



# NETHERLANDS

**Brief Background:** The Netherlands hosts more than 122,000 international students annually, and 1 in 5 new bachelor's students were international in 2017-2018. The Netherlands was the first country on the European continent to widely offer programs taught in English. A high level of English proficiency nationwide and hundreds of English-taught bachelor programs make the country an attractive destination for students. The Netherlands is also near some of Europe's most popular travel destinations and has a reputation as one of the safest countries in the world.

The Dutch are historically explorers, inventors, and entrepreneurs, and this legacy continues to be a driving force in Dutch academia. The Netherlands boasts strong science, architecture, economics, and engineering programs, as well as a thriving creative sector of designers, journalists, artists, and film producers.

Although small in size, the Netherlands is a strong academic force. Thirteen Dutch research universities rank among the top 200 universities in the world, according to the 2017–2018 *Times Higher Education World University Rankings*.

**Good to Know:** Higher education in the Netherlands is a binary system featuring research-oriented and profession-oriented institutions.

Research-oriented programs—*wetenschappelijk onderwijs* or WO—are available at 13 public research universities. Among these research universities, some are general comprehensive institutions and others specialize in technology, engineering, or agriculture. Academic programs focus on theoretical aspects of the field of study and prepare students to undertake independent research. Many programs offer internships and study abroad opportunities; minors are also possible. Students in these programs typically complete a bachelor's in three years. The vast majority of students continue on to complete a master's degree, a process which typically lasts an additional one to two years.

## RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES

Research universities are a good fit for students who like asking “why” questions, students who enjoy abstract thinking, building analytical skills, and the theoretical. The emphasis is on learning to look analytically and critically at the way a certain field can be approached. Students learn to present convincing oral and written arguments and to draw conclusions from them. Students are expected to study of their own initiative, have self-discipline and independence.

Over the past several years, many of the large, traditional Dutch universities have created university colleges, or selective honors colleges, that follow a liberal arts and sciences curriculum. These programs are relatively small, with many requiring students to live on-campus to foster a tight-knit community of students within the larger university.

Profession-oriented education, or professional higher education—referred to as *hoger beroepsonderwijs* or HBO—is offered by more than 50 universities of applied sciences, called *hogescholen*. Universities of applied sciences are teaching-oriented, and offer programs specializing in a specific field of study. These programs prepare students for particular professions, tend to be practically oriented, and include internships and minors in the last two years of study. The programs lead to four-year bachelor's degrees. Though less common than at research universities, students can continue on to master's programs at universities of applied sciences. Graduates of these universities can also transfer into a research university to complete a graduate-level qualification, however this will likely require a bridge year in which research skills and specific preparatory requirements are taught.

### UNIVERSITIES OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Universities of applied sciences are a good fit for students who like to ask “how” questions, as they provide opportunities for concrete, practical learning. Students apply knowledge and work in a solutions-oriented way. The educational experience is directed toward the acquisition of competences. Programs at universities of applied sciences usually involve more contact hours as compared to research-oriented programs. More time is spent on each topic at a relatively relaxed teaching speed.

Dutch professors often encourage student participation and questions. The Dutch teaching style is often interactive and student-centered, focusing on teamwork and problem-based learning. Students learn not only to operate at an academic level, but also to work independently on real-world issues—just as they will later in their careers.

Under a code of conduct created in 2006, and renewed every five years, participating higher education institutions commit to provide reliable and easily accessible information for international students about their programs of study, accreditation status, admission process and requirements, and similar policies.

