BRIDGING PROGRAMME

2025

Bridging Programme 2025

The VU International Office offers an intensive three-week Bridging Programme (BP) aimed to better prepare incoming PhD students for their PhD trajectories. The programme consists of 4 modules (see list below) delivered by lecturers from the Faculty of Humanities, VU Library, and the Centre for International Cooperation (CIS). The programme is scheduled for January - February 2025. It will be held in person and accommodate a limited number of students. Students from different VU faculties will be enlisted based on "first applied, first served" principle.

Modules
Orientation session: Welcome, BP learning environment, meeting BP alumni
M1: Open Science and Research Data Management, Literature management
M2: Academic Competencies
M3: Academic English Writing
M4: Soft Skills

When	20 January – 7 February 2025
Where	Face-to-Face at VU campus
Who	new/incoming VU PhD students
Credits	6 ECs * (certificate issued after the programme)
	Discuss your registration and the recognition of ECs in the "Training and Supervision Plan" with your supervisor before enrolling in the course
Registration	[Bridging programme 2025 (google.com)](google.com) by Friday 13 December 2024
Tuition Fee	Euro 750 (payment instructions will be sent by email to students selected)

Cancellation policy
- Cancellation free of charge until 8th January 2025
- Cancellation after 8th January 2025, a fee of 100 euro applies
- Cancellation after 16th January 2025, the full tuition fee (Euro 750) will be charged

Learning objectives
- Equip PhD students with necessary research, presentation and academic English writing skills to successfully engage in their PhD trajectory
- Support PhD students in the development of a structured and scientifically grounded research proposal
- Offer a stronger base for the start of the PhD trajectory
- Foster better integration of incoming PhD students in the Dutch academic system and culture

Academic and transferable skills

The Bridging Programme aligns with the PhD Competence Model (2016) as designed by the Dutch University Medical Centers. This following core competencies are addressed:
- Research skills and knowledge
- Communication
- Personal effectiveness
- Professional development

Assessment
Qualitative assessment based on overall performance in the programme (no pass/fail). More info will be provided during the orientation session

Coordination:
Sabina Di Prima (sabina.diprima@vu.nl) and Regina van de Wall (r.c.g.vande.wall@student.vu.nl).

Schedule

January				
Monday	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**
			16	**17**
			10:30-12:30 Orientation session	
20	**21**	**22**	**23**	**24**
9:00-9:30 Introduction				
9:30-12:30 M1: Data Management & Literature Management	9:30-12:30 M2: Academic Competencies		9:30-12:30 M2: Academic Competencies	9:30-12:30 M3: Academic English
12:30-13:30 BREAK	12:30-13:30 BREAK		12:30-13:30 BREAK	
13:30-15:30 M2: Academic Competencies	13:30-15:30 M3: Academic English		13:30-16:30 M4: Soft Skills	
27	**28**	**29**	**30**	**31**
9:30-11:30 M4: Soft Skills	9:30-11:30 M2: Academic Competencies	9:30-12:30 M4: Soft Skills	9:30-12:30 M4: Soft Skills	9:30-12:30 M3: Academic English
	11:30-13:30 BREAK		12:30-13:30 BREAK	12:30-13:30 BREAK
	13:30-15:30 M3: Academic English		13:30-15:30 M2: Academic Competencies	13:30-16:30 M4: Soft Skills (one-on-one coaching)

February				
3	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
9:30-12:30 M2: Academic Competencies	9:30-12:30 M2: Academic Competencies	9:30-12:30 M4: Soft Skills (Mock presentations)		9:30-12:30 M2: Academic Competencies (Presentations)
12:30-13:30 BREAK	12:30-13:30 BREAK			
13:30-15:30 M3: Academic English	13:30-16:30 M4: Soft Skills (Mock presentations)		13:30-16:30 M2: Academic Competencies (Presentations)	12:30-15:30 Closing

Lecturers

Lecturer Tycho Hofstra

Profile Tycho Hofstra is a Data Steward of the central library of the Vrije Universiteit. On top of helping researchers in planning and managing their research data, he teaches courses on how to write a Data Management Plan. You can ask him about Research Data Management and Open Science at the VU.

Lecturer Elisa Rodenburg

Profile Elisa Rodenburg is a Data Steward in the central University Library at the VU. She helps researchers with planning and managing their data, but also aims to improve support for Research Data Management and Open Science across the university and to connect different support staff groups to facilitate easier collaboration. You can ask Elisa about RDM and Open Science at the VU.

