



Viaa Buddy System

Transcultural Nursing Semester

Global Citizenship

Our Renewed Course Offer

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Why Viaa?

1 Christian University of Applied Sciences

Unique in Europe, specialised in social domains, with Christian identity, all staff has a Christian background

2 Small scale university

Individual approach, small groups, personal character of the university, easy to build new contacts with teachers and students

3 High quality education

Accredited by the government, all programmes top rated in several Dutch rankings, high student satisfaction

4 Well-situated

Zwolle is a typical Dutch student city with student life. Within 2 hours travel distance from major cities in The Netherlands and Germany, including Amsterdam airport and Düsseldorf airport.

5 Problem based teaching

Practical cases of the future field of profession are the starting point of teaching. Theory is always related to practise.

6 Practise oriented, English taught semesters

Practise oriented studying, fieldtrips, short internships, guest lecturers

7 Unique intercultural programme

Learning about Dutch culture and society through an excursion programme, Dutch language training, live-in option with Dutch host families and a buddy programme with Dutch students.

Colofon

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Welcome!

In March 2020, I went on a trip to Malta with my colleague Tjalling Oosterhuis to see if we could start a research and internship cooperation with the local university. At that time, there was still only a small notion of the possible threat of Covid-19. The Dutch government merely discouraged handshaking and stimulated practicing hygiene rules. It was strange to not shake hands with the people we met in Malta. It is a cultural custom to greet each other that way. On our way back, we saw the first travellers wearing face protection. I slowly started to realise that this virus probably might be a bigger threat than everyone thought back then.

A week later, the Dutch people received a message from their government: Everyone was obliged to stay at home and educational institutions had to go in lockdown. For Viaa, this meant we had to adjust the educational programmes to fulltime online teaching. Unfortunately, this also meant that we had to order Viaa students abroad to return to the Netherlands. The whole world came to a halt. It made me feel small noticing that we who as tiny little creatures had conquered the world were now forced to a standstill, in His Kingdom.

Due to the lockdown, there was no travelling. People started to notice the silence of nature, paid more attention to their relatives, and figured out new solutions for their companies or organisations. It was almost as if we were reinventing ourselves. Meeting online turned out to be very easy. So why all the travelling? The lockdown raised new questions and challenges.

How do we perceive our own goals and dreams about international experiences in relation to good stewardship for the planet we live on? We had to think out of the box and make new decisions. What kind of university do we want to be under such circumstances? How can we provide intercultural learning but at the same time care about our planet? What are the lessons we can learn from this online work period? I dare you to be part of this journey and share your good solutions and innovative ideas with us!

Robertha Langenberg is the Director of our Health Care Academy and Programme Director of Internationalisation.



Viaa buddy system breaks down barriers

Studying abroad can be quite a big step for international students. How do you find your way in a foreign country, in an unknown city, and at an unfamiliar university? To make that step smaller, Viaa offers a buddy system. This works simply: from day 1, an international student is linked to a Viaa student. The Viaa student helps the international student to find his/her way around and to adjust to the foreign environment. Conversely, the contact with a foreign student is a particularly educational experience for the Viaa student!

Nic and Thom share their experience in this joint interview. Nic studies Business and Psychology at Dordt University. Thom is one of our local students from the Teacher Training programme at Viaa.

“Participating in the buddy system is not only an opportunity to meet international students. I knew in advance that lasting friendships could result from participating in the programme. I liked the idea of becoming a buddy because I was secretly hoping to develop a lasting friendship with someone who grew up in a different country.” Thom was linked to Nic and that turned out to be a very good match. “I soon found out that Nic was a friendly, humble guy, someone you can laugh with and have a conversation with as well.”

Same struggle

Meeting people from abroad can give you new insights and perspectives on different issues. For Thom, meeting Nic gave him new insights into American life, politics, and education. But that was not even the most important experience, according to Thom. “Nic taught me there are other people struggling with similar issues like I do, even when they live on the other side of an ocean. Also, I saw a lot of faith and trust in God in Nic which inspired me! This reminded me of Whom I can always rely on. I am grateful to Nic for that.”