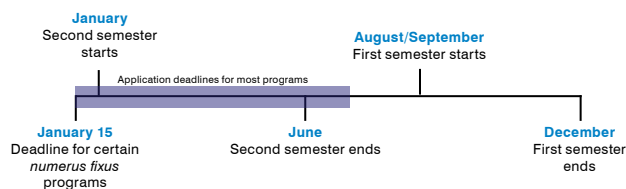


Photo courtesy of Stefan

**“The individual application processes of the Dutch universities were relatively straightforward, had helpful details—all in English—and connected me to dedicated international coordinators who understood and promptly addressed any difficulties I encountered. The application process is nearly identical to that in the US, making it easy to understand and follow.”**

—Stefan Harrigan, Ohio, Leiden University

**Academic Calendar:** Universities in the Netherlands typically operate on a semester basis, however some have four blocks or periods. The academic year generally begins in late August or early September and ends in June or July, with a holiday break in December/January. The academic year is 42 weeks long.



**Search:** Study in Holland includes a course search, scholarship finder, and information about visas, housing, daily expenses, working while studying, learning Dutch, and more. Study in Holland is run by Nuffic, an independent, nonprofit organization based in The Hague that supports internationalization in higher education, research, and professional education. Students can also search study programs taught in English.

Studielink, a Dutch national enrollment system for degree-seeking university students, also provides a complete list of Dutch institutions.

**Apply:** Applying to a bachelor's program in the Netherlands generally involves applying to the program of choice and registering for free on Studielink.

**Step 1:** Decide on the program(s) and institution(s) of choice.

**Step 2:** Check the admission requirements of the university and entry requirements of the specific program. Requirements and application processes differ not only from institution to institution, but also from program to program within institutions. Also, check if any matching activities are required.

A matching process is used to determine if a program is a good fit for the student. This can take place via online skills testing, questionnaires, tests about the student's interests, an interview or meeting, a letter of motivation (see below), or other requirement. Taking part in the matching process may be mandatory, but the outcome is only advisory, not binding.

**Step 3:** Confirm the deadlines of the specific program.

**Step 4:** Check the program's application instructions. Every application process will include both an application to the specific program as well as registration in Studielink. The program instructions will tell you in what order to complete these two steps. Follow all instructions from both the institution and Studielink.

To submit an application to the program(s) of interest, you will need to do so through an online system. Supporting documents such as transcripts, copy of passport, letter of motivation, and letters of recommendation may be required.

Letters of motivation give students the opportunity to explain their interest in the program of study. University colleges typically use these letters as an official criterion of admission, whereas other institutions may use them only as part of the matching process.

To register with Studielink, create an account and register your applications. Students may register for up to four programs in Studielink, only two of which can be *numerus fixus* programs, though exceptions exist.

*Numerus fixus* programs are highly-selective programs, including medicine, physiotherapy, and some types of business, which have a capped number of seats available. (The programs listed are a few examples and do not represent the exhaustive list of programs available.)

**Deadlines:** Deadlines generally range from Jan. 1 through July 1 depending on the nationality of the student (for visa purposes) and the particular program. Some programs offer rolling admission. The deadline for all *numerus fixus* programs is Jan. 15. A single university may have a different deadline for each academic program, so students should check the deadline of the specific program to which they are applying.

**Application Fees:** Some institutions require application fees. Students should confirm whether application fees are required by their prospective program and/or institution.

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**Admission Requirements:** The Dutch government equates certain diplomas around the world to its university preparatory diploma, called the Dutch VWO. Typically, a US high school diploma is deemed equivalent to a Dutch VWO when combined with a minimum number of AP courses (usually four) and sufficient performance on AP exam, typically scores of 3 or higher. IB diplomas are also recognized as equivalent.

Depending on the program, institutions in the Netherlands operate using one of three approaches to admission:

#### General Admission

Students applying to general admission programs, which comprise the vast majority of programs offered at research universities and universities of applied science, must have a Dutch VWO Diploma or an equivalent certification. General admission programs use few admission criteria so that more students have an opportunity to try the program. The challenge, however, is that once enrolled, performance expectations are very high with students being expected to obtain a minimum amount of credits.

#### Numerus Fixus

*Numerus fixus* programs have a capped number of places available. All *numerus fixus* programs have a minimum of two selection criteria. These criteria will be outlined per program on the program websites and can include grade achievement, standardized tests, international experience, letters of recommendation, and more.

