at the end of June/beginning of July)

Exact dates may differ per faculty; therefore, it is important to consult your official acceptance letter or the website of your Utrecht faculty for further details. UW-Madison students must participate in the orientation session for incoming students their first semester in Utrecht.

Preparation before Leaving

**IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS**

**Passport**: A passport is needed to travel to the Netherlands and to obtain your residence permit. Apply immediately for a passport if you do not already have one. Passport information and application forms can be found on the U.S. State Department website [http://travel.state.gov/passport/](http://travel.state.gov/passport/). If you already have your passport, make sure it will be valid for at least 6 months beyond the length of your stay abroad.

**Visa**: U.S. citizens do not need a visa to enter the Netherlands. Non-U.S. citizens should consult with the Netherlands consulate for visa requirements.

**Residence Permit**: A residence permit is required for all non-EU citizens staying in the Netherlands for a period longer than 3 months. At the orientation, the International Office will help you submit an application for a residence permit and register with the local authorities. The following items will need to be presented:

- Valid passport
- Copy of your Utrecht housing contract
- Acceptance letter from Utrecht University
- Passport-size photograph
- Proof of health insurance
- Proof of financial means (e.g. bank statement or declaration from your bank, scholarship/financial aid letter, and/or financial statement from your parents, verifying that you have at least 800 Euro per month to cover your stay in Utrecht. This amount may change, so please check the information from Utrecht carefully.)
- Fee of 600 Euro (payable by bank transfer)
The university has made special arrangements with the city of Utrecht and Immigration and Naturalisation Services to hold a special registration day in September and February for exchange students. The police and/or the town hall (GBA) must be notified of any change of address while you are in Utrecht and should be notified when you leave the Netherlands. For more information about visa and immigration procedures, visit www.uu.nl/visa and www.nuffic.nl/immigration/.

**HANDLING MONEY ABROAD**

The official currency of the Netherlands is the Euro (EUR), with 1 Euro equaling 100 cents. As of 3/01/12, the exchange rate was $1 USD to 0.74 Euro. You should bring some money with you in cash for incidental purchases as well as for bus and train fares. You will need enough money to cover your first few weeks in the Netherlands, including your first two months rent.

**Banks:** While it is possible for international students to open a bank account in the Netherlands, this may take a week or two to arrange after your arrival. The International Office and the bank ABN/AMRO, 4 Neude 4 (city center) have agreed that exchange students can open an account and receive an ABN/AMRO bankcard which can be used at ATMs and for university purchases. If you are staying in the Netherlands for less than one year, you may have to pay fees to open the account. If you are only here for a short period of time, you may wish to use your account back home if at all possible.

Information about opening a bank account also tends to change regularly, therefore please to the following site for the latest information: www.uu.nl/exchange > 'Arriving & living in Utrecht'.

**Traveler’s checks:** Traveler’s checks are an option to accessing money in Utrecht. However, traveler’s checks are usually not accepted in stores and must be exchanged at a bank or cash bureau.

**ATM/Debit cards:** Cash machines are available throughout Utrecht. Bring a U.S. ATM card with an international 4 digit pin number to access your checking account (not savings) overseas. Check with your bank prior to departure to make sure you will be able to access your funds from abroad with an ATM card.

**Credit cards:** While well-known international credit cards are widely accepted in the Netherlands, they may be inconvenient to use for everyday shopping. Visa and Master Card are the most commonly accepted credit cards.

**PACKING**

Packing light is a good idea as most items you will need will be available for purchase in the Netherlands. Clothing and shoes are generally expensive to buy in the Netherlands. Students at Utrecht University are generally well-dressed; it is a good idea to bring one or two dressy outfits for formal occasions. Bringing enough clothes to layer is also a good idea. Some packing suggestions:

- four passport-size photographs for various forms
- long pants, jeans
- a coat & warmer layer below (essential)
- long sleeve shirts
- sweaters
- gifts (for roommates, foreign friends)
- a few books
- a few framed pictures
- an appointment book or "agenda"
- a warm scarf, hat, mittens/gloves
- walking shoes other than tennis shoes
- waterproof jacket
- travel bag for shorter trips
- a large backpack if planning for extended travel

**Travel and Arrival**

You are responsible for making your own travel arrangements. The major airport in the Netherlands is Schiphol Amsterdam Airport (AMS) [http://www.schiphol.nl/](http://www.schiphol.nl/).

