



# Viaa

Christian University of Applied Sciences

*“A personal exploration into  
many new cultures*



# About Viaa

Viaa is a small university in a city with a rich history: Zwolle. At Viaa, there are about 1800 students and 250 staff members. We know each other by name and work with small groups of students to stimulate cooperation and learning from each other. Viaa offers high-quality educational programmes and is awarded annually with a number-one position for most of their programmes.

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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 learning groups, personal character of the university / easy to make new contacts with teachers and students, brand-new building.

### 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 city with an animated 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

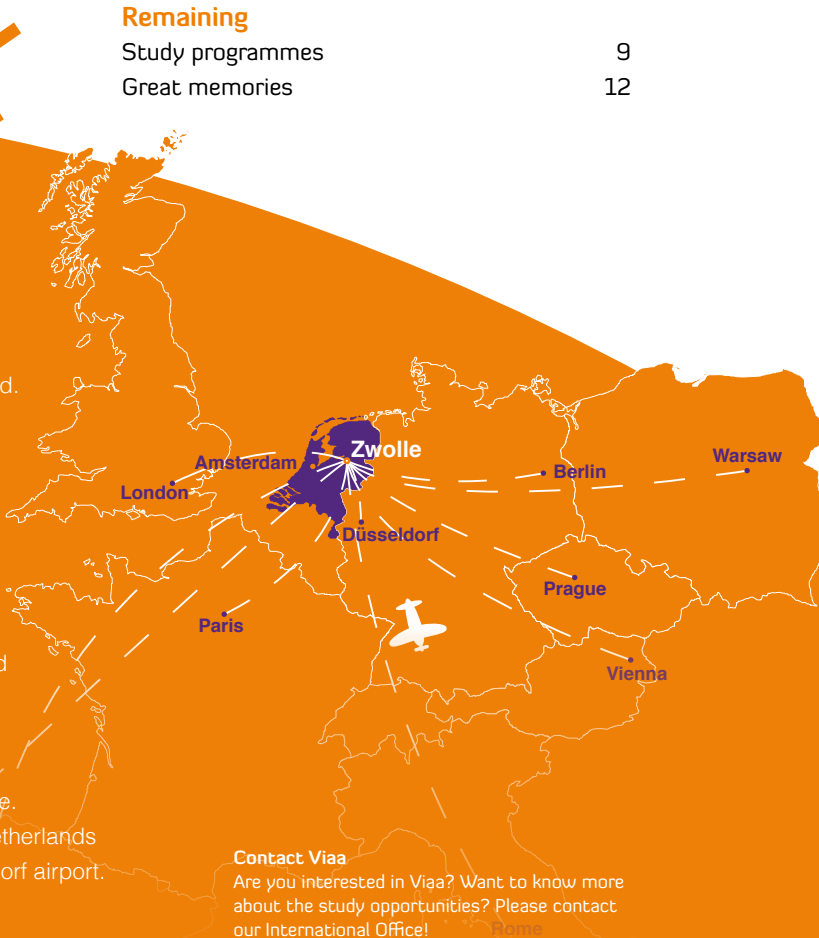
Practical case of the future field of profession are the starting point of teaching. Theory is always related to practice.

### 6. Practice-oriented, English-taught semesters

Practice-oriented studying, field trips, 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.



**Contact Viaa**  
Are you interested in Viaa? Want to know more about the study opportunities? Please contact our International Office!

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## Robertha: Being open-minded towards another person crossing your path

Last June, I stayed in Canton, Ohio, in the United States, together with a few colleagues to participate in a conference. On our Saturday off, we had the chance to visit Berlin, a small town in the middle of the Amish world. Accompanied by someone who was familiar with the region, we paid a visit to an Amish family. We heard about the deliberate choices this family made with regard to their lifestyle: no electricity; no gas; no running water. Attending school until grade eight, and then to work. No motorised transport, just horse and carriage. This forms a sharp contrast with the densely populated cities full of cars racing. But only a sharp contrast within one part of an tremendously diverse country as the United States. There, I experienced surprise and astonishment. And reflection as well: What do I actually think of all this? And what does that tell me about myself and my own choices, values, opinions and perhaps even my judgments?