Some programs at certain universities may be designated *numerus fixus* while not having that same status at others, and this can change from year to year.

#### Special Status Programs

University college programs are generally selective and use a holistic admission process similar to universities and colleges in the United States. Each university college utilizes a process unique to the institution where it is based. University colleges tend to look for students who are highly engaged in their studies and who have contributed to the student community. Motivation, as demonstrated in a personal statement, is important, and so is academic achievement. Some university colleges require interviews as part of the admission process. These are conducted by faculty and explore students' academic motivation, commitment, and curiosity. When required, interviews can be conducted virtually.

Fine arts and performing arts programs also have special status and may require auditions, interviews, or the submission of a portfolio. These talent-driven programs also consider motivation and prior academic performance.

The ACT and SAT are not typically considered as part of the admission process but may be a factor in scholarship decisions. Additional entrance exams are not common, although a very small number of programs may require them.

There is little standardization of eligibility requirements, application processes, deadlines, or non-European Union (EU)/European Economic Area (EEA) tuition fees in the Netherlands. When in doubt, students should contact an institution directly. The university's admission office ultimately makes all final decisions regarding applications.



**Upon Acceptance:** Each higher education institution will provide instructions on the acceptance of an admission offer and next steps. This will include practical information about how to arrange housing, visas, and residence permits, instructions for joining social/virtual communities of admitted students, welcome/orientation week schedules, and other pre-departure and arrival information.

**Tuition and Fees:** Tuition rates for non-EU/EEA citizens are set by each university and usually range from approximately 6,000 to 15,000 euros per year. Tuition fees for students with a passport from the EU, EEA, Switzerland, or Surinam are approximately 2,060 euros for the academic year. A select few programs, among them the university colleges, charge between 3,000-4,500 euros.

The Dutch government and some institutions offer scholarships or financial aid for students. These opportunities can be found on individual institutions' websites, or through [Study in Holland's scholarship search tool](#).

**Housing:** Generally, first-year student housing can be arranged through the housing office at most institutions. Students must apply for housing once accepted to their program and follow the instructions provided by the housing office. Students will ordinarily have their own private bedroom; rooms that two or more students share together are uncommon. Universities do not typically have a meal plan, although many provide some on-campus dining options.

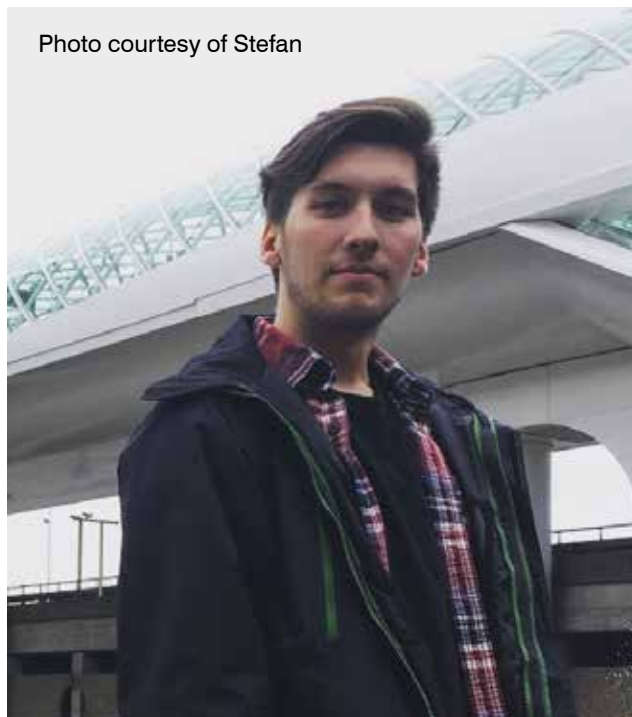
University colleges operate differently when it comes to student accommodations. Many university colleges in the Netherlands are residential, and require students to live on-campus for all or part of their studies. Single dwellings with many amenities are the most common.