Video calls

Unfortunately, Nic had to leave earlier than planned due to COVID-19. But that did not affect their friendship. “I am still in touch with Nic, we make video calls quite regularly. I really hope to see him again in real life. Nic has really become a friend of mine.”

During his major Business and Psychology at Dordt University, Nic knew he was open to studying abroad. Participating in the SPICE programme came as a perfect opportunity for him to fulfil that wish. Nic: “I really wanted to see a part of the world that I didn’t know well yet. I wanted to learn about a culture that is part of my heritage and I wanted to take the opportunity to get a unique educational experience.”

Perfect buddy

Going to another country and being far away from home might be a challenge for international students like Nic. Viaa’s buddy system turned out to be a great solution for Nic. It helped him finding his way outside his comfort zone. “Thankfully, I did not have to face the challenges of a new environment and being an outsider alone. I am quite shy and introvert, especially with new people, which made me apprehensive and sceptical about how close I would get to a potential buddy. Thom was a perfect buddy for me in this regard because he was immediately warm and engaging. He invited me out for lunch and always talked to me when we met at school.”

Bond over common issues

Nic is happy he was able to learn so much from Thom. “Cultural intricacies that you can only glean from a cultural native, perceptions of America that I might have been blind to, and most interestingly how two people from completely different backgrounds can share so many struggles and insecurities. Being able to discuss issues that affect both of us really bonded us. We realized that humanity and Christianity transcend cultural, political, and geographical lines”, Nic says.

Grow

For Nic, joining the SPICE programme is something he would certainly recommend to others: “SPICE offers you a unique relationship with your host family and with your buddy. Thanks to SPICE, I learned so much in a new environment and culture in a relatively short time. The challenges of a new environment, culturally, socially, and educationally, have made me grow. I got to know myself better and I am grateful for that.”

Nic and Thom were international buddies at Viaa.



"Thom was a perfect buddy for me; warm and engaging."



"I am grateful Nic showed me his faith and trust in God."

A woman with long, wavy brown hair is standing in a lush green field. She is wearing a bright red blazer over a black, patterned, knee-length dress and black tights. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. Her right hand is resting on the trunk of a tree with white bark. The background shows a grassy field, some trees, and a building in the distance under a bright sky.

“Coming into contact
with other cultures
requires reflection
on yourself and your
own culture.”

“It is really satisfying to see students develop what we call ‘global citizenship.’”

As a lecturer of the Intercultural Explorations Course at Viaa, Adriëtte Reijniers meets a lot of students from other cultures. When asked about the most inspiring aspect of the international facet of her work, Adriëtte answers: “I like guiding these students in how they learn and reflect during their stay here in the Netherlands. The process of learning to understand themselves and each other, their own culture and the Dutch culture in-depth, is wonderful and fascinating to observe closely.”

Global citizenship

As a visual arts lecturer, Adriëtte is involved in the part called ‘personal professional development’. “I want students to reflect on their process during the months they live here in the Netherlands. What does it mean to you to live with a Dutch host family? Which theoretical models can help you learn to understand your own culture and the Dutch culture? It is really satisfying to see students developing what we call ‘global citizenship.’”

Reflection

The gain of international experience for students is getting to know yourself and your culture better. You achieve this by immersing yourself in a different culture, Adriëtte says. She experienced it herself when she once lived with an English host family. More recently she spent a study week in Florence for the course ‘Discovering Renaissance Art in Florence’. “Coming into contact with other cultures requires reflection on yourself and your own culture. This enlarges your perspective and your ability to interact with culturally different others. Why am I who I am? Why do I do things the way I do them? How can I connect with people from all over the world? I think this is the most important benefit of an international experience.”

Small-scaled

Gaining these experiences at Viaa has its advantages, Adriëtte suggests. “Viaa is a positive and pleasant place to study. The personal contact among students and between students and lecturers is characteristic of how we work. Students appreciate the small-scaled and safe environment of our university. This environment is essential to focus on the personal formation of the student. Students will get to know and understand themselves well, because we do not avoid in-depth reflective conversations. We connect these conversations to theoretical contents. This makes the theory last longer.”