Each country has its share of contrasts, the Netherlands likewise. Contrasts in local dialects and customs. Differences between population groups. People living in comfort or living on the brink of poverty. Ethnical diversity, family composition, living in a city or in the country.

What is your experience? Always ready to jump to conclusions at first sight? Or are you capable of observing open-mindedly, unprejudiced, without judgment and let yourself be amazed? The way I see it, intercultural sensitivity or cultural awareness is about the latter. Being open-minded towards another person crossing your path. Whether this occurs somewhere near you or far away on some sandy path in Peru or Malawi.

Throughout this magazine, we would like to introduce you to this diversity of people that have crossed the path of Viaa University. I wish you amazement and inspiration!

**Robertha Langenberg**  
Programme Director Internationalisation Viaa







“I really enjoyed learning about the history and culture of the European countries I visited”

## Christina: “I can better understand the stories my grandpa shared with me”

When she was a little girl, Christina Ybema from Michigan, USA was already interested in the Netherlands, or Holland as she calls it. This interest was fuelled by her grandpa, who emigrated from Gaast (Friesland) to the States in 1950. The contact he still has with his Dutch family, the fact that her grandparents were hosts to different agriculture interns from the Netherlands... It made Christina's desire grow to go to the Netherlands one day.

### **Dream come true**

The SPICE programme made Christina's dream come true: “Through SPICE, I could do a study programme in Holland. Now I could add international experience to my study and I was able to see the culture where my grandpa grew up in.”

### **International Business Track**

Christina studies Animal Science at Dordt University. During her first few weeks as a first-year student, she heard about the different programmes available through the university. She decided to apply for SPICE, specifically the International Business Track: “I thought this track best suited my major, and my future career goals. Besides that, I had the chance to learn about the Dutch culture I heard about so many times at home. Looking back, I loved the programme overall. I learned about the Dutch culture by diving right into it. All I knew was that I had learned from my grandpa and the Dutch interns. But now I was able to meet my family and the interns in Friesland. This was so special! I can now better understand the stories my grandpa shared with me. That is what living in the culture for 4.5 months brought me.”

### **More than just The Netherlands**

By joining the SPICE programme Christina discovered more than just Holland. “As part of the business programme and through our own travel, we also visited several different countries in Western Europe and even Romania in Eastern Europe. I have always wanted to visit Holland, but I never really even thought about the surrounding countries in Europe. I really enjoyed learning about the history and culture of the European countries I visited. It also made me more open-minded. I found out that I enjoyed being so adventurous.”

### **Friendships**

Christina valued the friendships she made during SPICE the most. “From the Dutch students, to the Víaa faculty, to my host parents and their family and friends, to my Dutch relatives: I found everyone to be so kind and willing to help with anything! They wanted us to experience their lives and cultures as much as possible. I was able to meet several students who will also be attending Dordt next year and I am excited to show them around as much as they did to me!”

### **Christina Ybema**

Alumnus SPICE



## Wichert: “Across the border you learn both to appreciate the Netherlands and to observe it critically”

As a nursing student, he did a six-month internship in Ghana. “There, I have learned to let go of my own value judgments and typecasting. When you do that, you eventually arrive at similar themes. Values that are important to all of us”, says Wichert Trip, now a lecturer and coordinator at the Nursing Department of Viaa University of Applied Sciences.

### Voyage of discovery

Wichert considered his internship abroad fascinating and inspiring at the time. And he still looks back upon it with satisfaction: “An internship abroad is an ongoing voyage of discovery. International contacts require that you open up to others. This attitude creates a deeper connection more easily. That is an effect that I particularly value.”

### Learning to look beyond familiar frames

Experiencing this effect during their studies abroad is pure gain for students at Viaa, says Wichert. He remarks that students learn to look beyond familiar frames during a period abroad. “Once across the borders you learn to appreciate the Netherlands and to observe it critically. You develop a broader perspective of humankind by this, and you return enriched as a future professional: more mature and with an open mind towards the other and towards the profession.”

### Minor Connecting Professional and Community Care

In the academic year 2019-2020, Viaa starts with the Minor Connecting Professional and Community Care. Wichert coordinates the English-taught minor and is looking forward to starting. “I am pleased that I can contribute to the internationalisation of the curriculum

with this minor. All students can benefit from the effect this will have: broadening and deepening both your perspective of humankind and your profession.”

