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Focus on The Netherlands for Higher Education

The Netherlands – with more bachelor programs taught in English than any other non-Anglophone country – now seems more attractive than ever for local students. Brexit suddenly throws many unknowns into attending UK universities, about if and when EU students be charged international fees or subject to changing admissions standards. Even before Brexit, the number of UK students enrolled at Dutch universities has been increasing steadily because of the comparable quality but the lower price tag. Students from Switzerland are also recognizing the Netherlands as a place to include when investigating university options.

Why is the Netherlands more and more on the radar for higher education?

- The high quality of Dutch institutions of higher education.
- The wide range of programs taught in English at the bachelor level, and no language barrier due to the high level of English across the population.
- The low cost, comparable to staying in Switzerland, compared to options in Anglophone countries.
- A friendly, tolerant, and vibrant environment for students, from student life to the country itself.
- Liberal arts and sciences offerings for students who want to delay picking a specific subject or subjects to study.
- Options ranging from large programs with hundreds of students in a class, to small, tight-knit, residential learning communities.

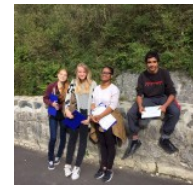


Note: What British universities refer to as a course, and US colleges call a major, the Dutch call a program.

The table below, excerpted from the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings for 2015-2016, helps put the reputation of Dutch universities into perspective when compared to Swiss universities or better-known universities from the UK, the US, and other countries.

World Rank	University	Country
2	University of Oxford	UK
4	University of Cambridge	UK

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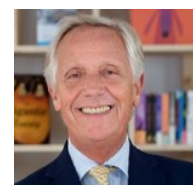
On stage with Oliver!



My child goes to an international school

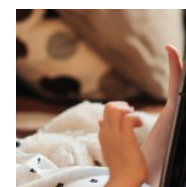


Say YES to stepping outside your comfort zone



8	Imperial College London	UK
9	Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETHZ)	Switzerland
19	University of Toronto	Canada
31	École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL)	Switzerland
34	University of British Columbia	Canada
38	McGill University	Canada
51	Brown University	USA
56	University of Manchester	UK
58	University of Amsterdam	NL
60	Washington University St. Louis	USA
62	Utrecht University	NL
64	Boston University	USA
65	Delft University of Technology	NL
67	Leiden University	NL
68	University of Southern California	USA
69	University of Bristol	UK
70	Durham University	UK
71	Erasmus University Rotterdam	NL
74	University of Groningen	NL
80	University of Warwick	UK
86	University of St Andrews	UK
88	Maastricht University	NL
94	Georgetown University	USA
104	Dartmouth College	USA
127	Tufts University	USA
131	University of Geneva	Switzerland
144	University of Lausanne	Switzerland
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So what is the cost?

For the parents reading this, we'll jump quickly to what this high quality Dutch university education might cost. Most bachelor students with a passport from the EU, European Economic Area (EU plus Liechtenstein, Norway and Iceland), or Switzerland, regardless of country of residence, pay the government set fee of €1984 per year for the 2016-2017 academic year. University college (described below) fees, at approximately €4000, are somewhat higher because they offer a smaller-scale learning environment, with specialized advising and services and lower student-faculty ratios. EU/EEA/Swiss students are also eligible for a tuition fee loan from the Dutch government and can work in the Netherlands.

Everyone else pays higher "international" tuition fees set by the university and typically ranging between €6,000 and €15,000 (Medical and pharmacy programs may be higher). It pays to do your research because the same degree might be offered at different prices at different universities. Permanent residents in an EU/EEA/Swiss country, but with a non-EEA passport, should contact universities of interest and ask if they are eligible to avoid international fees.

According to Kim Zwitserloot of University College Utrecht in August 2016,

"The fee status for UK nationals won't change until Brexit negotiations are over, as until that happens the UK is in the EU. The latest news is that nothing would change till the end of 2019, meaning that students starting in fall 2017 would pay the EEA fees for at least the first two years of a three year programme. This bit is very, very much provisional though. Who knows what will happen in the end."

Students in the Netherlands typically spend between €800 and €1,100 a month on housing, insurance and daily expenses such as food, public transport, books, clothes, and cinema tickets. Bottom line: attending university in the Netherlands costs approximately the same as staying in Switzerland. Two types of institutions of higher education

As in Switzerland, publicly supported institutions of higher education fall into two types: research universities and universities of applied science (UAS). Only 15-20% of Dutch students take the high school leaving certificate (VWO) qualifying them to attend a research university. The majority of students take HAVO, giving them direct access to universities of applied science.

The table below summarizes characteristics of research universities and UASs.