Lecturer Anouk Nuijten

Profile Anouk Nuijten is subject librarian for Humanities for the VU University Library and holds a PhD in Celtic Studies. She takes care of the collection for the Faculty of Humanities and teaches workshops on information literacy and how to find sources. She is also project leader for Re:Book, a library project that rethinks the way we interact with our physical collections. If you have any questions regarding finding literature (both print and digital sources) or navigating the library, you can ask Anouk.

M2: Academic Competencies

Lecturer   Ms. Denyse Snelder (PhD)

Profile   Denyse J. Snelder obtained her MSc in landscape ecology in 1985 from the University of Amsterdam and a PhD in 1993 at the University of Toronto, Canada, based on research directed at vegetative control of soil erosion in the semi-arid Baringo District, Kenya. Up to December 2012, she had a dual position, one as senior specialist Sustainable Land and Water Management at the Centre for International Cooperation, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and another as associate professor at the Institute of Environmental Sciences Leiden (CML), Leiden University, The Netherlands.

Lecturer   Ms. Sabina Di Prima

Profile   Sabina Di Prima holds a MSc in Environment and Resource Management from the Institute for Environmental Studies (IVM) of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU). She is a Sustainable Land Management specialist at the VU Centre for International Cooperation (since 2006). Sabina is also a PhD student at the Athena Institute of the VU. She conducts transdisciplinary research on the topic of Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture addressing issues of food systems transition, food insecurity and malnutrition among vulnerable rural communities in Lao PDR and Vietnam.

## M3: Academic English

Lecturer   Dr. Gea Dreschler

Profile   Gea Dreschler is assistant professor of English Linguistics and academic director of the Academic Language Programme at the Faculty of Humanities of the Vrije Universiteit (VU). Her research focuses on language change in written English, from the earliest manuscripts to the recent influence of ChatGPT. She teaches courses in linguistics to students at the Faculty of Humanities, as well as a wide range of courses on academic writing to bachelor's, master's and PhD students at various faculties of the VU. She also gives workshops on the writing process to both students and PhD students.

M4: Soft Skills

Lecturer   Ms. Wendelien Tuijp

Profile   Wendelien Tuyp is project manager of international projects in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The projects' focus is on research, education and social outreach in Higher Education between universities in the Global South and the VU.

Wendelien is a graduate in Communication Science, combining intercultural communication with expertise on sustainable land management. Her experience includes the development, management and implementation of projects in an intercultural and trans-disciplinary setting. She is also involved in teaching, training and coordination of courses at Bachelor and Master level, supervision of students, and the development of teaching and training (audiovisual) materials. Wendelien combines practical field work, training and research within (rural) development projects
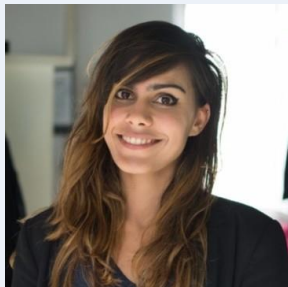
Lecturer   Ms. Mekky Zaidi

Profile   Mekky Zaidi is a project manager at the Centre for International Cooperation. She studied Biomedical Sciences and Management, Policy Analysis, and Entrepreneurship in the Health and Life Sciences at VU Amsterdam. With this background, Mekky has worked as a researcher in the department of Health Sciences on projects focused on promoting healthy nutritional behavior. Her background has equipped her with a profound understanding of both the scientific and managerial aspects of health-related projects, in and international context.

Mekky has a passion for communication and stakeholder engagement in projects, as she believes that this is an essential element for all kind of projects to bring them to a success. Beyond implementing her expertise in effective communication within her projects, she has taken the initiative to lead online training sessions on these subjects across various projects.

Modules

Module 1: Data Management & Literature Management

Lecturers: Tycho Hofstra, Dr Anouk Nuijten, and Elisa Rodenburg (VU Library)

Date	Topics
20 January 2025 **09.30-12.30**	Research Data Management Training - Informal introduction, getting to know each other - Open Science - Reproducible Lego Workshop Exploring metadata and research document in a team bonding activity - How VU Library can help you with Research Data Management - Tycho Hofstra, RDM expert - Elisa Rodenburg, RDM expert - Lena Karvovskaya, Community Manager RDM Library services & Literature management - Introduction to library services - Interactive workshop information literacy skills: - Formulating a search query - Navigating the online catalogue and databases - Introduction to sources & referencing - LibGuides & Lean Library Plugin

Lecturers: Dr Denyse Snelder and Sabina Di Prima (Centre for International Cooperation - CIS)