### Daring will get you a long way

An English-taught semester incurs challenges as well. Such as teaching in English. Wichert already gained experience with that and starts laughing: “Sometimes you are really looking for the right words. That is what I found out, when I hosted a number of guests from India. Fortunately, I was not on my own and my students complemented me well. It turned into a kind of co-teaching... You simply do not possess the vocabulary you would like at once. But daring will get you a long way. Besides, in such a situation, both sides need to get used to it.”

### Attractive place

According to Wichert, it is a great advantage that international students quickly feel at home at Viaa University. “Viaa is a university where students experience commitment and attention. Interaction occurs naturally. And that makes Viaa an attractive place, also for international students.”

### Wichert Trip

Lecturer and Coordinator Nursing



“Viaa is a university  
where students experience  
commitment and attention.  
Interaction occurs naturally”



# Alida: “The experience at Viaa broadened my horizon”

Alida van der Walt graduated from a Bachelor programme and worked as a nurse in South Africa. At the age of 31 she decided to join the Orange Knowledge Programme (OKP). As a part of the OKP, Alida participated in SPICE. Grateful for the opportunity to study abroad, Alida concludes: “My view of the world was limited. The experience at Viaa broadened my horizon.”



## Understanding patients from other cultures

Alida chose to do the SPICE programme because she wanted to find out more about her heritage. Her grandparents immigrated from the Netherlands in 1955. “I wanted to come and experience the Dutch culture. And in addition to learning about my heritage, as a nurse, I wanted to learn to understand patients from other cultures.”

## Cope with the differences

How did Alida experience the programme in a group of mostly younger students? Alida: “In the beginning I was very unsure about myself, and I struggled to fit in with the group. Most of the students in the programme came from the same university. Besides, the age difference between me and the students was more than ten years. But towards the end of the programme, I learned to cope with the differences, and I enjoyed the group.”

## Host family

The SPICE programme offers students the opportunity to live with a host family. Alida has great respect for Viaa's host families: “Their willingness to have someone they don't know at all come and be part of their family for four months is heartwarming. Although I have lived on my own for the past eight years, in no time I managed to settle in with my host family. It was very interesting to perceive the parenting style of Dutch people. I also enjoyed experiencing other parts of the Dutch culture and society together with the family. For example, my host family took me to see the Delta Works in Zeeland. I am very grateful they made me part of their family!”

## Travel opportunities

When asked what she values the most, Alida mentioned the ICE classes. “We investigated and discussed different areas of the Dutch culture, and we were free to form our own opinion.” Alida enjoyed the travel opportunities too. “We were able to see so much of Europe: We even went to Rome for a week! In Rome, I learned that in Europe there are poorer and richer states, just as in my home country.”

## Extraordinary job

“The lecturers and Tjalling and Marlinde from the International Office did an extraordinary job to assist each student in their personal growth. At Viaa, our Dutch student buddies did their share to make us feel at home at school and in Zwolle. I had the opportunity to go and work in clinics and hospitals in the Netherlands and to experience firsthand how the Dutch nursing system works. I will definitely implement what I have learned during the SPICE programme in my future decisions and plans!”

## Alida van der Walt

Alumnus Orange Knowledge Programme and SPICE

# Study programmes

## Domains

Viaa offers four programmes in the domains Education, Nursing, Social Work and Theology. These are bachelor level programmes. It is possible to study full-time and part-time. In addition, post-graduate and master programmes are offered, and refresher courses. All these programmes are taught in Dutch.

## English-taught semesters and courses

For incoming international students, we offer English-taught semesters:

- Transcultural Nursing
- Connecting Professional Community Care
- SPICE
- SPICE+ Nursing
- SPICE+ Social Work

All of these are 30 ECTS English-taught semesters.

## Contact

Email to: [internationaloffice@viaa.nl](mailto:internationaloffice@viaa.nl)  
(see page 24).

## Application

Visit our website: [www.viaa.nl/application](http://www.viaa.nl/application)

## About Viaa

Viaa is a Christian University of Applied Sciences, with a distinctive character. We believe that Jesus' love for the world sets an example for us in our contact with others. We attach great value to qualitatively good education, advice, and research. Our students rate the quality and advice within their programme with outstanding marks.