Room for development

For international students it is easy to build up contacts with Dutch students. But although students may feel quickly seen and known at Viaa, Adriëtte sees room for development. “My wish would be an increasing interrelation of the existing programmes for Dutch students and the programmes for international students. I would like to contribute to that development!”

Adriëtte Reijniers is Lecturer of Visual Arts and Personal Development at Viaa



Transcultural Nursing Semester: unforgettable memories from Peru



From touring by tuk-tuk to travelling around Peru: Hellen and Celine, two nursing students at Viaa know one thing for sure: going on exchange is definitely worth it! Together, Hellen and Celine went to a girl's centre in Peru as part of the Transcultural Nursing course. In 'Hogar de Gina' (Home of Gina) about 20 girls aged 3-23 live in a shelter because the government has decided that their home is no longer safe to live. Hogar de Gina takes care of these girls and offers them a warm home and the opportunity to go to school. Hellen and Celine shared with us their unforgettable Peruvian experience.

Peru

The first question, of course, is: why Peru? Hellen explains: "The founder of Hogar de Gina comes from the Netherlands, and we came in contact with him through Viaa. We then talked to people who had also gone there. After hearing about their experiences, we became enthusiastic and curious. Peru also appealed to us to go backpacking, so we wanted to embark on this adventure!"

Learning Spanish

Participating in the course Transcultural Nursing means that students get the opportunity to acquire and apply practical nursing skills abroad. But studying in Peru had more advantages. Hellen and Celine's main duties were to take care of the girls during the day: helping them getting (un)dressed, doing their chores, and of course doing their homework. "We taught the older girls English and conversely, the youngest girls taught us Spanish."

Deeply grateful

Hellen and Celine are convinced that Peru changed them for sure, both personally and professionally. "We think Peru has made us both realise that we should be deeply grateful for the country we live in and the wealth we have. Also, this stay has contributed to the cultural competence for both of us. By experiencing how you can best deal with a new culture, we have developed a sensitivity for that. In turn, this contributes to our cultural skills as nurses."

Earthquake

Asked about their most memorable experience, Hellen and Celine find it difficult to decide. "The first earthquake in Peru was exciting! We had read about it, but we completely forgot that this is normal in Peru. We both screamed but seeing the girls around us remain calm reassured us. And travelling around beautiful Peru for a month was also great!"

Unforgettable memories

For future students considering going abroad, Hellen and Celine offer a piece of advice: "It is a good experience to get away from your life in the Netherlands. You will appreciate what you have and look at it from a different perspective. We would like to say: take your chance to make unforgettable memories - it is definitely worth it!"

Find more inspiration on our website:

www.viaa.nl/en/inspiration

Hellen and Celine are both Nursing students at Viaa.

“Nursing: an international profession par excellence.”

“Travelling, I love it. Going from one place to another, whether far away or a bit closer. The longer you’re on the road, the higher the chance of having an adventure.”

Marian is a real adventurer and lecturer at the health care academy of Viaa. Marian has intensive contact with nursing students going on exchange or plan to do internships outside of Europe. She also provides education around the themes of culture-sensitive care and sociology.

Relevant

With a handful of international experience, Marian knows how relevant internationalisation is at the nursing programme. “Internationalisation is, among other things, about the development of cultural competences.

As a professional, you have to deal with the care and responsibility for a vulnerable group that is sometimes extra vulnerable because of their social position. I think international experience helps nurses to be able to recognize and combat racism and discrimination.”

Deir ez-Zur

As adventurous as she is, Marian herself also has a lot of international experience that she found exciting and a valuable learning experience. Marian: “Once I went on a trip to Syria, just before the war broke out there. At one point I arrived in the city of Deir ez-Zur. Nobody there spoke English and I don’t speak Arabic. When I wanted to go somewhere, the owner of the hostel wrote notes for me that I could show to people on the street so they could help me get on the right train and get off at the right time. This was exciting but also special to notice that people really wanted to help me. For me, this is an example of inconvenience that ultimately turns out to be a surprise: it allows me to experience something new that I hadn’t thought about before.”