14 Research Universities (including 3 Technical Universities)	39 Universities of Applied Sciences (including Art Academies and Conservatories)
Academic focus, learning to be analytical, critical and to present convincing oral and written arguments, asking critical questions	Practical focus, higher vocational education for a specific profession, acquisition of competencies
3 year bachelor, typically followed by a 1 – 2 year master	4 year bachelor, less frequently followed by a master
Intense study load	Less academic/research approach
e.g.: Philosophy, Engineering, Industrial Design, Business, Social Sciences, Humanities, Medicine, Law, Liberal Arts & Sciences	e.g.: Nursing, Physical Therapy, Elementary School teaching, Business, Social Work, Fine Arts (Art, Music, Dance), Dentistry, Tourism, Fashion Design

Eight Dutch research universities offer an additional higher educational experience, known as a *university college*, and defined by:

- Small-scale tightly knit academic communities.
- Fast-paced and intense classes, small class sizes, highly interactive teaching methodologies.
- An international atmosphere with approximately half of the students from outside of the Netherlands.
- A liberal arts and sciences curriculum.
- The requirement for students to live together (with a few exceptions).
- Instruction completely in English.
- Selective, holistic admissions.



Many international school students gravitate to university colleges because of the close-knit international environment and the flexible curriculum. According to Alexander Whitcomb of Erasmus University College in Rotterdam:

University Colleges are for highly motivated students who have a diverse interest and don't want to limit themselves to the perspective of one academic discipline. Such students are **academically strong, intellectually curious**, and interested in getting **socially involved** and giving back to their student community.

Programs from Aerospace Engineering to Graphic Design

Over 330 bachelor courses are currently taught in English in the Netherlands, with more being added annually. The first step to finding a bachelor is to consider what subject you want to study. If you are not ready to make that choice, look into liberal arts and sciences programs, which let you explore multiple subjects.

Selected examples of programs below demonstrate the range of the options:

Program example	Institution
Aerospace Engineering	Delft University of Technology, Delft
Archaeology	Leiden University, Leiden
Biomedical Sciences	Maastricht University, Maastricht
Circus and Performance Art	Fontys University of Applied Sciences, Tilburg

Double degree combining Art or Music and Erasmus University College (multidisciplinary, liberal arts and sciences) or Art and Culture Studies.	Codarts and Willem de Kooning Academy, Rotterdam – together with Erasmus University, Rotterdam
Electrical Engineering	Eindhoven University of Technology, Eindhoven
Global Project and Change Management	Windesheim University of Applied Sciences, Zwolle
Graphic Design	University of the Arts, The Hague, Den Haag
International Business Administration	Rotterdam School of Business, Erasmus University
Logistics Engineering	HZ University of Applied Sciences, Vlissingen
Politics, Psychology, Law and Economics	University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam
Technology and Liberal Arts & Sciences (ATLAS) (combines the study of science, mathematics, engineering and social sciences)	University College Twente, Enschede
University College Utrecht (multidisciplinary, liberal arts and sciences)	Utrecht University, Utrecht

To find a complete list of programs offered in English, use the www.studyfinder.nl website, first selecting **Undergraduate** for **Type of Education** and **English** under **Language of Instruction**. You can also search by institution or location.

Is the program a fit?

Once you identify programs of interest, assess the fit of their teaching, learning, social, and living styles. The best way to do this is to visit, either for an Open Day or on your own, though you can also learn a lot on program websites or calling the university. Investigate specific areas such as:

- The number of *contact hours* to expect in lectures, seminars, tutorials, or labs, and what type of staff will be involved, indicating how the teaching and learning style varies by university and by program. University colleges generally involve the most interaction with faculty and peers.
- Many programs use *problem-based learning* (PBL) in addition to lectures, tutorial sessions, and independent study. Advocates of PBL believe students retain theory better when they apply new knowledge and skills to problems as a team. With group members from diverse backgrounds and cultural environments, discussions can be especially lively.
- Availability of study exchanges and internships or work placements, which provide valuable experiences, enhance what you learn in a classroom, and appeal to future employers.



On-campus housing for students is not traditional in the Netherlands but some Dutch universities guarantee student housing located on or close to the campus to first year international students. University colleges typically require students to live in their residences for at least in the first years as a residential experience is critical to the educational environment.

Dutch universities and academic departments support many different student organizations that are run independently by and for students. Don't let names like *study associations* mislead you, however, as many of the activities they organize are social. Student associations organize orientation programs for first year students, parties and going for drinks, events for international students, charitable projects, study trips and excursions, career-related trainings and workshops, sport activities, cultural activities and many other creative events.

Can I get in?

Research universities in the Netherlands admit students with non-Dutch diplomas whose prior education is deemed to be equivalent to the Dutch VWO. The list of equivalent diplomas includes the:

- International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma
- Swiss Maturité
- French Baccalaureate
- German Abitur
- US High School Diploma with 3 to 4 AP classes and exam scores of 3 or higher
- 3 A-Levels with grades C or higher.
- In addition, many bachelor programs at research universities accept students who have done well in the first year at a university of applied science.