## Characteristics

As a University of Applied Sciences, our programmes focus on the students' professional training. Theory and research are applied to the future professional context. The introduction to the future professional practice by means of internships already starts in the first academic year. Education at Viaa can be characterised by a wide variety of teaching methods, involving a lot of interaction between lecturer and students. We make a strong appeal to the students' independence and their responsibility. Viaa is a small-scale university. Consequently, there is a lot personal attention for our students.



*International class 2019*



# Study programmes

## English-taught semesters and courses

Contact for information: [internationaloffice@viaa.nl](mailto:internationaloffice@viaa.nl)

### 1. Transcultural Care (30 ECTS)

- Planning: fall 2019 / spring 2020
- Testing: exam, article, and portfolio.
- Applicable to: Nursing and Social Work
- Brief description:

**Transcultural Care** is an English-taught semester programme with a focus on the issue of how to deal with cultural differences, in order to create equality in care. Students are encouraged to step outside their own frame of reference and be inspired by the diversity in the world. The course focuses on awareness of cultural diversity, one's own prejudices, and stereotypes. In these classes, this is applied to racism and discrimination. The programme is well-founded upon the theories of cultural anthropology and cultural diversity, connected with professional care. Spirituality and religion as aspects of

culture, as well as gender and sex, birth and death are parts of the course content. All topics are related to the profession of the care professional.

During the course, the focus will be on intercultural communication, applied to interviewing and with a link to health literacy. Transcultural psychiatry, geriatric care, refugees, human trafficking and FGM are parts of the content of this course.

During the course, students spend one or two days per week on practical assignments such as interviews, visiting families from a different cultural background, etc. Lectures and tutorials are planned on one weekday (Wednesday). One or two days are intended for self-study.

- Contact for information: [m.harink@viaa.nl](mailto:m.harink@viaa.nl)

### 2. Connecting Professional in Community Care (30 ECTS)

- Planning: fall 2019 / spring 2020
- Testing: writing an article, delivering a TED talk, and developing a portfolio
- Applicable to: Nursing, Social Work and Theology
- Brief description:

**Connecting Professional in Community care** is an English-taught semester programme with a focus on professional service in communities. After completing this minor, students are able to analyse communities, develop an innovative plan for a community problem, initiate activities, and implement a plan beneficial for the members of the community in order to help them coping with their problems. In this minor, students learn what communities are, how they work and they collaborate with students from other study programmes. Lectures topics include basics of civil society, sociology, history, politics, networking, co-creation, professionals and institutions in communities,

community problems (addiction, poverty, loneliness, getting older, etc.) and solutions. Students will develop a plan together on how to tackle a real-life community problem and implement this plan with professionals. As support, there will be lectures about professional entrepreneurship, innovation, and sustainability.

- Contact for information: [w.trip@viaa.nl](mailto:w.trip@viaa.nl)



### 3. SPICE (30 ECTS)

- Planning: spring 2020
- Testing: exam, portfolio, and presentations.
- Three mandatory courses: Dutch Culture and Society (6 ECTS), Art and Architecture (6 ECTS), and Cross-Cultural Understanding (6 ECTS)
- Two electives out of: Dutch language, History of the Low Countries, Contemporary Theology, and International Marketing. (6 ECTS each)
- Brief description:

**SPICE** 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 nice, medium-sized Dutch city,

experience the Dutch educational system, and travel a lot, both in the Netherlands, and in Europe. The main focus of the programme is cross-cultural understanding. Students experience the Dutch culture in many ways. An important feature of the programme is hands-on learning. In addition to theory in class, students experience their living environment, make study trips and do practical assignments composing a rich learning environment. All these experiences are combined in the portfolio class, as the learning environment for Cross-Cultural Understanding. Students are coached by a professional tutor to reflect on their cross-cultural learning process. For the portfolio class, they have to carry out research on a personal topic of investigation.