**Arrival in Amsterdam:** After arrival at Schiphol Amsterdam Airport, you will need to take a train to Utrecht Central Station. The train station is part of Schiphol Plaza, just follow directions for ‘trains’. Train tickets are available from the yellow ticket machines near the platforms at Schiphol Plaza or from the ticket offices, which are situated close to the red/white-checked cube at Schiphol Plaza. There is a direct train to Utrecht every 30 minutes (:15 and :45 past the hour), and the journey takes approximately half an hour. Buy a one way ticket (‘enkele reis’) to Utrecht Central Station. When in doubt, you can always ask someone at the ticket office. From Utrecht Central Station you can either take a bus or a taxi to your accommodations.

We highly recommend that you ask for a mentor from ESN (Erasmus Student Network). ESN assists all foreign students integrating into Dutch student life, organizing different activities ranging from excursions to parties. International students may also contact the ESN individually for mentor assistance. You can complete an online “I want a mentor” form at [www.esn-utrecht.nl](http://www.esn-utrecht.nl) or email info@esn-utrecht.nl. If you request to have a mentor, your mentor will meet you at the Utrecht Central Station and help you pick up your keys and get to your new room. Make sure that you make contact with the mentor prior to your arrival (time, meeting place, etc) to ensure that someone will be there to meet you.

It is important to inform your landlord in Utrecht of your expected date and time of arrival approximately one week before you leave. Submit a copy of your complete flight itinerary to your Utrecht landlord and/or ESN mentor.

**The Academic Program**

**UTRECHT UNIVERSITY**

Of all thirteen Dutch universities, Utrecht has the deepest historical roots. Its origins lie in the early Middle Ages and are closely linked with the history of the city of Utrecht. The formal establishments of the university in the modern sense of the word came about relatively late. It was not until 1634 that Utrecht established an illustrious school and two years later, the States General of the Province of Utrecht officially declared the school a university.
Founded in 1636, the university has grown over the span of three and a half centuries into a diversified international institution, housing almost all major academic disciplines. Utrecht University has over 24,500 students and employs over 7,500 staff members. Utrecht University does not consist of one large campus, hence you will need to take a bus from the center of town to reach the various faculties. Lectures may be given in historic premises in the characteristic city centre of Utrecht, or in ultramodern buildings in De Uithof, the university campus. Some of the buildings in De Uithof are in fact internationally renowned architectural works of art, such as the Educatorium and the Minnaert Building.

Utrecht University [http://www.uu.nl](http://www.uu.nl)

Utrecht University Exchange Office [www.uu.nl/exchange](http://www.uu.nl/exchange)

Q-Desk (Frequently Asked Questions for Students) [www.qdesk.uu.nl](http://www.qdesk.uu.nl)

For information about arrival and living in Utrecht, please visit: [http://www.uu.nl/EN/informationfor/internationalstudents/arrivingandliving/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.uu.nl/EN/informationfor/internationalstudents/arrivingandliving/Pages/default.aspx)

**NETHERLANDS EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

In 2002-2003, Utrecht University changed the academic program and is using a European Bachelors and Masters system. The duration of the new bachelors program is three years. After obtaining the bachelors degree, students may continue their studies during one or two years in order to obtain a masters degree. These *programmes* include: teacher training course (1 year), vocational training in, for example, Medicine, Pharmacy and Law (max. two years), and research training, leading to the degree of doctor (dr.) which, as a Ph.D., is gained after 3 or 4 years of additional study and research, culminating in a dissertation. Those who go on for a doctorate are not registered as students, but as temporary employees of the university.

Dutch students will only be admitted at a university after finishing the pre-university education VWO. This is comparable to the first two years of US college/university. This pre-university education is one reason that Dutch students choose their major right at the beginning of their university studies. The first 2 years of the study are compulsory; thereafter students can specialize and choose their own programme to a certain extent.

