Netherlands, Utrecht Honors
FALL AND AY 2013-14 PROGRAM HANDBOOK

The Utrecht, Netherlands Honors program is offered by International Academic Programs (IAP) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in conjunction with University College Utrecht, Utrecht University. This IAP Program Handbook supplements handbooks or materials you receive from University College Utrecht 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.

This program handbook contains the following information:

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  - U.S. Embassy Registration

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Contact Information

ON-SITE PROGRAM INFORMATION
Your primary contact will be:

Carla Kist
Exchange Officer
College Hall, room 016
PO Box 80145
3508 TC Utrecht,
The Netherlands
Tel: + 31 (0) 30 253 9853
Fax: + 31 (0) 30 253 9905
Email: c.e.kist1@uu.nl

UW-MADISON INFORMATION
International Academic Programs (IAP)
University of Wisconsin-Madison
106 Red Gym, 716 Langdon Street
Madison, WI 53706
(608) 265 6329
(608) 262 6998 fax
www.studyabroad.wisc.edu

Erica Haas-Gallo
IAP Study Abroad Advisor
Tel: 608-265-6329
Email: haasgallo@studyabroad.wisc.edu

EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION
In case of an emergency, call the main IAP number (608) 265 6329 between 7:45 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
The Netherlands
+ 31 (0)70 310 2209
+ 31 (0)70 361 4688 fax
http://netherlands.usembassy.gov
PROGRAM DATES
2013-14
Fall Introduction Week Aug 26 – Aug 30
Fall Semester Sept 2 – Dec 20
Fall Break Oct 21 – Oct 25
Spring Introduction Week Jan 20 – Jan 24
Spring Semester Jan 27 – May 16
Spring Break Mar 17 – Mar 21

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/. 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 755 Euro per month to cover your stay in Utrecht)
- Fee of 433 Euro (payable by Master Card/Visa or bank transfer)

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 2/23/09, the exchange rate was $1 USD to 0.78 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.

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 there for a short period of time, you may wish to use your account back home if at all possible.

**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 University College Utrecht 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 (€7.30). 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 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.

The Academic Program

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE UtreCHT

Of all thirteen Dutch universities, Utrecht University 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.

University College Utrecht (UCU) is the international Honors College of Utrecht University. It offers students a residential setting in which the foundations are laid for their academic and/or professional careers. The College provides its students with unequalled opportunities for academic, cultural and social achievements. It offers a unique educational experience designed to teach students how to communicate effectively and think critically and creatively. Among the special characteristics of the college are the international composition of its student body, the freedom for students to compose their own curriculum, its small classes and individual attention. It provides an environment that encourages intellectual exchange among students and professors in a friendly and informal atmosphere. The college faculty strives to connect rather than isolate the fields of study, thereby challenging students to integrate different aspects of their curriculum.

UCU is a small and selective College of 650 students within Utrecht University. Located conveniently between the two Utrecht University sites, it has its own residential campus in a pleasant part of the historic city of Utrecht. At most 400 students are Dutch; the others cover a wide range of nationalities. The College community offers all the support students might need, from high quality teaching and career services to companionship, recreational facilities and accommodation: a bed/sitting room, and ample study and computer facilities. UC-students also have access to all of the academic, social and recreational facilities that Utrecht University has to offer.

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Utrecht University College www.ucu.uu.nl
Utrecht University http://www.uu.nl

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:
100 level Introductory courses (open to all students)
200 level Intermediate courses (100-level prerequisites)
300 level Advanced courses (100 & 200-level prerequisites)

Information about the courses for exchange students is available through www.ucu.uu.nl/courses.shtml

* * Exchange students generally may not enroll in lab courses and language courses (with the exception of Dutch)

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.

Academic Tutor: Every exchange student has a tutor for academic advice. University College provides its students with a unique tutorial system: each student can count upon the support and advice of their own tutor as well as access to the collective skills of the tutorial team throughout their time at the college. Tutors are involved in the process whereby students select courses, compose majors and minors, and plan their future studies and careers.