- Contact for information: [t.oosterhuis@viaa.nl](mailto:t.oosterhuis@viaa.nl)

### 4. SPICE+ Social Work (30 ECTS)

- Planning: spring 2020
- Testing: exam, portfolio, and presentations.
- Four mandatory courses: Dutch Culture and Society (6 ECTS), Art and Architecture (6 ECTS), and Cross-Cultural Understanding (6 ECTS), Social Work in Europe (6 ECTS)
- One elective out of: Dutch language, History of the Low Countries, Contemporary Theology, and International Marketing. (6 ECTS each)
- Brief description:

**SPICE** 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 nice, medium-sized Dutch city, experience the Dutch educational system, and travel a lot, both in the Netherlands, and in Europe. The main focus of the programme is cross-cultural understanding. Students experience the Dutch culture in many ways. An important feature of the programme is hands-on learning. In addition to theory in class, students experience their living environment, make study visits, and do practical assignments composing a rich learning environment.

All these experiences are brought together in the portfolio class, as the learning environment for cross-cultural understanding. Here, students are coached by a professional tutor to reflect on their cross-cultural learning process. For the portfolio class, they have to carry out research on a personal topic of investigation.

As part of the intercultural experience we offer a study trip in Social Work in Europe. Participants can use the preparation and the actual study trip as input for the portfolio class.

- Contact for information: [t.oosterhuis@viaa.nl](mailto:t.oosterhuis@viaa.nl)



*With the host family*



# Great memories



Dine together



Groningen



Excursion



Class 'Nederlands'



Brand new building of Viaa in Zwolle

## Student life in Zwolle

About 30,000 students study in Zwolle, in one of the four universities. As well as a beautiful historic centre, the city has lots of parks. Zwolle is a great place to shop. It's also a safe city: if you learn how to ride a bike, it's easy to get around. Student life in Zwolle is focused around the city centre, which is packed with attractive cafés and restaurants.

Gyula Sümeghy (Károli Gáspár University):  
"It is encouraging to know that we are not alone in our mission."

Gyula Sümeghy is Director of International Relations at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. He develops, coordinates, and supervises the international relations of the university. In 2016, the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Theology entered into Erasmus agreements with Viaa and that is when the cooperation between both universities started.

## Fresh ideas

Sümeghy tells about what this cooperation has yielded in the past years: "Besides ongoing student and teacher mobility, our university received a student group from Viaa in March 2017. A few months later, a delegation of three professors from our Faculty of Teacher Training paid a visit to Zwolle to explore the possibilities of expanding the partnership to the field of teacher training. Together with a colleague, I myself visited Viaa in January 2018 and returned with really good impressions and fresh ideas."

"Our cooperation is based on mutual trust and respect."

## Trust and respect

Sümeghy's positive feelings about the relationship with Viaa are not only based on the fact that there is much to be learned from each other in terms of best practices or lessons learned. "Our cooperation is based on mutual trust and respect. Today, when Christian values in higher education are fading in several countries and regions, it is encouraging to know that we are not alone in our mission. We see potential for further development in our partnership. For instance, new Erasmus agreements could be elaborated and cooperation might also be extended to joint research or conferences", Sümeghy proposes.

Gyula Sümeghy

Károli Gáspár University (Hungary)





"This programme helped broadening my understanding on living in general"

## Kristóf: "I think Dutch people in general are very open and friendly"

Kristóf Nagy studies for his master's degree in English Language and Literature and takes a minor in Dutch Language at the Károli Gáspár University in Budapest, Hungary. Asked about his experience with the SPICE programme, he mentioned the ability to immerse himself in the Dutch history and culture. But also the effort of the professors at Viaa to help students understanding themselves better. And living with a host family...

### Part of the family

Kristóf calls it one of the main reasons why he has chosen SPICE over the other programmes. "Living with a host family has been a wonderful experience. You can learn so much more this way than when living on your own. My host family treated me like I was part of their family. Every time I needed help with something, they were ready to offer their help."

### Helpful, friendly and humorous

This open-minded mentality of the Dutch is something Kristóf noticed anyway. He appreciated the attitude of the professors at Viaa. "All of them were very helpful, friendly and humorous, making it really easy for students to open up to them and have a good time together." Kristóf continues: "I think Dutch people in general are very open and friendly. I never found it difficult to strike up a conversation with a Dutch person, whether it is a guide, train guard, or a cashier in a supermarket. The Dutch are genuinely interested in learning about different cultures."