**COURSE INFORMATION**

**Courses**: Utrecht University consists of 7 Faculties which each offer specific educational programs, focusing on one subject field rather than covering a broad spectrum of courses. The Faculties include:

- Humanities (Arts, Theology, Philosophy)
- Behaviour and Social Sciences
- Law, Economics, and Management
- Geosciences
- Science Federation
- Medicine (course not available for exchange students)
- Veterinary Medicine (courses not available for exchange students)

Many UU faculties offer both bachelors- and masters-level degree courses. Because of the differences in the educational system, most UW-Madison juniors and seniors will take courses
at the A or B level (the first or second year of course work for Dutch students). Courses at the C level are more equivalent to a graduate level course here in the United States. International exchange students meeting the requirements may enter (some of) these master courses as well, depending on your educational history, the prerequisites of the course, and the faculty policy.

Course Levels for Bachelor Students:

- Level 1 = Introductory
- Level 2 = Intermediate
- Level 3 = Advanced

Information about the courses for exchange students is available through www.uu.nl/exchange (Click on “Course Information”, then on the appropriate Faculty. For the Faculty of Arts, you can also go directly to www.let uu.nl/international (go to information for international students > exchange students > Course schedules and Course descriptions). Note: Most international exchange students apply for courses within the regular Faculties, not University College Utrecht.

After Utrecht University reviews your exchange application, you will receive an acceptance and course enrollment for your specific faculty which will specify your Faculty Orientation date as well as the dates your courses begin (Note: each Faculty has slightly different start dates). All students will also participate in a general international student orientation in Utrecht. Typically, students will also confirm their course selection when they receive their acceptance packet from Utrecht. **Utrecht University recommends that exchange students try to choose courses within one faculty.**

**Students will not be able to receive UW-Madison credit for fine arts courses since Utrecht University does not offer credits or grades for art classes.**

**Dutch Language Courses:** While many of the Dutch people you meet will speak excellent English, it is strongly encouraged that you take Dutch either before you depart or while you are in Utrecht. This will help you not only in day-to-day circumstances such as traveling and reading signs and menus, but speaking Dutch greatly increases your ability to get to know both the culture and the people.

At Utrecht University Dutch language courses are not part of the regular university education. However, the James Boswell Institute www.jbi.uu.nl, a language institute affiliated with Utrecht University and located at Kromhoutkazerne next to University College Utrecht, offers Dutch language courses to international students as well as members of the Utrecht community. Courses are taught on different levels and incoming students with previous Dutch language study must take an exam to place into a Dutch language course. Courses generally follow the calendar of the regular Utrecht University semester, with students meeting twice a week. Classes are generally small in size.

UW-Madison students who have not taken at least one semester of Dutch prior to going to Utrecht must take an introductory course in Utrecht. Students will receive a pass/ fail grade for courses taken at the Boswell Institute. UW-Madison arranges these courses and will be in touch with students with additional information. Students will receive 4 credits in the Dutch language sequence for the course.
Registration: Students must arrange enrollment at both the university and the faculty/faculties for their courses. You will receive a student number (called an F-number) and become a student of a “main” faculty (depending on your major). You can register for courses at the student desk of the faculty where you wish to take a class(es). You must always register as a student of a faculty in general and for each course you wish to take.

The International Office typically advises exchange students to pick courses from just one faculty. You can apply for more than one faculty, but it can be hard to combine time tables. If you are going to take courses at different faculties, you will have to register at the different faculties; otherwise, you will not receive computer printouts with results of your exams.

Please note that you will need to enroll in courses prior to the start of courses and before you arrive in Utrecht, which the International Office will help you with. You will receive information by e-mail on course registration. Course enrollment is very important and the procedure differs per faculty.

Course Equivalent Requests and My Study Abroad
Each course you take abroad must be assigned a UW-Madison “equivalent” course in order for your grades and credits to be recorded on your UW-Madison transcript. In order to establish UW-Madison course equivalents for your study abroad courses, you will submit a Course Equivalent Requests through your My Study Abroad account. Detailed information on the UW course equivalent process that you will use through your My Study Abroad account is available in the IAP Study Abroad Handbook.

CREDITS
Conversions: In the Netherlands, an academic year consists of 60 ECTS credits. ECTS (European Credits Transfer System) credits are a numerical value (between 1 and 60) allocated to course units to describe the student workload required to complete them. They reflect the quantity of work each course unit requires in relation to the total quality of work necessary to complete a full year of academic study at Utrecht University, that is, lectures, practical work, seminars, tutorials, field work, private study (in the library or at home) and examinations or other assessment activities. ECTS is thus based on a full student workload and not limited to contact hours only.

