



Brochure Bridging Gaps 2018

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Have you ever wondered what the influence of culture and context on theology is, and vice versa? What it's like to have the chance to pursue your academic subject of interest in a new and stimulating environment? To study in the heart of Europe? To live and learn with other theologians from totally different cultures? To step back and take a critical look at your own culture? To discover Amsterdam together? Maybe Bridging Gaps is the programme for you!

Bridging Gaps

Every year, in September, October and November, a number of students from abroad study for three months at the Faculty of Theology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU Amsterdam) and the Protestant Theological University (PThU). The main focus of Bridging Gaps is to offer students the possibility of an intercultural exchange that enriches their theology. With the Bridging Gaps programme you are not only studying, you are participating in a community. Students are offered a scholarship (full or partial) which covers travel and living expenses. Scholarships are provided by Kerk in Actie a fund from the VU Amsterdam and several theological seminaries.

Students are supervised by academic professors and are exposed to Dutch ecclesiastical and social reality. Although the academic side of their stay has priority, all students also participate in church activities and – through lectures and preaching – may share stories about their life back home.

Bridging Gaps consists of the following four central components:

1. Personal research done under the guidance of an academic professor.
2. Intercultural exchange and lectures. This exchange consists of: classes, exposure and group dynamics.
3. An introduction to and exchange with Dutch churches and Dutch society
4. Interaction within the group

Contextual Theology is the basis of the Bridging Gaps project. The research of all students has to be relevant to their own context.

Background of the project

Since 1980 the Faculty of Theology of the VU Amsterdam has maintained valuable contacts with many theological institutions throughout the southern hemisphere and Europe. What started hesitantly as a dialogue with liberation theologians and an exchange of students, has evolved into the Centre for Contextual Bible Interpretation (CCBI) in cooperation with the PThU. Bridging Gaps is one of the activities of this centre (<https://www.pthu.nl/ccbi/>).

In the Bridging Gaps programme students from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America can come to the VU Amsterdam and PThU for a period of study and research. They receive personal supervision and comfortable housing. This meeting of the minds between theologians from different parts of the world has produced some fascinating discussions. Time and again it has become clear how important it is to look beyond local boundaries and local theology. It cannot be denied that discussions with people 'from another world' offer much insight.

Former participants speak

By now we have had the privilege to offer hospitality and guidance to a large number of students from different countries of origin. We happily share some of their experiences in their own words:

'Bridging Gaps offered me you a truly irreplaceable international experience and a better future for me and my community. The variety of perspectives from various countries all over the world opened my mind, increased my social awareness and enhanced my knowledge. Besides of having the possibility to build international networking, BG 2016 most importantly gave me the chance to study Master of Theology in the Netherlands in the next following year. Bridging Gaps is a life-changing programme indeed!'

Gloria Wilhelmina, Indonesia (BG 2016)

'The possibility of the contact and socializing with people from other cultures is undoubtedly the most enriching and rewarding aspect of the Bridging Gaps programme for me because it allows the exchange of experiences and worldviews that make us rethink our own assumptions and broaden our horizons of meaning'

Taniah Biela, Brazil (BG 2016)

'It has been a privilege to do research in a well-resourced environment. Although the system initially was new and frustrating, once it became more familiar it really worked well for me. It was a blessing to be able to find material that is not necessarily available in my home institute.'

Dawid Mouton, South Africa (BG 2012)

'From the first day of my arrival, all through the programme and to its last days, I have had the most wonderful combination of intensive and effective individual research, stimulating class discussions, unforgettable church visits, and an amazingly enjoyable fellowship and friendship with my colleagues from the Bridging Gaps 2003.'

Corneliu Constantineanu, Romania (BG 2003)

With whom do we co-operate?

Over the years, strong bonds have been forged with a great number of seminaries and institutes. In Latin America, this entails all major seminaries and faculties. Within Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe we have contacts with many institutes and seminaries. All theological students are encouraged to apply, even if you are not sure about official bonds with the Bridging Gaps programme.

Your stay in the Netherlands

Study activities

During your stay, your main activity will be to work on your research. You will meet regularly with your supervisor and at the end of your stay you will be expected to present your research to your fellow students. In addition you will be asked to write an evaluation of your time in the Netherlands.

During your stay you will join classes 'Class and Context'. These lectures are given by drs. Willemien van Berkum and focus mainly on the contexts of the participating students and questions arising from these contexts. The classes start with a presentation by the students, detailing their own cultural and religious context. During the classes there are opportunities for discussion and exchange of personal experiences. Students are expected to prepare presentations for these classes.

The Bridging Gaps students will also participate in the classes 'Usage of the Bible' at the PThU and 'Hermeneutics' at the VU Amsterdam. For these classes the students have to read the mandatory literature. There is also the possibility to attend other classes thought at the universities, if they are relevant for the research.

Place of residence

Your place of residence will be the Student Hotel Amsterdam West. A tram and metro stop, with direct connections to the university, is located nearby.

International students and lecturers of various departments and institutions stay at this Student Hotel. The rooms are completely furnished, including blankets and sheets. They also contain a private bathroom. The kitchen is shared with several other people. The rooms are available from arrival until the departure. The Student Hotel is situated less than 30 minutes from the city centre of Amsterdam, the cultural heart of the region. Here students can visit most of the cultural and touristic sites of Amsterdam, like many museums.