Module 2	
Description	This module is suitable for PhDs from different disciplines who would like to improve their competences in developing and writing a research proposal. Although disciplines vary in research content, their broad approach in terms of operational steps in the research process is similar, addressing questions such as what to research (decide) and why (justify) and how to do the research (design and plan). This module will concentrate on the following steps in research proposal development: generating innovative research ideas, reviewing the literature, formulating a research problem that it is clearly linked to the research questions or objectives, developing a conceptual framework that captures the information needed to answer the research questions, and conceptualizing a research design that covers research methodologies for each of your research questions.
Teaching methodology	The approach that we will follow is to start with reflecting and elaborating on candidates' research ideas and preliminary research proposals. Then, through the series of sessions the PhD candidates will get a deeper understanding of the relevance of their topic, its integration within broader streams of literature and scientific debates providing the contours of a conceptual framework and identify appropriate methodology(ies) to tackle the addressed topic.
Intended learning outcomes	After completion of this module: • You will have developed a more critical view on how to compose, write and present a research proposal • You will have acquired insight into the structure, components and main topics of a research proposal • You will be able to understand and explain the differences between research aims, questions, objectives, and hypotheses, and between different research designs • You will understand the importance of a literature review, know how to start one and where to look for literature sources • You will be able to differentiate between a theoretical and a conceptual framework • You will be able to present an "elevator pitch" describing your research ideas
Assessment	All assignments contribute to the final elevator pitch presentation for this module. Assignments are commented on but not graded. However, the timely submission of assignments and giving the elevator pitch presentation are mandatory to obtain the ECT credits for this course.
Book for this module	Kumar R. 2019. *Research methodology: a step-by-step guide for beginners*. 5th ed. SAGE Publications Ltd, London. The 3rd edition of 2011 is available online, see: http://www.sociology.kpi.ua/wpcontent/uploads/2014/06/Ranjit_Kumar-Research_Methodology_A_Step-by-Step_G.pdf

Tip	Creswell J W (2018). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches. 5th edition. London: Saga publications Inc Piet Verschuren & Hans Doorewaard. 2010 Designing a Research Project Lantsoght E. 2016. *Top PhD advice from start to defense and beyond: focus on the Netherlands with universal tips & tricks*. Edited by Francien Horrevorts, Academic Transfer & bookboon.com; see: https://bookboon.com/en/top-phd-advice-from-start-to-defense-and-beyond-ebook

Date	Topic
20 January 2025 **13.30-15.30**	**Designing and developing a (preliminary) research proposal** 2.0 Introduction to module 2
21 January 2025 **9.30-12.30**	2.1 Introduction to research 2.2 Formulation of a research problem *Preparing for Assignment 1*
23 January 2025 **9.30-11.45** **11.45-12.30**	 2.3 Literature review 2.4 Research justification *Preparing for Assignment 2*
28 January 2025 **9.30-11.30**	Feedback on assignment 1 2.5 Theory of Knowledge 2.6 Conceptual and theoretical frameworks *Preparing for Assignment 3*
30 January 2025 **13.30-15.30**	Feedback on assignment 2 (justification) 2.7 Validity and reliability of research 2.8 Research design and methodology *Preparing for Research methodology table / flow chart and Assignment 4*
3 February 2025 **9.30-12.30**	2.9 Interactive session with: • Feedback on assignment 3 (conceptual framework) • Questions, answers, and feedback on other components

4 February 2025 **9.30-12.30**	**One-to-one sessions** (on demand)
6 February 2025 **13.30-16.30**	Elevator pitch presentations on research proposal *(Student presentations)* Assessment by panel of experts
7 February 2025 **9.30-12.30**	Elevator pitch presentations on research proposal *(Student presentations)* Assessment by panel of experts

M2 – Assignment topic	Submiss. date	Description

Assignment 1
 	
Research questions and objectives
	tbd	Kindly submit the following:
		
		1. A working title for your research proposal
		2. A short description of your research topic or problem that you like to address (max. 4-5 lines)
		3. Your main research question and specific objectives, taking note of:
		   • The verbs used (e.g., are these strong or weak verbs)
		   • The wording (be clearly and unambiguously in words and ideas)
		   • Main versus sub- / specific question (e.g., check number of aspects covered per sub-objective)
		   • Check whether the specific objectives jointly cover all relevant aspects of the research problem (referred to in your main objective or research question) that you plan (and will be able) to study (as far as you can judge at this time of course)

Assignment 2 Justification	tbd	Write a paragraph (or review and adjust the concerned paragraph in your proposal) on the background and justification of your research, based on a review of the literature. Given the short time available, just limit your description to 2-3 pages and we further do not expect a complete review based on an exhausting list of references but a total of 5 - 10 articles and / or chapters of books will be sufficient. Important is that you structure your paragraph addressing the following points: *Introduction to topic* • What is the situation of your topic (introduce topic)? • Statement of problem • What is the problem you like to study? what is the key issue? • What is the size of the problem? Is there evidence of the problem? (show data from literature that indicate the size of the problem) *Justification* • Why is it important to address this problem? (Set out the reasons for undertaking this particular study) • Why do you think your research problem or question is worth investigating, why is it important for the academic field (scientific relevance, indicate knowledge gap)? • Why would your research create valuable and useful knowledge? • What is the societal relevance? Any ethical aspects?