Some programs have additional subject requirements, minimum grades, and English language and mathematics requirements. For example, IB Math Studies does not meet requirements for some programs. An English language proficiency exam such as IELTS is required for students who are not native English speakers and not educated in English.

Dutch universities of applied science sometimes admit students with a High School Diploma and IB certificates. Students who do not meet requirements can take a foundation year to develop academic and English language skills to the required standard, before starting a bachelor program.

If you have an eligible diploma and the required subjects, check the program selectivity and whether the program considers additional factors. Most bachelor programs are *automatic admission*: If you qualify and obtain your diploma, you are entitled to prove you can cope with a university education. There is a slight wrinkle for programs with a *matching procedure*: If you qualify you may still be asked to undergo a test, be interviewed, or write a letter. The outcome of this process is advisory only, so technically students who get negative matching advice may still attend.

Though these entry requirements might seem low, standards are not. According to Carolyn Barr of Leiden University,

“ [I]t is exceptionally important to understand that all programmes select “*after the gate*” (after students have been admitted). Depending on the programme and university, students are required to pass 60%-100% of their first year classes in order to continue. We call it *Binding Study Advice* (BSA), but there is no advice about it – if you don't make it you're out. So while it may seem the Dutch system is not selective, that's not entirely true.

The first year at a Dutch university is seen as a probationary period. You will take regular exams and if you fail them, you will be asked to leave. Before this scares you away, understand that well-prepared students who apply themselves have a high chance to succeed. In particular, Dutch university representatives say that international students, especially those completing the IB diploma, usually do well.

Programs with selective admissions

Although most programs are open admission, some are selective: *Numerus fixus* and other selective programs. A program is *numerus fixus* when limited places are offered and applications consistently exceed that number. Traditionally medicine, some business courses, physiotherapy, psychology and a few others are *numerus fixus*, but again this varies across universities. Selection is based on two or more criteria, such as grades and a letter of motivation. For applications submitted for Fall 2017, students can apply to two *numerus fixus* programs prior to January 15.

Programs that are selective but not *numerus fixus* fall into two categories:

1. Those officially labeled *small-scale* and *intensive*, such as the university colleges. *All* university colleges are selective and use holistic admissions processes requiring a combination of

interviews, letters of motivation, and letters of recommendation.

2. Programs that require some form of talent such as art schools and dance academies.

When a program is selective, remember that minimum grades or points *are minimums*; it is always wise to ask what grades are typical for students who received an offer the previous year. However, with the exception of some university colleges, offers are not conditional in the UK sense that the student must obtain a certain number of points or grade level on their final exams.

How do I apply?

With different types of institutions, programs, forms of selectivity, and application requirements, navigating the Dutch application process is a challenge. Each university can have its own online application system and you might even be required to mail documents by post. Refer to each program's website for detailed information.



The Studielink website is used in most application procedures, but Studielink is not technically an application portal like UCAS or the CommonApp. Instead, it is a student registration system with the critical function of registering students with the Dutch government before they begin studies. You are limited to four applications in Studielink at a time, but you can withdraw an application and replace it with a new one. No more than two of the programs can be *numerous fixus*.

The documents required differ from program to program but all require:

- Copy of your valid passport or ID card
- (Certified) copy of your diploma
- English language test results (if you are not exempt)

Some programs additionally require one or more of the following:

- Transcript, or grade report
- Letter of motivation
- Curriculum Vitae/Resume
- Two letters of recommendation, usually from teachers or school administration
- Course descriptions (syllabi) for required subjects
- Interview, either in person or via Skype.

Application deadlines range from January 1 to June 30, with earlier deadlines for selective programs.

In summary

The Netherlands deserves a close look as you consider where you'll apply to university for so many reasons. However, it is best to hear from the students themselves:

What do Swiss students report about the Dutch university experience?

International School of Geneva, 2016, to Leiden University:

“ LUC was my top choice, due to the extensive programmes they have to offer as well as the community and positive outlook on change to a global scale. I am planning to do a masters and remain in Europe, either in the Netherlands or the UK.

International School of Geneva to Leiden University, 2016:

“ I enjoyed studying at Leiden University, it was a great experience and I believe that there is no student life better than that of the Dutch! Education wise, International Studies was an interesting program. I took the East Asia track and soon became hooked on the politics/economics and Chinese language courses. I did, however, decide not to pursue international studies any further.

After finishing my bachelor in 2015 I did a 6-month marketing internship at Unilever. This was an amazing experience and gave me the insight that I would love to work in the FMCG [*Fast Moving Consumer Goods*] sector later on. Hence, I applied for a MBA at the University of Amsterdam where I am now following the marketing track. I hope to graduate in 2017.