Right place

And yes, Viaa seems to be the right place when it comes to internationalisation. Marian: “Viaa is not a very big school. Students also indicate that they generally feel comfortable within the school, they feel that they matter. The International Office offers very good support to incoming students and involved teachers.” With that in mind, Marian has a final message for all (future) students going abroad: “Discover someone else’s story, be curious. Open your eyes and ears to see, hear and learn!”

“Discover someone else’s story, be curious.”

Marian Harink is Lecturer at the Health Care Academy at Viaa.





Renewed programmes make exchange to Viaa more accessible


Viaa adapted its international programmes so more students of partner universities will be able to participate. The renewed programmes has been shaped in close consultation with both current and new partners and will make it possible for more international students to participate in an exchange.

Bram Suithoff has been involved with the International Office (IO) as a coordinator and a contact person for international partners since 2012. "We want our unique programmes to be available to more international students from different countries. That is why we have been in close contact with both our current and new international partners. Our question to them was: What should an international programme look like to be interesting for your university and your students? We listened carefully, to get a clear picture

of those wishes." According to Bram, this research provided valuable information. Viaa used the input to come up with new programmes that is interesting for a larger and more diverse group of international students.

High quality and flexibility

"We are very happy with our partners. We are committed to a good cooperation and our partners partners are pleased with the collaboration with Viaa. This is mainly thanks to the high quality of our education and to the fact that we at Viaa have a flexible mentality", says Bram. This flexibility appears to be essential for programmes that tie in well with the teaching at other universities. "The curricula of universities differ, and we have taken that as a starting point. Our new programmes make it possible for a student from one university to start at a later moment than a student from



“We have made optimal use of the increased online possibilities in education.”

another university, without missing parts of the programme”, Bram explains. Viaa is involved with both current and new partners. The International Office colleagues received compliments from various sides for the fast and flexible way in which Viaa was able to build programmes that match the wishes of partner universities so well.

Physically and online

In short, the programmes are characterised by a head, body, and tail. The head and tail are hybrid: students can follow these parts either in a classroom (at Viaa) or online. The body, the core programme, is offered physically, at Viaa. “In the new set-up, a student from Germany who cannot join until later, can already follow online lectures at the beginning of the programme. While a fellow student from Canada follows the same start of the programme at Viaa.” In the tail, the student is able to return to his/her home country earlier, while s/he is supervised by a Viaa remote tutor during the research phase. Bram: “We make optimal use of the increased online possibilities in education.”

Interaction in an international context

Interaction in an international context remains the main goal of the exchange programmes. Students learn and lecturers teach in an intercultural way. “Because the context abroad is different from your own country, it is important we continue

to test our knowledge and relate it to other cultures. You achieve this by facilitating interaction between students and lecturers from different countries. It enriches our education and that of the universities we work with. Contact with our partners also means that Christians from different continents are in conversation with each other. “This impacts on your Christianity”, says Bram. Viaa will implement the updated programmes in the current period in close cooperation with the partners and the lecturers involved.

Find our updated programmes on the next page or our website: www.viaa.nl/en.

Bram Suithoff is coordinator of the Business Exchange programme and International Development Advisor of the International Office at Viaa.

Our course offer

Viaa SPICE Exchange

- Planning: Spring 2022
- Testing: knowledge tests, portfolio, and presentations.
- Two mandatory courses:
 - Culture and Society and Intercultural Explorations (4 ECTS)
- Three electives out of: Dutch and/or Spanish Language, Modern European History, Contemporary Theology, Art and Architecture, Research Project, Early Childhood Education, Social Psychology, Business Consultancy Assignment and International Marketing (4 ECTS each)
- Brief description:

Viaa SPICE Exchange is an English-taught semester programme focusing on cultural understanding and personal growth. It is an intensive study programme during which students are fully immersed in the Dutch culture. They live in a beautiful, medium-sized Dutch city, experience the Dutch educational system, and travel a lot, not only in the Netherlands, but also in Europe.