Assignment 3 Conceptual framework	tbd	Make a visual representation of a conceptual framework (if possible, based on an existing theoretical framework) that relates to your research problem. Think about aspects selected from existing theories that may become the basis of your research or inquiry. Steps for developing conceptual framework: 1. Select literature (use search machine like • http://scholar.google.com/; • http://www.plosone.org/; • http://www.bioone.org/; • http://iopscience.iop.org/1468-6996/; • http://www.sciencedirect.com/; • http://www.doaj.org/; • http://www.getcited.org/ 2. Review the literature (limit the number of sources to about 10 key articles): identify themes (based on theories, and issues) that are of relevance to your research which in turn can serve as a basis for developing a conceptual (or theoretical) framework. 3. Insert the findings from the literature materials you have reviewed into these themes. 4. Select the most important aspects from these themes that relate to your specific research problem (the information you have gathered relate to thematic areas and associated issues in which your research is embedded, however, not all may be of direct or specific relevance to your research problem; hence, select those that are of direct relevance). 5. Identify relationships between themes, examine the type of relationship among themes, e.g., positive / negative influence, functional relationship, and identify a hierarchical structure (if any). 6. Make visual representations of this information and write a short paragraph explaining the visual.
Assignment 4 Elevator pitch Presentation preliminary proposal	6-7 Feb 2025 - presentation days	Prepare a 5 -minute presentation on your research proposal based on the 3 assignments and other relevant information provided in class (e.g., methods table, work plan). We suggest to use Powerpoint software. Include not more than 10 slides (**max. 90 words per slide**): • Cover page (title of presentation, name, affiliation, date)-> 1 slide • **What** is your research about? What is the problem to be investigated? -> 1 or 2 slides • **Why** did you decide to do this research? What is your motivation and why is the topic important? Give evidence of the importance of this research e.g., through statements in literature or articles? -> 1 or 2 slides • **How** are you going to do your research? (methodology) -> 1 or 2 slides • What are the **expected results** of your research? 1 slide • What are the **expected implications**, impacts / solutions and **for whom**? 1 or 2 slides

		• List of references (at least 5)

Lecturer: Dr Gea Dreschler (Faculty of Humanities, Academic Language Programme)

Module 3	
Website for this module	https://www2.fgw.vu.nl/www/els-online/
Learning objectives	After successfully completing this course, you will be able to write a well-structured and coherent academic English text about the topic of your research, following the stylistic conventions of your discipline. Your writing will be relatively free of serious lexical and grammatical error which would have an adverse effect on the readability of the text. You will also have insight into your own strengths and weaknesses in grammatical terms, and how to go about resolving the weaknesses.
Course structure	The course consists of 5 sessions spread over three weeks.
	Each participant will receive feedback on the 1000- word text they handed in as a pre-course assignment and use the feedback to revise the relevant text during the course. The due date for this assignment is 13. January 2025. You will receive an email with further instructions.
Participation	Attendance and active participation are required.
Assessment	The final assessment consists of the reworked pre-course assignment. The participant's revision of the text should show that they are applying the tips they received during the course.

Date	Topic
21 January 2025 **13.30-15.30**	Introduction to the course. What experience do you have of writing in English? What do you hope to learn? What are your own strengths and weaknesses? Introduction to ELS-online and the feedback you received on your pre-course assignment. **Readability and style.** Readers of academic texts will have certain expectations about the writing style, though these may differ in different academic disciplines or types of texts. In this session we discuss academic English style and usage issues. We will look at some common mistakes writers make, and you receive instructions on how to use the feedback your received and the website ELS-online.
24 January 2025 **9.30-12.30**	We will continue the overview of common mistakes and how to avoid them. **Readability and coherence.** The overall aim in writing is to communicate something to a reader. But what makes a text comprehensible and readable? In this session, we will look at how to create coherence through correct use of transition words, reference, and syntax.
28 January 2025 **13.30-15.30**	We will continue with the topic of coherence. In the second part we will address the topic of readability and punctuation. Punctuation is a vital aspect of written communication. In this session we will take a closer look at the role of commas, colons, semicolons, hyphens, and brackets.
31 January 2025 **9.30-12.30**	**Readability and consistency.** You can help readers to understand your text by being consistent in your use of terminology and verb tenses. In this session we will deal with tenses and other aspects of the verb phrase. In this session, you also have the opportunity to work on your own texts and to ask me questions about the feedback I gave you on the 1000-words pre-course assignment and on the use of ELS-online.
3 February 2025 **13.30-15.30**	**Information ordering.** You can improve the reading flow of your text by creating sentences that provide information in an accessible order. In this session you will learn about a sentence's theme and focus. **Revision.** I will give you a checklist of things to look out for when writing and, above all, when revising your writing. This also serves as a course review. You will then apply these tips to revise the text you submitted. You will share your texts in small groups and help each other to revise. I will be on hand to answer questions and give advice.