International School of Zug and Lucerne, 2013, to Erasmus University College, Rotterdam, 2016:

“ I was born in Luzern and raised in a small town called Walchwil in Canton Zug. My mother is Swiss and my father is British, therefore I was fortunate to grow up bilingually. My mother and father did not attend university themselves, but deemed education extremely important and wanted to give my brothers and I the best possible opportunities they could. I attended the International School of Zug and Luzern. My education was primarily in English and therefore it was important for me to find a Bachelor degree that was taught in English. My first instinct was to look at the US and UK. However, in addition to the fees being too high, I was in a part of my life where I did not know what direction I wanted to go in and finding a suitable Bachelor programme that fit me and my needs (which at the time were not being confined to one specific subject, in case i wanted/needed to change my mind). My college counsellor suggested I look at Holland. It at first did not appeal to me as I had not heard much of the Netherlands as a country and it was not a popular destination amongst my friends. However, circumstances forced me to look into it more. I came across the University College programme, which is what captured my attention, and I realised that it would be a great fit for me. Essentially I could build my own bachelor degree. It would give me extra time to figure out what I wanted to do, what I was passionate for and what my dislikes were. A friend of mine, who got accepted to Erasmus University College, suggested I apply. Three years later, I'm standing on stage at our graduation ceremony, looking back at the incredible journey I had just experienced.

EUC and moving to the Netherlands was one of the scariest but most rewarding choices I've made. I learnt a lot about myself, being away from home. I grew as a person along side of the enriching EUC community that I had the pleasure to help build. I was a part of the main study association board and am now chair of the Alumni Association. It had its difficult times but I would not change a thing about my journey. I'm now doing an internship at a start-up company in Rotterdam, taking some time to explore the job market and looking to start my masters (possibly in sustainability or marketing) in the summer of 2017.

International School of Zug and Lucerne to Leiden University:

“ I went to a Swiss international school for 5 years, and am also a Swiss-American dual national. Initially as a high school senior I only applied to schools in England, as my school was very focused on British universities. I studied a BA in Politics at Durham University for a year and [...] felt academically under challenged. Having done the International Baccalaureate, I also was more used to a broad study curriculum, as opposed to the single-track British degree. I thus started looking up Dutch universities, particularly liberal arts and sciences colleges, and applied to Leiden University College. My experience there has been one of personal, social and intellectual growth. I've never been in an institution so encouraging of the individual! The small class sizes, minimal lectures, and discussion-based learning are much better suited to my learning style as an IB student. I am getting a BSc in Global Public Health and find the multifaceted, interdisciplinary nature of my degree program to be very progressive. The professors are also much more accessible and passionate about their students, as they aren't lecturing to a 500+ audience. There is a

much stronger support network, academically and socially, for students at Leiden University College. It is also a very smooth transition from Switzerland to the Netherlands culturally – I find the Netherlands is similar in terms [of] infrastructure and development but much more culturally vibrant and accessible. It's a perfect place for a young student to grow!

Kantonsschule Zürcher Unterland Bülach, 2013, to Leiden University:

“ I graduated from high school in Switzerland with the Swiss Matura in 2013 and started the Bachelor International Studies at Leiden University in 2014. My experience has been very good, I enjoy the course for its variety and also appreciate the international study environment. I am currently in my fifth semester, doing an internship at an NGO in Rio de Janeiro as a part of the degree. Since the program covers quite a few different areas (politics, economics, history, cultural studies, area studies, language), I hope to get a better idea of what I want to focus on in my Masters and in my professional life later on through this internship, because I am not sure yet what I would like to do. I will definitely look at some Masters in the Netherlands, but also in other European countries [...]

Useful Websites:

www.studyinholland.nl

– Overview of the country, the educational system, admissions requirements, scholarships, working while studying, visas, etc.

www.studyfinder.nl

– Search for Dutch programs taught in English by location, institution and subject.

www.studielink.nl

– Register for Dutch university applications.

www.studiekeuze123.nl

– Data from student reviews but only in Dutch.

About the author

Marilyn Stelzner is the founder of **Global University Choices, a university admissions consultancy** specializing in working with students applying to colleges and universities in the UK, Europe (including the Netherlands!), the US and Canada. Based near Lausanne, Marilyn works with students and families to identify options, understand the tradeoffs, and then find the right fit for higher education. Life-long residents of California, Marilyn and her husband jumped at the chance to move to Switzerland seven years and have never looked back. She is a member of the International Association for College Admissions Counseling, Independent Educational Consultants Association, and Higher Education Consultants Association. After touring ten Dutch universities in April 2016, Marilyn is excited to help spread the word about the great choices they offer students in Switzerland. More resources about university in the Netherlands are on her website at **www.globaluniversitychoices.com/nl**.



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