1 full academic year = 60 ECTS credit
1 semester = 30 ECTS credit

An average course consists of 200 study hours (classes, preparation, and exams are included), and thus equals 7.5 ECTS credit-points. In general, students at the university take 4 courses each semester.

Credit Conversion Scale:


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECTS Credits</th>
<th>UW Madison Credits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or 5.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 or 6.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 or 7.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Limits and Load**: UW-Madison students are required to be enrolled full-time when studying in the Netherlands. Students are required to take the equivalent of 12 to 16 UW-Madison credits each semester, with 18 credits as the maximum. **Remember that Dutch language courses count in the total number of semester credits.** Please note that it will not be possible to earn more than 4 UW-Madison credits from Dutch language courses per semester.

**PASS/FAIL/DROP/AUDIT**

Please refer to the IAP Study Abroad Handbook for academic policies. Dropping and adding classes at Utrecht is complicated. Please notify your study abroad advisor if you intend to make changes to your schedule. **If you intend to drop a class after initially registering for it, you MUST submit a drop form through your My Study Abroad by the deadline.**

**GRADES AND GRADE CONVERSIONS**

The grading system used by Dutch universities is based on number scale of 1 (very poor) to 10 (outstanding). The following scale has been established for translating grades from Universiteit Utrecht to UW-Madison:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Utrecht University</th>
<th>University of Wisconsin-Madison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.5 - 10</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.0 - 7.4</td>
<td>AB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5 - 6.9</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.0 - 6.4</td>
<td>BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 - 5.9</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0 - 5.4</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.0 - 4.9</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP (no participation)</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC (no credit)</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The grade reporting system is quite different in Utrecht than it is in Madison. You will receive a computer print-out of courses taken in your main faculty. Upon completion of your program, Utrecht University will send an official university transcript to IAP.

Living Abroad

THE NETHERLANDS

While commonly referred to as Holland, the official name of this country is The Netherlands. Strictly speaking, Holland is the name of two provinces in the west: North Holland and South Holland. To the east, the Netherlands borders Germany, to the south Belgium, and to the north and west the North Sea. It is a small country; the longest distance from north to south can be driven in a mere four hours. The landscape is extremely flat, and as a result, wind is an almost constant feature. Water is everywhere--lakes, rivers, and canals of many types. The population is over 16 million people, and over 60% of this population lives in an area that covers one-sixth of the country (the Randstad, which is defined by drawing a line connecting Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam and Utrecht). A few years ago, it was the second most crowded country in the world (after Bangladesh) but it's also one of the leading exporters of food. This is possible because of the extreme care the Dutch take in land use.

The Netherlands has a moderate climate (30 to 40 F in the winter), but the weather often includes drizzling rain, chilly winds, etc. The weather is best characterized by its instability: what looks like a rainy day in the morning might turn out to be a warm and sunny day and the other way around. Extreme weather (snow, tropical temperatures) is rare and usually does not last long. Hence, it is important to be prepared for all types of weather. An umbrella won't be enough to protect you against virtually horizontal rain.

Study in Holland www.studyin.nl/
Dutch Tourist Office www.holland.com/global

UTRECHT

Utrecht is the fourth largest city in the country with a population of approximately 300,000. Of this number, nearly 50,000 are students at the city's university and numerous academies. It is an old cathedral city, with many medieval churches and canals with canal level cellars, which are typical of Utrecht. It is also a modern city with large shopping centers, numerous cafes, museums and theaters.

Utrecht Tourist Information http://www.12utrecht.nl

HOUSING

Utrecht is a city of higher education, and students make up a considerable part of its population. This has a very positive effect on the atmosphere in the city, but it also means that the demand for student housing usually exceeds the supply, and finding a place to stay in Utrecht can be a real challenge. Utrecht University wants to assist its international students as much as possible in finding suitable temporary accommodation.