### Most to offer

The many excursions made SPICE the programme that had the most to offer according to Kristóf. "We made many excursions throughout the Netherlands, to Amsterdam, Groningen, The Hague, Rotterdam, Utrecht and the Kröller-Müller Museum. We also spent a week in

Italy: seeing Rome was amazing! The professors guided us through the cities and told us about the history. We saw famous museums and buildings and managed to go to places like the Tweede Kamer of the Parliament, hardly accessible to ordinary people normally."

### Positive experience

What is Kristóf's most important takeaway from this international programme? Kristóf: "I would say the overall experience. I have learned a lot from my stay in the Netherlands. I got to travel to places that I would have been unable to visit, if not for this programme. I experienced what it is to live in a different country and living with locals. This programme helped broadening my understanding on living in general. It helped me mature. It was very valuable for me to spend a semester in the Netherlands. I highly recommend this programme to students with an international scope!"

**Kristóf Nagy**  
Alumnus SPICE



SPICE 2019





Ludie:  
“It’s really special  
to experience  
Christian identity  
across borders”

Ludie Gootjes is Visual Arts Lecturer at Viaa University of Applied Sciences. Ludie is involved in the international programme that Viaa offers to both Viaa students and students from abroad who study at Viaa for one semester. “We frequently meet with our students. Students appreciate this atmosphere of commitment and tell us this helps them interpreting a different culture.”

#### Rome

“I enjoy the privilege of going to Rome with students twice a year: once with the Viaa students and once with the foreign students studying at Viaa for one semester”, Ludie says. She thinks Rome is a fascinating city, and she wants for students to encounter the other side of the culture as well, and not merely look at the outside of it as tourists. “In a culture that is new to you, you need to learn to tune to what you bring along yourself and what a particular culture brings you. Particularly when it concerns your future profession. An international experience helps broadening the idea you as a student have of your profession.”

#### Through the eyes of the artist

As an Arts lecturer, Ludie wants students to gain insight in the Dutch and European history and culture. Her approach in the Art and Architecture course is refreshing: through the eyes of the artist. “Art is a means.

A way of exploring. And it keeps on surprising that it actually works! Art helps to reflect. Also when it comes to shared values I still think it’s really special to experience the common Christian identity across boundaries of language and culture.”

#### Zwolle

To learn from art you don’t need to travel far, according to Ludie. For that matter, Viaa University is situated in a beautiful city, she states. “Zwolle is conveniently arranged and has a particularly beautiful medieval city centre. That is a great opportunity for international students to learn about the Dutch history and culture. Zwolle demonstrates very well how the Netherlands deals with its rich history.”

#### Ludie Gootjes

Visual Arts Lecturer

Eric Forseth (Dordt University):  
“SPICE is our most  
vibrant and popular  
study abroad option.”



Eric Forseth is Provost at Dordt University. Ever since 1980(!), Dordt has had a Study Programme in Central Europe (SPICE). The relationship with Viaa in Zwolle has existed for almost twenty years.

#### Value

Forseth clearly sees added value for Dordt students in SPICE: “We want our students to develop an awareness of cultural traditions in the Netherlands and surrounding European communities. SPICE gives us this possibility. The programme helps them understand the contemporary political, economic, ecclesiastical, and social structures of this region. It also helps to acquaint students with the historical interweaving of culture, politics, economics, and communities of faith in Dutch society.” The opportunity SPICE offers to students in recognizing different cultural systems and beliefs, and in understanding more deeply their own culture and biblical worldview is also one of the unique benefits, according to Forseth. “Our students develop skills and sensitivity in cross-cultural communication and experience living as Christians in cross-cultural settings. Besides that, they learn or improve Dutch language skills through formal instruction and informal conversations with host families and fellow Dutch students”, Forseth says.

#### Customised programme

The valuable partnership Dordt University has with Viaa has existed for so long because the programme is customised for the learning needs of Dordt’s students’, Forseth suggests. “If an Education major wants to participate in the Viaa programme, we find a way to accomplish this objective together. If a business or language studies student wants to participate in the Viaa study abroad programme, we navigate the goals

for the semester with appropriate courses and other positive experiences within the fabric of Dutch culture.” The Provost praises the strong relationship between Dordt University and Viaa: “Our long-standing history has allowed us to keep in communication often and to accommodate all kinds of student interest. The SPICE programme is our most vibrant and popular study abroad option at Dordt University.”