**Visa and Other Permits:** American citizens do not need visas to enter the Netherlands, but students will need to apply for a residence permit, called an mvv. Students cannot apply on their own behalf; the Dutch government has mandated that higher education institutions are responsible for overseeing the visa/residence permit application process for each international student they admit. The institution will inform admitted students about the application procedure and documents needed.

As part of the residence permit application process, all institutions require students to submit documentation confirming that they have sufficient funds to support their living costs; in 2017 this amount was set at 900 euros a month, or approximately 11,000 euros a year. The application for a regular provisional residence permit (mvv) costs 321 euros. This fee is adjusted annually.

Residence permits are granted for the full duration of a student's study. They are only terminated when

Photo courtesy of Stefan



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**“Perhaps the most challenging aspect for me has been navigating the bureaucratic processes. From registering at the municipality to paying taxes, the learning curve and language barrier can make it initially frustrating for students to settle in. Although these become routinely familiar acts in time, it is important to give yourself time and to familiarize yourself with what you need to do even before you arrive in the Netherlands.”**

—Stefan Harrigan, Ohio  
Leiden University

the university reports that the student has completed their studies or did not earn sufficient academic credits to continue.

US students can work a maximum of 16 hours per week while classes are in session and full-time during the summer months of June, July, and August. A student's prospective employer must apply for a work permit on his or her behalf. If a student is employed, they must also purchase Dutch health insurance, which is more expensive than student plans. Students do not need a work permit if they are participating in an internship that is required by their program of study.

Graduating students may opt to stay in the Netherlands for a job search and orientation year during which time they can look for employment. Students interested in this option, referred to as *zoekjaar*, must apply for a search year residence permit through the Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND). If the

student is subsequently offered a position that meets the requirements to work in the Netherlands, he or she will be authorized to do so. Students have up to three years after graduating to exercise this option. Therefore, if they wish, they can return to their home country or travel elsewhere before deciding to return to search for work. It is possible to apply for a *zoekjaar* both after a bachelor's program and then once again after a master's. More information can be found at the [Immigration and Naturalization Service's website](#).

**Advice from the Field:** The Dutch government aims to make international students feel welcome in the Netherlands. English is widely spoken and the Dutch welcome international students into their communities. Many universities also offer free Dutch courses, even for students studying in English-taught programs.

English-taught programs at Dutch universities attract students from all over the world. Dutch institutions have ample experience accommodating international students, and tend to offer a diverse array of related student support services, clubs, and activities.

University colleges focus on undergraduate study only, and the degree structure can be almost as flexible as a program of study at a US liberal arts college.

Early planning is important as some courses have strict prerequisites that students may not meet if they do not prepare early enough in high school. Many business and science programs in the Netherlands, for example, require an advanced level of math. For a student enrolled in the IB curriculum, this frequently means taking mathematics rather than the mathematical studies course. Students should check each program to confirm specific entry requirements.

Within the Dutch higher education system, transferring to the same type of program at a different institution is possible, though there may be limits on how many credits are accepted. Changing one's program of study is difficult, and would most likely require a student to start his or her studies anew.

Each institution will have an alumni office in some form, which offers resources to graduates. In addition, the Netherlands as a whole offers the [Holland Alumni Network](#) through Nuffic. Holland alumni are invited to join the network to: stay in touch with fellow Holland alumni; join existing communities or establish new ones; stay informed about upcoming alumni activities across the globe; find refresher courses as well as news & trends in an area of expertise; share experiences with prospective international students; find information about career opportunities in Holland; and browse internship and job vacancies.

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# Study in the Netherlands at Leiden University

- 7 faculties spread across Leiden and The Hague
- 14 English-taught bachelor's programmes
- 443 years of tradition and innovation
- Top 100 research-focused university
- 16 Nobel Prize winners
- 120 nationalities

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