The focus of the programme is cross-cultural understanding. During your study abroad you will experience the Dutch culture in many ways. All these experiences are brought together in the Intercultural Explorations class, as a learning environment for cross-cultural understanding. You will be coached by a professional tutor to reflect on your cross-cultural learning process. For the Intercultural Explorations class, you have to research a personal topic of investigation.

Field trips are an integral part of the SPICE programme. All SPICE students, will go on a weeklong field trip to Rome and several field trips to large cities or landmarks in the Netherlands. Also, students who choose for the elective course International Business make company visits within the Netherlands and travel to Germany and Romania for consultancy assignments and company visits.

Viaa Exchange Specialisations

Viaa Social Work Exchange

Are you dedicated to helping people? Do you want to be significant in the life of another person? Are you interested in intercultural learning? Join us in the Viaa Social Work Exchange programme!

The Viaa Social Work Exchange programme is an intensive study programme, during which students are fully immersed in Dutch culture.

- Planning: Spring 2022
- Testing: knowledge tests, portfolio, and presentations.
- Four mandatory courses: Culture and Society, Intercultural Explorations, Social Work in International Context and Transactional Analysis (4 ECTS each)
- One elective out of: Dutch and/or Spanish Language, Modern European History, Contemporary Theology, Art and Architecture, Research Project, Early Childhood Education, Social Psychology, Business Consultancy Assignment and International Marketing, and an internship or practical assignment in the field of social work. (4 ECTS each).
- Total 20 ECTS

Viaa Nursing Exchange

Would you like to expand your horizon by living abroad, while simultaneously broadening your intercultural understanding and knowledge of health care? Would you like to gain practical experience in health care through short internships and research? If you'd like to add health care experience to your resumé, then the Viaa Nursing Exchange programme is the right programme for you.

Join us for the the Viaa Nursing Exchange programme. The Viaa Nursing Exchange programme is an English-taught semester programme focusing on cultural understanding and personal growth and gaining practical health care experience through short internships in the Netherlands.

- Planning: Spring 2022
- Testing: knowledge tests, portfolio, and presentations.
- Three mandatory courses: Culture and Society, Intercultural Explorations, Nursing Practical (4 ECTS each)
- Two electives out of: Dutch and/or Spanish Language, Modern European History, Contemporary Theology, Art and Architecture, Research Project, Early Childhood Education, Social Psychology, Business Consultancy Assignment and International Marketing (4 ECTS each).
- Total 20 ECTS

Viaa Business Exchange


Would you like to gain practical experience in business and marketing consultancy at companies in the Netherlands, Germany and Romania? If you want to expand your international marketing knowledge and learn about it from professionals in the business world, this is the programme for you. The focus of the programme is cross-cultural understanding, in combination with international business and marketing. During the Viaa Business Exchange programme, you will experience German and Romanian business culture, next to the Dutch business culture. An essential feature of the programme is hands-on learning. In addition to theory in class and academic readings, you will experience your new living environment, make (international) company visits, and work on practical assignments assigned by companies in the Netherlands, Germany and Romania.

All these experiences are brought together in the Intercultural Explorations class, as a learning environment for cross-cultural understanding. You will be coached by a professional tutor to reflect on your cross-cultural learning process. For the Intercultural Explorations class, you have to research a personal topic of investigation.

- Planning: Spring 2022
- Testing: knowledge tests, portfolio, and presentations.
- Four mandatory courses: Culture and Society, Intercultural Explorations, Business Consultancy Assignment and International Business (4 ECTS each).
- One elective out of: Dutch and/or Spanish Language, Modern European History, Contemporary Theology, Art and Architecture, Research Project, Early Childhood Education and Social Psychology (4 ECTS each).

We are currently further updating our programmes, as you can read in the interview with Bram Suithoff, to a more flexible approach on exchange programmes. At the moment, we are also working on a **Viaa Theology Exchange** and a **Viaa Education Exchange programme**. Disclaimer: Some of the courses are only offered in case of enough applications. Please contact our International Office for more info.