Lecturers: Wendelien Tuijp and Mekky Zaidi (Centre for International Cooperation – CIS)

Module 4	Soft Skills
Description	This module is suitable for PhDs from different disciplines who seek to explore and enhance their soft skill abilities. The main focus is on communicating and presenting research to varied audiences and promoting research for maximum outreach. The aim is to develop the basic communication and presentation skills necessary for a successful PhD trajectory, taking into account the need for context and situation-based adaptations. The soft skill training will help you consolidate your research project ideas and prepare you for academic discussions with peers but also with other relevant actors. It will also facilitate your introduction to the department and faculty as you will be able to clearly and easily explain your research topic. Additionally, throughout this module you will appreciate the importance of inter-cultural communication and peer-to peer learning.
Teaching methodology	An interactive and experiential learning approach is used. You will develop your presentation skills and mindset by acting, reflecting, exploring, experimenting and receiving/giving feedback. For the best effect, active participation is required.
Course structure	This module consists of four sessions spread over two weeks. It also includes the possibility for one-to-one coaching sessions on-demand. The module will end with a round of mock presentations (5 min pitches) which will prepare you for the final presentations for Module 2. Throughout the sessions, you will build up the blocks of your presentation pitch and practice both in smaller groups and in plenary sessions.
Learning objectives	After successfully completing this module, you will be able to present and discuss your PhD research in a clear and concise manner to both an academic audience as well as a general public. You will also have insight into your own strengths and weaknesses in communication/presenting skills, and how you can make use of your strengths during a presentation.
Assignments	The soft skill-sharpening will occur through a progression of interlinked assignments which stimulate you to activate and build on the experience and insights acquired in each session. The assignments will help you to develop specific aspects of communication and presentation skills.
Formative assessment	The mock presentations at the end of the module will be assessed by your peers as well as the lecturers. You should be able to provide a clear and convincing presentation of your PhD research topic.
Materials for this module	Study materials (including handouts and links to videos) will be provided by the lecturers on CANVAS prior to each session.

Date	Topic
23 January 2025 **13.30-16.30**	**Session 1:** Introduction to the soft skills module and getting to know each other. We will highlight the key principles of presenting and communicating with an audience and discuss how to structure your presentation. **Assignment 1:** In preparation for next session: work on your pitch (building block 1)
27 January 2025 **9:30-11.30**	**Session 2:** We will introduce a set of guidelines for advanced presentation skills, paying attention on how to make your presentation interesting for the audience. We will continue with tips on how to give and receive feedback. In the second part of the session you will present Assignment 1 in a smaller group. You will also practice giving and receiving feedback from your peers. **Assignment 2:** In preparation for next session: work on your pitch (building block 2)
29 January 2025 **9:30-12.30**	**Session 3:** During this session we will delve into non-verbal communication, the voice as a toolbox and interacting with your audience. We will continue with examples from real life situations and learn from the experience of a PhD candidate who successfully defended the thesis in the previous year. In the second part of the session you will present Assignment 2 in a smaller group. You will also practice giving and receiving feedback from your peers. **Assignment 3:** In preparation for next session: work on your pitch (building block 3)
30 January 2025 **9.30 – 12.30**	**Session 4:** In this session we will address communication in the Dutch academic environment and expectation management. We will highlight different cultural perspectives and implications for communication, for example with your supervisor. In the second part of the session you will present Assignment 3 in a smaller group. You will also practice giving and receiving feedback from your peers. **Assignment 4:** In preparation for next session: work on your full mock presentation (5 min pitch)
31 January 2025 **13.30 – 16.30**	One-on-one coaching
4 February 2025 **13.30 – 16.30**	**Mock Presentations** (5 min pitches)
5 February 2025 **9:30-12:30**	**Mock Presentations** (5 min pitches)