Utrecht University does not own any housing or accommodation. Instead, the University has an agreement with SSH Short Stay Solutions, a local housing corporation that offers temporary furnished housing. They reserve a range of furnished accommodation especially for
international students of Utrecht University. The University covers the administrative fee if you make use of this offer. However, Utrecht University does not guarantee the availability of housing, and the number of reserved accommodation is limited.

For information on to reserve housing, please follow the directions sent to you by Utrecht University and refer to the following website. www.uu.nl/housing

If you arrive before the start of your rental contract, after office hours or during the weekend, you may need to spend a night in a hostel or hotel. Affordable options are: Budget hostel Strowis (www.strowis.nl) in Utrecht city-center, Bed and Breakfast Utrecht City Center or Hostel Stay Okay (www.stayokay.nl) in Bunnik. For information on other tourist accommodation, you can also check the official Utrecht Tourist information website.

**Meals:** Most students do their own cooking or eat in some of the less expensive cafeterias or restaurants in the university area. Refrigerators are small, so the Dutch often shop daily or every other day for food. Traditionally, the Dutch eat rather plain fare, consisting primarily of bread and vegetables, with only one hot meal per day. Breakfast might be bread and jam or cheese, a similar meal possibly with soup or salad for lunch and an evening meal of potatoes and vegetables and a small amount of meat. There are a fairly large variety of ethnic restaurants in Utrecht.

The university has self-service restaurants on different locations. They all offer lunches with bread, soup and (warm) snacks. Vegetarian soup and snacks are available. The restaurant in the Educatorium and the Bologna restaurant offer warm meals at dinner time. The Bologna restaurant requires a reservation in advance. The restaurants are closed in the weekend and on holidays. During summer break and the Christmas holidays some are closed and some have limited opening hours. In the main library in De Uithof campus you find the coffee bar Gutenberg which serves coffee, tea and some snacks.

Some student organisations have their own restaurant where their members cook. Usually the restaurant is only open to members of the organisation but C.S. Veritas (www.veritas.nl) is an exception. The Veritas restaurant is open on weekdays. Dinner starts at 7:00 p.m. but you have to make a reservation before 4:00 p.m. by calling +31 (0)30 230 8040. Vegetarian meals are available.

To buy something at a vending (slot) machine you need either a “chipknip” on your Dutch ATM bankcard or a special “slot machine card.” The slot machine card is available at the university restaurants. You must pay a deposit of 5 Euro and the value of the slot machine card: 10, 20, 30 or 40 Euros. You cannot use coins in the slot machines.

**STUDENT LIFE**

**Student organizations:** There are many student organizations in Utrecht you can join. Some focus on offering a good time while others centre around a religion, a sport or a shared cultural interest (singing, photography). Most faculties have their own student organization, which, besides organizing social activities, also organizes lectures and excursions which may be useful to your studies. Some of the student organizations are internationally oriented:

- Utrecht Erasmus Student Network (ESN) [www.esn-utrecht.nl](http://www.esn-utrecht.nl)
- Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe [www.aegge-utrecht.nl](http://www.aegge-utrecht.nl)
- European Geography Association [http://egea.geoq.uu.nl](http://egea.geoq.uu.nl)
• Utrechtse Studentenvereniging voor Internationale Betrekkingen www.sib-utrecht.nl
• Christian Union www.cu-utrecht.studver.uu.nl

Student Services can provide you with a complete overview of all student associations in Utrecht (in Dutch). You might want to ask the student organization whether a membership is valuable if you don’t know Dutch.

Students most often make friends (both Dutch and other foreign students) through their classes and their living situations. There is also a wide variety of nightlife—bars and discos. Each University Faculty building also has a coffee bar attached to it, as a place to read and meet with friends.

The Cultural Student Centre De Salon (in De Uithof) is an ideal meeting place for university students and staff. De Uitwijk also shows films for free, organizes exhibitions, and offers affordable creative courses such as yoga, photography and painting.

International and Cultural Centre ParnassOs is located in the historic city centre. It not only offers cultural facilities for students and staff of Utrecht University, but also has a strong international element. ParnassOs is home to a number of organizations that look after the University’s foreign guests, such as ESN Utrecht, the International Neighbor Group and AEGEE. ParnassOs also houses scientists and students from abroad.