You can get to the university easily by public transport. The Student Hotel also offers bicycles that you can use.

Use of library and computers at the faculty

At the faculty you will get an access-card to use the extensive library of the VU Amsterdam. You can also get a card for the library of the PThU. Access to online publications is limited to the building of VU University. By bringing an USB-stick you can download materials to read them in your place of residence. Information about the library and the catalogue can be found at the websites of the respective libraries: <http://www.godgeleerdheid.vu.nl/en/students/library/index.aspx> and <https://www.pthu.nl/en/Library/>

There is a Wi-Fi connection available. If you bring your own laptop, you can work anywhere within the VU Amsterdam and PThU.

Visa

For most of the participants it is necessary to obtain visa. Information about obtaining visa can be found on the website: <https://www.netherlandsandyou.nl/travel-and-residence/visas-for-the-netherlands>

Financial support

If selected, you will receive a scholarship (full or partial). This scholarship will cover all expenditure for flight, accommodation, study, as well as an allowance to pay for your living expenses. From this allowance you will also have to pay for your own travelling costs within the Netherlands. Also the excursions will be paid for.

Insurance

The Bridging Gaps programme will provide an insurance for the period of your stay in the Netherlands and during your travels. This will cover health, life, accidents etc. This insurance will be covered by the scholarship.

Excursions

Every year we make a few excursions, the costs of which are covered by the Bridging Gaps programme. Every year the excursions will be slightly different. A few examples from the excursions of past years:

- An excursion through historical Amsterdam. Through this tour you will get to know some of the history and challenges of Amsterdam.
- Excursion to Kerk in Actie Utrecht. It is the Centre for Global Ministries of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. Students are able to meet the representatives of the desks responsible for their own continent. Afterwards students can visit the beautiful city centre of Utrecht.

- Visit to the drugs pastorate, street pastor and other social projects. These visits showed the students some places where diaconal work is done for people who live in the margins in Amsterdam centre (drug addicts, homeless, migrants, illegals).
- Visit to religious or cultural museums. For example: the students were able to visit the Jewish Historical Museum and had a tour through the Jewish Cultural Quarter. Or the students can visit the *Tropenmuseum*, where they will learn about the colonial past of the Netherlands.

Church participation

Every student will be asked to participate in church services. A number of weekends will be spent at a church community somewhere in the Netherlands (students will visit in pairs).

Some churches will ask participants to participate in a service by praying, preaching or by telling about their own background. During your three month stay you will pay two to four visits to different churches.

Application procedure

All partner institutions receive a letter of invitation in autumn 2017, asking them to nominate students suited for participation in this project. Along with this letter of invitation they also receive brochures to announce the project to their students. The deadline for application is December 31st 2017.

In February 2018 the Selection Committee for the Bridging Gaps programme assembles to make a selection of the applicants. The committee consists of a delegation of the Faculty of Theology of the VU Amsterdam, the PThU, and Kerk in Actie. Every year, the number of applications is greater than the number of scholarships. This unfortunately makes selection necessary. The selection is made partly on the merit of a research proposal submitted by the student. A proposal must be relevant to the local context of the applicant. The VU Amsterdam or PThU must have adequate expertise to make the stay worthwhile. The full criteria are listed on the next page of this document.

After the selection procedure has come to an end, the committee will notify the selected students. At that moment the procedure to obtain visa must be initiated. Selected students will maintain close contact with the student-assistant of the Bridging Gaps programme.

Applicant Profile

The applicant is a theology student at the end of his Bachelor's programme (undergraduate student), enrolled in a Master's

programme (graduate student) or at the beginning of a PhD programme. The three-month stay could make an important contribution to a specific study project or a MA thesis. The applicant is not older than 40 years old.

Criteria according to which the applicants are selected

Because there are usually more applications than scholarships, participants will be selected on the following criteria:

- Consistency, originality, contextuality, and thoroughness of the research proposal
- Economic, social and cultural situation (precedence is given to students from underprivileged circumstances)
- International experience of the applicant (less experience being better than more)
- The academic situation (the institute, where in the programme, etc.)
- Your academic specialisation. The committee will ensure that the number of applicants is distributed evenly over the teachers at the Faculty of Theology of the VU Amsterdam and the PThU.
- Potential contribution of the VU Amsterdam or PThU to your field of research
- Even geographical distribution (i.e. not all students can come from one particular country or region)
- Even distribution between male and female students
- Your religious background (Preference is given to those who have a strong relationship with their local and/or national church)

Documents to be submitted with the application

You are expected to submit the following documents:

- The Format Proposal Bridging Gaps, which is sent to you with this brochure. This form contains your curriculum vitae and your research proposal.
- A testimonial from a teacher, dean or other authorised academic institute concerning your sufficient knowledge of English.
- A testimonial from a teacher, dean or other authorised academic institute concerning your academic ability and the study project in the Netherlands.
- The signed Declaration of Intent.
- A copy of a valid passport.

Address

Complete applications should be sent to Gijsbert Steenbeek, who can also be contacted for further information.

Gijsbert Steenbeek (student-assistant to the Bridging Gaps programme), g.a.steenbeek@student.vu.nl.