#### Strong potential

If it is up to Forseth, Viaa should offer more courses taught in English. “There is strong potential for expanding student interest in multiple majors. There could also be opportunities to designate year-long co-op and internship opportunities in the years ahead. Our students have a keen desire to learn more about organisational and business placements, because they will consider international placements after finishing their university education.”

#### Eric Forseth

Dordt University



## Era: “Viaa changed my mindset and perspective”

Era Dorihi Kale teaches Transcultural Nursing in Indonesia. In a country that houses more than 1300 (!) tribes, this is quite a relevant topic. Since diversity is often an issue in Indonesia, Era decided to take the Transcultural Care Course at Viaa. In the Netherlands, Era had to get used to expressing herself in another language. And to Dutch food... Luckily, the lecturers at Viaa were ‘friendly and ready to help when we need it’.

### Reflection of Christian school

What helped Era to feel at home is the atmosphere that characterises Viaa. Era: “I experienced how the Viaa Campus shows a reflection of a Christian school. You notice that when you interact with the people at Viaa. It also can be seen in the meetings taking place in the assembly hall and at the start of the classes: we pray and read the Bible.”

### Learning environment

Era also is positive about the learning environment at Viaa. “The learning process is very well-planned and organised, using a learning management system (Viaa Online). This system is very supportive of the learning process. As an international student, I did not find it difficult to adapt, because Viaa provides various facilities. You can think of bicycles, train subscription cards and facilitating communication with the Dutch local authorities (‘gemeente’). And not to mention housing, and host parents who made us feel at home!”

### Most valuable experience

Asked about her most valuable experience at Viaa, Era is clear: “Viaa changed my mindset and perspective on many things. Especially in dealing with differences in various relationships, whether with friends, students, superiors, families or with strangers we had never met before. That is my most valuable gain of taking the Transcultural Nursing course at Viaa. Besides that, I have experienced that some typically Dutch food, like *stamppot* with dried meat, made me addicted...”

### Time for traveling

In addition to doing a course at Viaa, there is enough time left for traveling. Era has made full use of that possibility: “In the Netherlands, we travelled a lot, to all kinds of cities. I really enjoyed this traveling! We would always find canals or rivers, with ancient and European-style city architecture. In the Netherlands, you are already close to a lot of European cities, so we even went abroad, to other countries as well. There is no need to arrange a visa to be able to go to another country. It’s nice to be able to get this experience and I hope to come back here someday... *Tot ziens!*”

### Era Dorihi Kale

Alumnus Transcultural Care



With friends in Amsterdam



“The learning process is very well-planned and organised, using a learning management system (Viaa Online)”





“Our view is recognised  
and valued both nationally  
and internationally.  
I am proud of that”

## Marja: “Recognise brokenness and keep on hoping for recovery”

Marja Jager is a professor at the Social Work Academy at Viaa. For years, she has been coordinating a team of colleagues that do research within this field. And the study programme at Viaa directly benefits from this.

### Well-equipped

Social Work Students at Viaa are well equipped for the changing professional field, thanks to the work of the Social Issues research group. According to Marja the secret of this is easily explained: “At Viaa, we know how to apply international developments to education in the Dutch context.”

### Learning from partners abroad

Going abroad for inspiration comes naturally to Marja’s research group. “For us, it is helpful to see how other countries have overcome the challenges the Netherlands are facing now when it comes to Social Work. I think it is important that our researchers attend international conferences and actively participate in networks. This is how we learn from partners abroad.”

### Inspiring for international partners

The learning process works both ways. What makes the collaboration with Viaa interesting to international partners? Marja says: “We are able to apply international developments to education in the Dutch context. Moreover, as a university we play an active role in our own region. For example, in Zwolle, in a project aiming to prevent problems related to conflict divorces. Prevention and building relationships are key concepts in this project. Our collaboration partners and we share the conviction that children are entitled to a good

relationship with both parents. This involvement in our immediate environment is inspiring for our international partners.”