A professional headshot of a middle-aged man with short, light brown hair and a friendly smile. He is wearing a dark navy blue suit jacket over a light blue dress shirt and a yellow, green, and blue plaid tie. The background is a solid, dark blue. In the bottom right corner, there is a quote in white text.

**“The Viaa-Dordt
partnership has
literally provided
countless lifetime
friendships across
oceans and cultures.”**

Faith and education: building blocks of successful crosscultural interaction

Adam Adams is the Director for Global Education at Dordt University. What drives him most is the combination of faith and education, forming the building blocks of successful cross-cultural interaction. “I am consistently amazed by the work our graduates are doing around the world. I am in awe of the way their faith and education have equipped them for cross-cultural work around the world.”

Larger perspectives

Students of both Viaa and Dordt University have a unique opportunity to go on exchange to another international Christian university. According to Adam, going on exchange will positively form students for the rest of their lives:

“I believe the most important thing is that students will have a new and much larger perspective of the world. The opportunity to experience a culture shock and build the competence and confidence to navigate a new culture is a valuable skill that will serve students the rest of their lives.”

Viaa-Dordt partnership

As the Global Director, Adam manages partnerships with international universities that allow their students to go on exchange. The partnership between Dordt University and Viaa is especially valuable to Adam. He explains: “For more than twenty years, our institutions have exchanged students, and received visitors from each other’s leadership teams. Additionally, host families in Zwolle have cared for multiple students from the Dordt student family over the years. Friendships have formed that encouraged families to travel from one nation to the other for holidays, to attend weddings, and to learn even more about US or Dutch culture. The institutional partnership formed in the past goes far beyond just four months of a student living in someone’s home in a foreign country. The Viaa-Dordt partnership has literally provided countless lifetime friendships across oceans and cultures.”

Christian Identity

Finally, Adam explains that the Christian identity of Viaa is an asset and is valuable for students going on exchange. “The clearest example of the Christian faith at Viaa is the humility of Viaa-staff. It is very challenging for international universities to have a long, healthy partnership without staff committed to the cause. I believe Dordt and Viaa work so well together because we recognise that this partnership honours God.”

Adam Adams is the director for Global Education at Dordt University in Sioux Center, Iowa

“We should develop a vision on internationalisation in combination with the Sustainable Development Goals.”

As Good Education Practices Professor, Ingrid Paalman has a clear idea of her role in the internationalisation of Viaa: “Besides research, my involvement is mainly focused on sharing and exchanging knowledge and experiences. Particularly regarding educational content and practices.” In this role, Ingrid especially appreciates the connection between different operational levels. “I like it when there is an interrelation from regional to national to international. Reinforce each other in the context where you are.”

International connections

Ingrid has a lot of connections with people abroad. She is convinced that sharing knowledge among different countries is valuable: “I obtained my doctorate in England. I work with many people from abroad, to learn, discover, and develop. I think reflecting on the global context also stimulates our own context. There is a lot of information to pick up and bring back and forth. The international context is also valid for students because it supports them to look with different angles towards their own practice.”

Attractive place

Viaa encourages international students to study in the Netherlands. Ingrid thinks Viaa is an attractive place to study for international students: “Viaa is a small-scaled university. There is an open and accessible atmosphere and there is room for questions. International students at Viaa often feel quickly at home.”

Corona crisis

The corona crisis did not make it any easier for the internationalisation programme. Most exchange programmes are currently on hold. However, Ingrid considers the crisis as a good occasion to reflect on the current internationalisation activities of Viaa: “This is also a good opportunity to reconsider why we do everything we do and what is the added value. In what way do international activities enrich our education and situation? I think the meeting is essential.

Learning in other contexts helps you to analyze your own perspectives and values.”

Future perspectives

Due to Covid-19, internationalisation practices and international partnerships may change in the future, as physical contact is severely reduced. Ingrid: “I think we should develop a view on internationalisation in combination with the Sustainable Development Goals.” Ingrid believes we should think twice about whether a visit to a conference abroad is necessary. “The times to just go flying lies in the past, I think. At Viaa we can set an example of how you collaborate internationally without always meeting in person.”

