



# BRIDGING GAPS



The **Bridging Gaps** programme 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 represent a wide variety of Christian traditions. They aim to broaden their horizons and develop themselves as theologians contributing to a **more humane world**.

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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 from September to 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 objective 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 which covers travel and living expenses. Scholarships are provided by Kerk in Actie, VUvereniging and several theological seminaries.

Students are supervised by professors from the VU and PThU and are exposed to the 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.

The Bridging Gaps programme consists of the following four central components:

1. Individual research done under the guidance of an academic professor.
2. Intercultural exposure and exchange during courses, lectures and activities.
3. An introduction to and exchange with Dutch churches and Dutch society
4. Interaction within the group

Contextual Theology as a field forms the framework of the Bridging Gaps project. The research carried out by 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 modestly as a dialogue between 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 organized this centre.

Since 1994, Bridging Gaps students from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Central and Eastern Europe, and Latin America have come to the VU and PThU for a period of study and research. This meeting of minds between theologians from different parts of the world has produced some fascinating discussions. It cannot be denied that discussions with people 'from another world' offer much insight. Time and again it has become clear how important it is to look beyond boundaries and local theology.



## 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:

*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, Indonesia (2019)

*Participating in the bridging gaps program has been an eye-opening experience. A time to step away, learn, challenge and be challenged. I had a chance to see life-long friendships grow with people from across the globe. An opportunity to learn with people in different disciplines in theology, work on my research and express its significance in my context, broadened my horizons. After learning about our diverse contexts, experiencing life in Dutch families, I realized how different yet similar we all are. And what a joy it is now to travel to a certain country and remember there is someone you call a friend simply because of a bridged gap.*

Hope, Rwanda (2022)

*Bridging Gaps for me was an unforgettable and transforming experience, where I learned that in community it is possible to be what I am and to be all that we are in a collective way. It opened me to the dimension of plurality on class, race, sexual and gender diversity in the Christian community in general. Those differences, in the end, do not matter so much when you have affection and the will to know and to be. With the Bridging Gaps family I learned that it is our duty as theologians to love and change things, and that responsibility as Christians calls us to the exercise of love, humility, simplicity, and the hope that comes along with the need to toughen up and become indignant at the injustices of the human world that separates us from the divine. The power comes from this: in a contextual hermeneutics, seeing, judging, and acting, when done in community, bridges gaps.*

Giovanni, Brasil (2022)









## 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 connections between your institute and the Bridging Gaps programme.**

## OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

### Studying

One of the main activities during your stay will be working on your research. You will meet regularly with your supervisor and at the end of the programme you will be expected to present your research to your fellow students. In addition to this, you will write reflections on various aspects of the programme.

The course 'Class and Context' is specifically for Bridging Gaps students. These lectures focus mainly on the contexts of the participating students and questions arising from these contexts. During the course, each student will present about their own cultural and religious context. There will also be opportunities for discussion and exchange of personal experiences. This course is also used to improve your academic skills, such as presenting, writing short assignments, and giving feedback on your peers' work.

The Bridging Gaps students will also participate in the course 'Usage of the Bible' and one of the courses at the VU that is relevant for their research topic. For these lectures the students you will prepare by reading assigned literature. The students are free to attend more courses if relevant for their research.

### Excursions

The programme also includes a number of excursions. These are different every year. A few examples of excursions from previous 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, the centre for global and national ministries of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. Students are able to meet the representatives of the departments 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 within Amsterdam centre.
- Visit to religious or cultural events, such as the Interfaith Conference in The Hague.

## Church participation

A number of weekends will be spent visiting 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 stay you will pay two to four visits to different churches.

## YOUR STAY IN THE NETHERLANDS

### Place of residence

Housing will be arranged by the programme, and is generally at the Student Hotel or a similar accommodation. You will have your own room and bathroom, with a shared kitchen. You will also be provided with a bicycle to make your way around Amsterdam and to university.

Your classes and many activities will be at the Faculty of Religion and Theology of the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam.

### Use of university facilities

At university, you will be able to make use of 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 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: [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 in Amsterdam. This is also where the Baptist seminary is located.

### Visa

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

It is advisable to check whether you are eligible for a visa. For example, if you visited the EU on a Schengen visa within 180 days of your stay, you will not be allowed to remain in the EU for the full three months on a different visit within this period.





### Financial support

If you have been selected to participate in the programme, you will receive a scholarship. This scholarship will cover the expenses for your flight, visa, accommodation, and provide you with an allowance to pay for your living expenses. All the excursions and related transport costs will be covered as well.

The provided allowance is comparable to a typical Dutch student budget. It can cover all your living expenses, if you are careful with your spendings. If you wish to make use of public transport frequently, go on personal outings or do not plan to cook for yourself most of the time, it is wise to count on having to make use of some personal finances as well.

### Insurance

The Bridging Gaps programme will provide health insurance for the period of your stay in the Netherlands and during your travels. This will cover any necessary medical care.

## 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 can visit the applications webpage, which contains information about applying, as well as as the application forms. If you are applying, make sure that you have read the requirements and instructions carefully, and that you hand in all the necessary forms. The deadline for application is 1 January, unless indicated differently at our website.

In February the selection committee 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 available places. 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 started. Selected participants will be provided with the information necessary for preparing to attend, and will maintain close contact with the programme coordinator during the process.





## 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 thesis. The applicant is not older than 40 years old.

## Criteria according to which the applicants are selected

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 distribution;
- Gender representation;
- Your religious background (Preference is given to those who have a strong relationship with their local and/or national church);
- Other factors relating to the diversity of the group.

## Documents to be submitted with the application

You are expected to submit the following documents:

- The application form, including your curriculum vitae and a research proposal.
- 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.
- The application procedure for 2024 can be started on the 2024 applications webpage. Here you can find detailed information, download the necessary forms and submit your application.

## CONTACT

For further information, you can contact Eline van der Kaaden.  
(programme coordinator)

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## OUR PARTNERS

The scholarships of the Bridging Gaps programme are made possible thanks to contributions by Kerk in Actie (KiA), VUvereniging, Evangelisch Lutherse Synode in partnership with Nederlands Luthers Genootschap, Sormanifonds, Catharina Halkes Fonds, Doopsgezind Seminarium and Baptisten Seminarium.

**VU**VERENIGING

**kerk  
in actie**