ESN (Erasmus Student Network) is a European program for European exchange students. Although you will not be considered an Erasmus student, you will be allowed to participate in the activities organized for Erasmus students. Past participants recommend signing up for a mentor as a way to meet Dutch students and get oriented to Utrecht when you first arrive. You can meet Dutch students during the ESN meetings every Tuesday evening. If you stay for the entire year, you can sign up to be an ESN mentor for the second semester. One past participant suggested becoming an ESN mentor and requesting a non-American student so that you can expand your social network of international students while taking part in a Dutch organization. The ESN organizes social events such as tours of the city, excursions to Amsterdam, sporting events, and other activities.

Sports facilities: Utrecht University provides excellent sports facilities in its Olympos Sports Centre www.olympos.nl. It provides top-class facilities for indoor football, basketball, volleyball and handball. At the centre, you will also find squash courts and a well-equipped fitness centre. Outdoor facilities include football fields, a rugby pitch, hockey fields, a golf practicing course, beach volleyball courses and all-weather tennis courts. You can join a course, a student sports club and use the facility for your own recreational sports. All in all you can take part in over 30 different sports, including tae bo, capoeira, fencing, fitness, running, squash, tennis, salsa dancing, street dance, and different kinds of ball sports—all at student rates of course. When you consider joining a course or sports club please ask first if you need to know Dutch.

SHOPPING
There are a few "supermarkets", but much smaller scale than what you might be accustomed to in the U.S. There are specialty stores for cheaper shopping, such as the green grocers, and also markets on Wednesdays and Saturdays in the inner city. There is also an immigrant area of town behind the train station that has cheaper food stores. You will pack your own groceries,
even in shopping centers, so you will want to bring your own shopping bag or purchase one for a small fee.

Store hours are usually 8:30 or 9:30 a.m. until 5 or 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturdays. Thursdays are late shopping evenings and stores are open until 9:00 p.m. Shops are closed on Sundays in Utrecht (except the first Sunday of a month) and often on Monday morning, although this is beginning to change. Restaurants and small 'snack bars' are usually open on Sundays. Supermarkets are open typically until 8:00 p.m.

TRANSPORTATION

Bus: To pay for buses, trams and metro in the Netherlands you need a ‘stripenkaart’ (a ticket with strips on it). Each strip represents a zone, and each city and region is divided into travelzones. Every time you travel, you will use up one basic strip + the number of zones you are traveling in. So each ride amounts to a number of strips (‘stripen’) depending on the distance. Within Utrecht city you will need 2 ‘stripen’, to the Uithof Campus and the area Overvecht Noord: 3 ’stripen’.

Although you can buy a single ticket (2 or 3 “stripen”) on the bus, it is much cheaper to buy a blue ”stripenkaart” at the city bus station (‘stadsbusstation’), at the railway station, post office or supermarket. It costs € 6.80 for 15 stripen or € 20.10 for 45 stripen.

How long you can travel depends on the number of stripen that you have stamped. 2-4 strips are valid for 1 hour from the time of stamping. Within this time you also have the right to change buses, as long as you stay within the same zone(s).

The “stripen” system is currently in transition to a debit-card type system. The transition has been completed in certain cities, but not all Dutch cities yet. Students should consult local postings to determine what system is currently being used.

Train: For national train transportation, Netherlands Railways www.ns.nl, a Voordeelurenkaart can be purchased at any time and is valid for one year. This card provides a 40% discount (watch for time constraints with the card – typically you can’t use it before 9 am on weekdays) anywhere nationally. If you plan to travel by train a great deal within the Netherlands, this card is highly recommended. You will need 1 passport photo and the cards costs 50-55 euros.

Bicycle: Most people travel by bike as it is convenient and cheap. A secondhand bike will cost between 25 to 70 Euro, and if you are lucky, you can use it during your whole stay and sell it at the end. However, bike thefts are very common. You may wish to bring a Kryptonite lock (or U lock) from the United States, as they are more expensive in the Netherlands. If you choose to bicycle, be aware of the laws that apply to bicyclists. Though you will see fewer bicyclists wearing helmets, Dutch law requires that your bike have a working light for night riding. Bring your helmet from home if you are planning on biking.