Ingrid Paalman is Professor of Good Education Practices at Viaa.





“This was a wonderful opportunity!”

Francis Mugisha is a Christianity, Culture and Communication student at UC Diakonessstiftelsen in Copenhagen, Denmark. As part of Viaa’s SPICE programme, he took five classes, including Dutch Culture & Society and International Business. For Francis this was an inspiring experience. “I like to travel and experience new places and educate myself about different cultures. Viaa offers that: we travelled to Berlin, Rome, Romania, and many other interesting places. Through lectures and several company visits I got inspired by the business world across the borders.”

Erasmus+ scholarship

As Francis’ home university has a partnership agreement with Viaa, Francis heard about the international programme at Viaa. “I chose to come to Viaa because I thought they had some very interesting courses that I wanted to take. And I could also get an Erasmus+ scholarship. So, I felt this was a wonderful opportunity!”

Difference

When asked about the difference between Denmark and the Netherlands, Francis has to think. “Maybe there is not that much difference, as the cultures are quite similar. The only thing I noticed was that people are more welcoming and friendly in the Netherlands. And, at times, they are louder in public. The Danes can come across as somewhat reserved

when they meet new people. I think this was the most inspiring aspect of my experience in the Netherlands: the people I met were very open and eager to getting to know me.”

SPICE buddies

Viaa also has a pleasant, open atmosphere, Francis noticed. The concept of ‘SPICE buddies’ illustrates this, according to Francis: “Every international student has a Dutch student buddy to guide them if they need help with anything. Thanks to the open culture in Zwolle, I made new friends. Not only through Viaa but also Dutch friends of my ‘host brother’. They taught me how to adapt to a new culture and to surroundings that I am not used to.”

Include everyone

In class, Francis noticed something else that characterizes Viaa: the way how professors at Viaa try to include everyone. “The professors encourage students to participate in the conversations. Most of the time you could feel the urge rising to comment on things in class. I appreciate that attitude. This encourages you to prepare yourself for every class.”

Francis Mugisha is a Danish student who followed the SPICE programme at Viaa.

“You are crucial to the students and to their families at home.”



Students are not the only ones to enjoy Viaa's international exchange programme. The Dutch host families in and around Zwolle seem to have just as much fun as the students do. Richard and Callista Bredewold were such a host family. They hosted Francis Mugisha, one of our international students who participated in the SPICE programme. Although Francis had to leave sooner than expected due to the coronavirus, the Bredewold family enjoyed the time they spent with him.

Spending time together

Callista Bredewold: 'This year we hosted Francis. A young man from Denmark but originating from Burundi. There was a click from the first minute. Hosting international students is always an adventure, a surprise how things will turn out. But so far, the experiences have been super positive. We do believe that you should have time and space in your life to have an international student in your home. Especially to spend time together and do fun things.'

Different cultures

It is not the first time the Bredewold family hosted an international student: they have hosted two American students before. When asked why they chose to become a host family, Callista answers: "Because we enjoy receiving and getting to know people from abroad. Our sons are the same age. That makes someone feel at home quickly." Richard adds: "We like getting an insight into other people's culture. A nice extra is that you become a tourist in your own country for a while."


Corona

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, Francis had to leave earlier than planned. "We had just started doing fun things with him. The barbecue at Callista's father was very successful, and the visit to Sneek was also fun." Richard laughs: "By the way: this is a hilarious name for a place in terms of language! Sneek sounds like 'snake' and the Frisian word is Snits, which sounds like 'snitch'... We already had big plans for celebrating King's Night and Day and the Liberation Day Festival. Unfortunately, we did not get to experience that this year."

Recommendation

The Bredewold family would definitely recommend hosting international students to other families. Callista: "You get to know great people and often receive a lot in return! What we did not realize when we participated for the first time is that you are also crucial to the students and their families who stay in their home country. Hearing this from our host students' parents makes us grateful and happy."