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

UCU Conversions: At UCU, courses carry 4 credits. These credits transfer to UW exactly. So, a 4 credit UCU class transfers to UW as a 4 credit course.

Limits and Load: UW Madison students are required to be enrolled full-time when studying in the Netherlands. The total number of credits you can bring back to Madison corresponds to UW-Madison semesters. UCU requires exchange students to take a full time study load of 16 UCU credits per semester (4 courses).

PASS/FAIL/DROP/AUDIT
Please refer to the IAP Study Abroad Handbook for academic policies.
grades and grade conversions

Students are required to attend all classes held in each course and participate, to the satisfaction of the professor. The grading conversion scale from UCU to UW Madison is available below. Upon completion of your program, Utrecht University will send an official university transcript to IAP.

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<tr>
<th>UCU Grade</th>
<th>UW-Madison Grade</th>
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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/](http://www.studyin.nl/)

Dutch Tourist Office [www.holland.com/global](http://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](http://www.12utrecht.nl)
HOUSING

All UCU students live on campus and form an international community that is not limited to the classroom. Campus life is an essential part of University College’s philosophy. Students come from varied backgrounds, and living together provides unique opportunities for them to learn from each other’s experiences. Through a wide range of on-campus organizations, special interest committees and contests, students are encouraged to actively participate in campus life.

UCU has multiple halls of residence. All located around the main campus area. Each hall is divided into different units. Each unit has between 6 and 12 rooms, which share a living-room, kitchenette and one or more bathrooms. UCU is committed to diversity in its student community, so each unit attempts to mix students of different gender, age, and nationality as much as possible. The rooms vary in size between 12 and 20 square meters and are comfortably furnished with at least a bed, a desk and a wardrobe. Most rooms are single, although some double rooms are available. While smoking is prohibited in all main campus buildings, students can express a preference for smoking or non-smoking unit. Students share the bathroom with their housemates. There is a shared living room. All units have a kitchenette where students can prepare simple meals (a hotplate, a microwave, coffeemaker and refrigerator). Bathrooms are fitted with a shower, a toilet and a wash basin.

During the semesters, all students are on a full board plan, which entitles students to eat breakfast, lunch and dinner five days a week. On Saturday and Sunday, brunch and dinner are served. Meals are served in the Dining Hall.

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). UCU has a number of opportunities for students to experience student life both on and off campus. A list of available opportunities is available at: http://www.ucu.uu.nl/campuslife.shtml

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.

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. Utrecht Erasmus Student Network (ESN) www.esn-utrecht.nl

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 ‘strippenkaart’ (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: UCU advises students to purchase student insurance from AON: www.myaon.nl/students UCU’s international officer can apply for the insurance on your behalf.
COMMUNICATION

Telephone: When making calls, keep in mind time zone differences [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]. 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).

Mail: UCU will inform you of your address shortly before you depart the U.S. (typically 1 to 2 weeks before departure). Do not give the International Office address to your family and friends for sending mail to you.

E-mail: Please check your email account often for messages from the International Office and from IAP. Most of UCU buildings have modern facilities and there are numerous computer rooms and study places for students’ use.

Skype: Skype is a free, downloadable software application that allows users to make live video and voice calls over the internet. Skype users can also add money to their account and can then use the service to call land lines and cell phones internationally at very low rates. Additionally, Skype also provides an instant messaging function as well as file sharing.

To create a Skype account, users must download the application from [www.skype.com] and create a user name and password. Once the application is installed onto their computer, they can search for friends either by first and last name or using their friends’ Skype usernames. Once a friend is added to a users contact list, they will be able to see whether that person is available to chat. If two users both have web-enabled video cameras for their computers, they will be able to chat face to face. For users without a web cam, a microphone is all that’s required for calls to another computer.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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
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.