SAFETY

According to the U.S. State Department Travel Information on The Netherlands, “The Netherlands has a low crime rate.” Crimes of property, however, do occur. Students should be particularly aware of keeping their bikes locked at all times. Violent crime is much less common.
in the Netherlands than in the U.S. Remember to take care of personal belongings in crowded surroundings such as buses during rush hour, markets, etc.

HEALTH
Medical facilities are widely available and easily found; doctors usually have offices at their homes. Most visiting hours are from 8:00 to 9:00 am and 1:00 to 2:00 pm; double-check the hours before going. Doctors usually speak English and can prescribe medicine that you can get at local pharmacies. You can pay cash on the spot, get billed at home, or have it taken directly out of your Dutch bank account.

Insurance: The Office of International Relations at Utrecht recommends you to have third party liability insurance. They can provide you with an inexpensive student insurance which includes expatriation to the U.S. in the case of an emergency or accident. There is another type of student insurance which covers medical costs, liability, luggage, legal assistance, repatriation, etc. See their office for more information or [http://www.ace-ips-nl.com/](http://www.ace-ips-nl.com/).

COMMUNICATION
Telephone: When making calls, keep in mind time zone differences [www.timeanddate.com/worldclock](http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock). To make an international call to the United States, dial the access code for the country from which you are calling plus the United States country code (always “1”) followed by the appropriate U.S. area code and local number. To call internationally from the United States, dial “011”, the country code, city access code (if necessary) and the phone number. Country and city codes can be found online [www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/dialing.html](http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/dialing.html). Some of above steps can vary if you are using a calling card.

For calling the United States, some former students recommend having a U.S. calling card (AT&T, Sprint, MCI, etc.) to be able to obtain cheaper rates than are available through direct dialing. Pre-paid calling cards are also available at “tobacco-and-magazine” shops and may offer the least expensive rates. There is no call-waiting at student apartments. Many Dutch students have cell phones; so you might want to consider purchasing an inexpensive cell phone with pre-paid cards to use during your stay in the Netherlands. (Note: Dutch cell phones work with SIM-cards).

E-mail: You will receive your own Utrecht University e-mail address. Please check this account often for messages from the International Office. An Internet connection will be available from your accommodation, and with only the costs of the telephone to pay (there are no subscription costs), you will have access to the Internet and all University services (e.g. the library). If you live in one of the student complexes, a super-speed connection to the University network will be available.

Most of the University’s buildings have modern facilities and there are numerous computer rooms and study places for students’ use. The majority of the degree programs offer free printing facilities and there is, of course, a specific library for each program, which can be accessed for books and new media, such as the Internet and CD-ROMs. The brand new university library annex at De Uithof offers 90 kilometers of books and newspapers and space for approximately 800 study places, each equipped with computer network connections.
Student Testimonials

The quotes below are comments from past participants; they reflect various students’ experiences and are included to provide different perspectives. IAP does not endorse any specific view expressed in this section.

HANDLING MONEY ABROAD

Some past students have experienced difficulty in opening a bank account. While one branch of a particular bank might deny you an account, the next one may let you open one.

I used my credit card, although not everyone accepts them. An ATM card is a must.

Leaving for the program I had about $200, which was enough.

If you are there for a year, open a bank account. Few places take Visa so I relied on a cash card and had to pay $2.00 for every withdrawal. Traveler’s checks were not useful.

I arrived with 1000 euros in traveler’s checks and 200 euros in cash, which was more than enough.

Using credit cards gives the best exchange rate. Opening a bank account is convenient for food shopping, paying rent, etc.

Traveler checks are a pain to bring abroad since most places do not exchange them.

Do not bring travelers checks. ABN-AMRO does not except them nor do many other banks.

Easiest way to get money is through your check card. Foreign ATMs do not have a service fee, so you will only get charged by your bank at home. There is also no conversion fee charged by either bank.

Students most often opened a bank account in Utrecht, but it is not necessary. Money sent through their U.S. banks by money order or direct transfer (for a small fee). It takes, however, several weeks for a personal check from the U.S. to clear so be sure to have enough money to live on for a while after arrival.

PACKING

Pack light because you’ll buy stuff there and bring some nice clothes.

Make sure to bring a backpack and a good guide book- and pack light!

I wish that I had brought miniature toiletries for traveling.