Richard and Callista Bredewold were Francis' host family for his time at Viaa.

A woman with short, curly white hair and a black top is standing in front of a modern staircase with blue railings. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background shows the staircase and some greenery.

**“Moreover, it was fun to do
the course together with my
colleagues!”**

Learning and sharing valuable knowledge with international colleagues

Besides having an active role at the nursing programme of Viaa, Annemieke Vogel has ambitions to gain international working experience. “I find it important to have an international exchange of knowledge about educating nursing students. This will undoubtedly improve the quality of education. I would very much like to work abroad at a nursing programme for a shorter or longer period. An essential part for myself, as a new adventure and for my personal development.”

Annemieke acknowledges that internationalisation gives you the unique opportunity to learn and share valuable knowledge with international colleagues: “It is very interesting to learn from each other, and it is adventurous to stay in a different environment for a while and also work and learn there.”

Norway

Together with colleagues, Annemieke investigated if there was an opportunity to partner with a Norwegian nursing school. Fortunately, positive reactions came from Norway! But, as you might expect, coronavirus threw a spanner in the works. Annemieke: “Due to the current situation around Covid-19, the plans are on hold, but hopefully there will be a moment after the corona crisis when we can dream about exchange again. I would also love to live and work in Norway for a while. For now, I try to teach myself the Norwegian language so that I can say ‘Jeg snakker norsk’ (I speak Norwegian) and the language barrier does not have to be a problem.”

Hospitality and warmth

Besides offering students and teachers a unique experience abroad, Viaa additionally offers internationalisation programmes rooted in Christian values. When asked, what reflects the Christian identity in the internationalisation of Viaa specifically, Annemieke answers: “I think it is mainly in the way of dealing with each other. It is characterized as hospitable and warm. It is key to show interest in each other’s beliefs without a value judgment.”

Small scale

Over the years, Annemieke has gained international experience herself too. Viaa University, as small-scale university, has a lot of room for personal contact and sharing valuable experiences together with others. As such, Annemieke went on several trips with colleagues. In addition to her trips to Ireland and Norway, she also took the Cambridge Course to improve her skills in English. “I am proud that I passed the exam after the course. Moreover, it was fun to do the course together with my colleagues!”

Annemieke Vogel is a Teacher and Programme ambassador at the Nursing Programma at Viaa.



“The best part of our job? Meeting Christians from all over the world!”

For Viaa students, international students, and relations from other universities, Tjalling Oosterhuis and Marlinde Liefjijn are trusted contact persons. Together, they manage the International Office of Viaa.

Christians from all over the world

One of the best parts of their job, according to Tjalling and Marlinde, is the opportunity to meet Christians from all over the world. Tjalling: “Our drive is to welcome students to a Christian University in the Netherlands. We challenge students to find their way in the open-minded Dutch society. Meanwhile, we enjoy sharing the Christian foundations in life, in the programme we have developed for international students.” Marlinde adds: “The result is an unforgettable experience of intercultural learning!”

Supporting students

But what is the role of the International Office? Tjalling: “At the International Office, we know the different Viaa programmes, we are always looking for new, interesting options for international students to participate in the high-quality education at Viaa. We take care of advising students who are in the process of choosing a programme.” Marlinde adds: “We enjoy our job of supporting students, by providing great lecturers, an inspiring learning environment, and friendly host families in Zwolle.”

Practical situations

During a semester at Viaa, the International Office also helps out students in practical situations. Marlinde: “We want to make sure students have a great time in the Netherlands, so you can ask us for advice in finding housing, help with your visa and we provide you with a bike.” Tjalling and Marlinde are also available for Viaa students going abroad for help with visa procedures and other preparations for a study or internship abroad.

Contact

Contacts at universities abroad are most welcome to contact the International Office, Marlinde and Tjalling say. “They can contact us by email: internationaloffice@viaa.nl. After the first contact, we can see what the possibilities are, and whether our programmes match the criteria of their university, we would be happy to welcome their students at Viaa!”

Tjalling and Marlinde manage the International Office at Viaa and form the international team with Robertha and Bram.