

# BRIDGING GAPS PROGRAMME




**Bridging Gaps** creates an intercultural and international community of learners in Amsterdam to bridge gaps between cultures, different kinds of knowledge, and academia, society, and church.

Students participating in the [Bridging Gaps programme](#) come from countries in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America and a wide variety of Christian traditions. They aim to broaden their horizons and develop themselves as theologians contributing to a **more humane world**.

# CONTENTS

Bridging Gaps .....	4
Background of the project .....	4
Participants' experiences .....	5
Who are our students? .....	7
Overview of the programme .....	7
Study activities .....	7
Excursions .....	7
Church participation .....	8
Your stay in the Netherlands .....	8
Place of residence .....	8
Use of library and computers at the faculty .....	8
Visa .....	8
Financial support .....	9
Insurance .....	9
Application procedure .....	10
Applicant Profile .....	11
Criteria according to which the applicants are selected .....	11
Documents to be submitted with the application .....	11
Contact and submission .....	12





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 Religion and Theology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) and the Protestant Theological University (PThU). The main focus of the Bridging Gaps programme 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, VUvereniging 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: courses, 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 Religion and Theology of the VU 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 ([www.pthu.nl/ccbi/](http://www.pthu.nl/ccbi/)).

Since 1994, Bridging Gaps students from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Central and Eastern Europe, and Latin America can come to the VU 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.



## Participants' experiences

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:

*'Getting the opportunity of being a student in an intercultural setting is quite enriching. At that time, I did not have any responsibility for others, even though I am a person who tries to take care of everyone. I especially remember trying to always be on time with Philip Peacock (one of the other participants, red.). We are still friends. I have kept very close contact with Philip until now. But that was a time for me to learn, to be a student. I did not have to provide answers. It was just a learning experience. Because it is a learning experience, you allow yourself to live with many questions. You are more open to new things.'*

*Darío Barolin, Argentina (2000)*

*'My stay in Amsterdam and the Bridging Gaps programme were also a process of maturation; before that I had only encountered religion in my Greek-Catholic tradition, or the broader Byzantine tradition. Being in Amsterdam really opened my eyes to new ways of living faith, and spirituality. So, it was a very good start of my ecumenical and international journey.'*

*Nadiia Sybira, Ukraine (2010)*

*'Through the Bridging Gaps programme I got to know people with other perspectives. At the VU we had classes about the use of the Bible. After these classes, we were with a small group of fellow-participants in the kitchen of the Student Hotel. We discussed about what we learned in class and I heard different perspectives. Some of their views were so patriarchal! Others were so conservative! How can I appreciate these other perspectives? And how can I explain myself sufficiently without upsetting others? I learned how to tolerate other people's views and how to express my own view. This was not always easy, but it also taught me a lot.'*

*Erin Sinaga, Indonesia (2019)*



## Who are our students?

Over the years, strong bonds have been forged with a great number of seminaries and institutes. The programme started with inviting students from major seminaries and faculties in Latin America. By now we invite students from many institutes and seminaries Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Central and Eastern Europe to apply. **All theological students are encouraged to apply, even if you are not sure about official bonds of your home institute with the Bridging Gaps programme.**

## OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

### 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 the course Class and Context. These lectures focus mainly on the contexts of the participating students and questions arising from these contexts. The lectures start with a presentation by the students, providing an overview of their own cultural and religious context. During the lectures there are opportunities for discussion and exchange of personal experiences. Students are expected to prepare presentations for these lectures.

The Bridging Gaps students will also participate in the course Usage of the Bible at the PThU and one of the courses at the VU that is relevant for their research topic. For these lectures the students have to read mandatory literature. The students are free to attend more courses, that are relevant for their research, taught at both universities.

### Excursions

Every year, a few excursions are included in the Bridging Gaps programme. The excursions will be slightly different every year. These are 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 in Utrecht. It is the centre for global and national 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 events. For several years, Bridging Gaps participants have visited the Interfaith Conference in The Hague.

## 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 months' stay you will pay two to four visits to different churches.

## YOUR STAY IN THE NETHERLANDS

### 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 kitchens are 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

The faculty of Religion and Theology of the VU and the PThU are both located in the main building of the VU. At the faculty you will get an access-card to use the extensive library of the VU. You can also obtain a card for the library of the PThU. Access to online publications is limited to the building of the VU. By bringing a 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: [www.ub.vu.nl/en/](http://www.ub.vu.nl/en/) and [www.pthu.nl/en/Library/](http://www.pthu.nl/en/Library/)

Wi-Fi connection is available in the main building of the VU. If you bring your own laptop, you can work anywhere within the building.

As a student of the Bridging Gaps programme, you are also welcome to work and use the library in the Baptist House. The Baptist seminary is located in this building. The Baptist House is a 15 minutes' walk from the Student Hotel Amsterdam West.

### Visa

For most of the participants it is necessary to obtain a visa. Information about obtaining a visa can be found on the website: [www.netherlandsandyou.nl/](http://www.netherlandsandyou.nl/)





### Financial support

When the selection committee has selected you, you will receive a scholarship (full or partial). This scholarship will cover all expenses 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. All the excursions will be paid for as well.

### Insurance

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

## APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Yearly, all partner institutions receive a call for applications in autumn, asking them to nominate students suited for participation in this project. Students who are interested in participating in the Bridging Gaps programme, are encouraged to visit our website ([www.pthu.nl/bridging-gaps](http://www.pthu.nl/bridging-gaps)) where they can find the brochure and the application form. The deadline for application is 1 January, unless indicated differently at our website.

In February 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 Religion and Theology of the VU, the PThU, and Kerk in Actie. Every year, the number of applications is larger 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. Furthermore, the VU 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 send a letter of admission to the selected students and a letter of rejection to all other applicants. At that moment the procedure to obtain a visa must be initiated. Selected students will maintain close contact with the coordinator of the Bridging Gaps programme from that moment onwards.



## Applicant Profile

The applicant is a theology student at the end of their 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. Proposals have to have clear relevance for the context of the student
- Economic, social and cultural situation (precedence is given to students from underprivileged circumstances)
- International experience of the applicant (precedence is given to applications who have less experience)
- Stage of study (the institute, what year etc.)
- Your academic specialisation. The committee will ensure that the number of applicants is distributed evenly over the teachers at the Faculty of Religion and Theology of the VU and the PThU.
- Potential contribution of the VU or PThU to your field of research
- Geographical representation (i.e. not all students can come from one particular country or region)
- Gender representation
- 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 application form, which includes your curriculum vitae and your research proposal. Please find the application form at [www.pthu.nl/bridging-gaps/](http://www.pthu.nl/bridging-gaps/)
- 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.



## CONTACT AND SUBMISSION

Complete applications should be sent to [bridging.gaps@vu.nl](mailto:bridging.gaps@vu.nl).

Geke van Vliet (coordinator of the Bridging Gaps programme) can be contacted for further information via the same email address.

## OUR PARTNERS

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