Take a laptop over if you have it along with a security cable. I got an adaptor/converter before going and everything worked fine.
If you have a laptop, it may be a good idea to bring it. Computer labs are few and far between and it can be a hassle to type papers. Make sure you bring a computer lock (a long wire that hooks to the back of all new laptops). Make sure to look up the hours of the labs, most are closed on weekends.

Another participant said not to bring a computer because “theft is a problem and connection can be difficult in university housing”.

Our travel Bible was Lonely Planet’s Europe on a Shoestring.

**THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM**

Arriving early to participate in the Dutch orientation can’t be recommended enough. That will make the whole experience so much more enjoyable.

You only take 2 classes per a block. There are two blocks in a semester, so you take 3 to 4 classes total in a semester. It was nice to only have two classes at a time because it allowed me to travel and have a social life.

Ask a lot of questions and leave enough time. It takes time to understand how other cultures work.

There was less busy work and more reading. I would say I spent a little less time to get comparable grades.

Find the library. Little work gets done in an international flat.

The library becomes quite busy so finding a place in the academic buildings is a nice quiet change.

Ask the teachers what they want in a paper. Most professors just want the answer, not a 5 paragraph essay.

Take the course “Dutch Present Day Society” as it provides a lot of information on Dutch culture and is very interesting!

**STUDENT LIFE**

Do every activity made available. I did everything even when I was the only person and I met more people than I can remember.

Be as open to everybody as you can, both while in Utrecht and traveling.

The best way to meet other students was through the Erasmus Student Network’s parties and various get togethers.

ESN is an essential part of one’s time in Utrecht since it is the main way one makes friends and does social activities. Students should be aware of what a terrific opportunity ESN is so they have the chance to get involved as soon as they arrive.
Get an ESN mentor because it makes it a lot easier to get from the airport to where you need to go. Also the activities they put together allow you to meet other internationals.

Meet as many international people as possible but stray at times from the group of international students and meet the locals.

It can be difficult to meet and befriend the Dutch. It can be made easier by attending activities, talking to people in your housing and classes, and getting involved with clubs and sports.

I spent most of my free time traveling with new friends. Doing new things with new people is exciting and fun!

Also try to limit socializing with Americans. Most students tend to hang out with other Americans; this defeats the purpose of studying abroad. Expand your horizons!

Do as much as possible! Join every activity that you hear about!

Don't just make friends with just Americans—don't be a stereotype!!

Get used to a lot of smokers and smoke in every bar and restaurant. Students go out around 10-11 pm till early morning. Most bars close at 2 am, but some discos and a few bars go till 5 or 6 on weekends. Gays should be very comfortable and safe.

It is common to have friends over for tea and coffee in the afternoon or cook dinner for house mates or invite friends over then.

Don't call anyone around 6—It's dinnertime and considered rude.

The Dutch are stranger-friendly, helpful, most speak at least some English, German, and French, have very liberal politics and open minds for the most part. Any Dutch conservative is an American Democrat. They are, though, Dutch -- very tall, blond and straight hair, blue eyed, generally. I am 5'6” and felt short.

TRANSPORTATION
Everyone rides bikes, so you will definitely want to get one. Shop around to find the best deal as there are lots of places to purchase used bikes. If you are planning to stay for the full year, make sure you buy a good enough used bike to last the entire year.

Get a strippenkaart for buses (good all over Holland).

Trains are the way to go. Bring a guidebook but be prepared for some inconsistencies.

SAFETY
Don’t be stupid: watch your purse and wallet.

Just be aware of what is going on around you. Don’t ride your bike through the parks after dark and alone. Be careful with ATMs and the people behind you. If you can’t understand Dutch then you won’t understand the catcalls, but ignore them anyway.
COMMUNICATION

Check if your house has a phone. There are cheap cell phones available. Go to Lombok (Turkish area) for the best phone cards.

Bring your own cell phone if it is a triband or quadband because you can buy a chip in Holland for very cheap and stick it into your phone. A cell phone is very convenient to have to get a hold of other people. An incoming call from anywhere does not cost any money, so your family and friends can call you if they want.

Some students brought their laptop along and found it really useful because computer lab hours and accessibility is a bit inconvenient at times. It is also nice to have programs such as Skype, Google Talk, MSN messenger or AIM to connect with people back home.