### Brokenness and hope for recovery

Marja puts forward a clear view on the relevance of Social Work. Even though this may not often be recognised in the Netherlands, according to the professor, Social Work is the driving force behind political and social development. “Social Work is doing justice to people. We start from a Christian view of humankind at Viaa. This is characterised by recognition of brokenness and a hope for recovery. By assuming both hope and brokenness, depth arises. For there are limits to what people can do. And at the same time, I believe in a God who cares about what people are going through. He is there for the vulnerable.”

### Rewarding job

Learning from other regions and finding the connections with your own region. It results in valuable experience for the research group, which they share in turn with international partners. And that is a rewarding job, says Marja: “Our view is recognised and valued both nationally and internationally. I am proud of that.”

### Marja Jager

Professor in Social Work



# Marco: Do not take it for granted! “In Malawi, we have unlearned our Dutch casualness”

Marco van der Zwaard is a lecturer and education and organisation consultant at Viaa. Together with a group of school leaders of the Dutch Reformed School society in Nijkerk, he travelled to Malawi last year. Marco: “In Malawi, we have unlearned our Dutch casualness: do not take it for granted!”

## Contrast with the Netherlands

The group visited several elementary schools in the cities of Nkhoma and Lilongwe, and met with colleagues from the Education Department of Nkhoma University. The trip was a part of the re-registration programme for school leaders. The contrast with the Netherlands is what stuck with Marco in particular: “Malawi is so totally different... That is what we already noticed upon arrival. Having reached our destination safely, we wanted to grab our luggage and get out immediately. Our host, however, brought us to a stop and said: ‘Let’s first give thanks to the Lord that we have arrived safely. That’s not matter-of-course: we don’t take it for granted’. We have learned so much from our colleagues in Malawi, for that matter.”



Marco with colleagues in Malawi

## Flip-thinking

Marco’s Dutch fellow travellers are all responsible for the knowledge and quality development of education in their own schools, like the school leaders are in Nkhoma and Lilongwe. Yet, the approach to this differs a great deal in both countries. “In the Netherlands, the highest aim is self-realisation: getting the best out of it. With us, success seems feasible, man-made. In Malawi, a school dropout of 60% of the pupils is interpreted differently: 40% does succeed! And perhaps even 10% of them will end up in a position where they can make a difference. That is flip-thinking!”, says Marco.

## Nothing is self-evident

According to Marco, this shows the attitude that characterises the fellow school leaders in Malawi. “They dare to define their daily work from a sense of dependency on God and their community. To them, nothing is self-evident. Despite the very limited resources, they are passionate, creative and professional. They were surprised when we expressed our respect for that. I thought that was a beautiful effect: in addition to our own learning process, our contact instilled in them an increasing awareness of their own qualities.”

## Very valuable

Nkhoma University in Malawi is a permanent partner of Viaa within the network of Christian higher education. Marco has experienced the collaboration first-hand: “I have seen for myself how both universities offer good Christian education to their students. Intercultural professional meetings, like ours in Malawi, are very valuable and informative both for the universities and the professional field.”

## Marco van der Zwaard

Education and Organisation Consultant and Lecturer



“In the Netherlands,  
the highest aim is self-  
realisation: getting the  
best out of it”





# International Office

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

## Fundamentals of Christianity

The best part 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." According to Tjalling, the result is an unforgettable experience of intercultural learning.

## Support

But what is their role as the International Office? Tjalling: "As 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 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 host families in Zwolle."

## Practical situations

During a semester at Viaa, the International Office also helps out students in practical situations. Marlinde: "For example, if your bike is stolen, or you have lost your travel document, we will help you in the process of getting

things back on track. We want to make sure students have a great time in the Netherlands." 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](mailto:internationaloffice@viaa.nl). After the first contact, we can see what the possibilities are, and if our programme matches the criteria of their university, we would be happy to welcome their students at Viaa", Tjalling assures.

## Facts:

Top 5 questions, to be answered before coming to the Netherlands.

1. What kind of Viaa programme can I choose?
2. Can I do an internship in the Netherlands?
3. Can I continue exercising/working out during a semester abroad?
4. How do I find housing in the Netherlands?
5. What are the costs of a semester at Viaa?

**Tjalling Oosterhuis and Marlinde Liefjijn**  
International Office