

Netherlands – University College, Utrecht (UCU), 2007-08 Year

Religious Studies & History Majors

I. ACADEMIC CONCERNS

A. Structure

Educational philosophy:

- **Role of higher education in host country (percent of population able to attend university)**
- **Role of professor (researcher, teacher, relationship to students)**
- **Role of student (more independent, need to take more initiative, class participation or non participation)**

UCU is a small international honors college affiliated with University of Utrecht. There are only about 600 students, who are roughly 2/3 Dutch and the rest are international. It is based off of a small American liberal arts college and is different from other Dutch universities. Each class is small with less than 25 students and is like a pro-seminar, with an emphasis on discussion, presentations, and participation. The role of the professor is less of a lecturer and more of a guide to the class discussion. Each student is able to develop a close academic relationship with the professor. The student must be an active participant and involved in discussion.

Course organization:

- **Year system vs. semester system**
- **Registration process (choosing, adding, dropping courses, grading options)**
- **Classes in which English is the language of instruction**
- **How host courses differ from UC courses**
- **Setting: Urban university vs. U.S.-style “campus”**
- **Amount of language acquisition (if applicable)**
- **EAP Code of Conduct: unexcused absences**

UCU is a semester system, with a fall and spring semester. The winter break is about six weeks long. Each student is given a tutor who works with them to choose their classes, and will register for them. Because it is based off of a small American liberal arts college, the grading system is like the one at UCSB with letter grades A-F. All classes are in English. As stated above, all classes are small and are like pro-seminars with an emphasis on discussion. They are a lot like sections or discussions would be here at UCSB. All school buildings, classrooms, dorms and the dining hall are on the same small campus.

B. Method of instruction

Instructors, length of class periods

Requirements: exams (oral vs. written), frequency, papers and projects

Syllabi, bibliography sheet given as “suggested” reading, deadlines

Grading system: transferability of credit, etc.

The classes are two hours long and meet twice a week, and are usually mandatory. It depends on the subject, but there are usually papers, tests, and presentations for each class. Most exams are written, unless you are taking a language class, than sometimes it is oral. A syllabus with the readings and deadlines are given for each class. Each class is worth 4 UCU semester units, and will transfer to UCSB as 6 units.

C. Libraries - general and departmental

Accessibility, is there a cost?

Availability of books and resources

Photocopying & other services (reserve, tracking, etc.)

Fines and penalties (grace period?)

There is a very small library at UCU, so most students use the large library at the “Uithof,” or the main campus of University Utrecht. You will be given a student I.D. which you will need to check out books. There is a website you can use to look up books (you should be given a link at the orientation, or just ask your tutor), and request books which you can pick up at the main library at the Uithof. There are also other libraries throughout the city of

Utrecht. There are copy and print machines on the UCU campus, but you need a “chip knip” card to use them, which is like a pre-paid card with 10 or 20 euros on it that you can purchase at vending machines throughout Utrecht and at the Uithof. You can use this chip knip to purchase other things in the Netherlands like train tickets and items at a vending machine.

D. Bookstores: on/off campus

Availability of materials, cost of books?

Discounts, used books: sold/bought?

There is no UCU bookstore. There are bookstores for UU (University of Utrecht), yet they will not always have books for UCU students. A student organization will have a book sale for UCU students at the beginning of the semester, but arrive early because lines are long and you will sometimes not get the books. There is also a website where students will post books available for purchase. If all else fails, there is always amazon.com or non-school bookstores throughout the city of Utrecht.

II. SURVIVAL LIVING

A. Before you go

Packing: What to take, send, leave behind; choosing only what you need

Backpacks vs. suitcases/duffel bags

Clothing: weather, availability of sizes, cost & quality (what you would rather buy there)

Musical instruments, sports equipment, bicycles, etc.

Computer

Save room in luggage for purchases abroad

Weather in the Netherlands varies greatly, but you are guaranteed cold and rain (don't worry it can also be extremely pleasant and sunny), so bring a rain jacket, warm clothes, and layers. There's a LOT of shopping in Utrecht, so if you want to pack light you can buy a lot of clothes there (but it is more expensive). I suggest packing light because you will definitely come back home with more than you brought. If you plan to travel on weekends or breaks, sm/medium travel backpacks are very useful, and much easier to deal with than duffel bags, especially on trains and busses. Bring a laptop if you can because you will be using the internet for organizing your travels, and especially for school work and emails. All of the classes at UCU have websites you are required to use. If you cannot bring one, there are computer labs on campus that are usually open late you can use.

B. Housing

Options: dorms, apartment sharing, host families, boarding houses, etc. (desirable vs. undesirable neighborhoods)

Contracts and leases, cost of housing, insurance

Search for housing/roommates

Security, locks, bedding, cooking, shower/bath, phone, electrical appliances (220/110V current), laundry...

Paying bills

Everyone at UCU is required to live on campus in the dorms, called “units”. You will have your own room, and most of the dorms are really nice and extremely safe. You do not get to choose your “unit-mates” but you will most likely live with Dutch and other international students, and share a common room, bathroom, and small kitchen with limited appliances. The study center will provide some bedding, and the rooms are fully furnished. You will have to buy office/school supplies, but you should check at the study center for left over items past students have left. You pay for your room and board to the UCU landlord, either in one big chunk or through a payment plan. You have to pay either by credit card (yet they charge a really high fee) or by bank transfer (which may be expensive as well, but less expensive than using a credit card). If you have a bank account back home, then plan with your parents on how you are going to pay. If you open a Dutch banking account (most students don't, unless you are staying for a year) then transferring money will be much easier. Everyone is required to pay for meals at the dining hall, but there are also local grocery stores.

C. Correspondence/communication

Postal system: time, cost, services, postal hours

Best way to mail/ship letters, packages, books (UPS/DHL/Fed Express)

FAX, e-mail (cost, if available?), telephone, university computers

Cell Phones: pre-pay vs. contract

There are post offices in Utrecht, and mailboxes right on campus. You will be given a personal mailbox when you move into your unit at the UCU campus. At the post office you can mail letters and packages. The internet in your unit is free, and the computer labs on campus have internet. You can either bring a cell phone that allows you to put a "sim" card in it. Then you would buy a sim card when you get there that is pre-paid, and that you will re-fill when you'd like to purchase more minutes. Or you can purchase a cheap cell phone there with a pre-paid sim card. Shop around for the cheapest deals, like at "Media Markt" or local cell phone providers.

D. Banking

Local currency: exchange rates, black market

Opening an account, types

Credit cards, debit cards, overpaying credit balance to have funds available,

advantages/disadvantages of VISA vs. AM EX, wiring funds, time it takes to send/receive \$

Banking hours, automated tellers (must have a 4-digit PIN to use ATM!!), safety

Using an American account abroad

Setting up online bank account-- pay off credit cards via online bank account

Knowing when the exchange rate for local currency is low; be aware of fair exchange rates

Avoid exchange booths at all costs! Use ATMs to get local currency.

The Netherlands is on the Euro. Check a website for the current exchange rates. Most students do not open a checking account unless they are staying for a full year, but it is possible and probably a good way to go if you are staying for a year. The Dutch use a "chip knip" card that they transfer money from their banking account onto. It is like cash, sort of like an ATM but a bit different. They use this card for everything. As stated above, you can purchase a pre-paid one throughout the city and use it for printing on campus and things like train tickets. If you plan on using your bank account and ATM from home, find a bank that does not have high fees for when you take out money in a foreign country. Some banks, like Bank of America and Wells Fargo have HUGE fees for taking out a money from a foreign ATM. There are ATMs all throughout Utrecht and the Netherlands.

E. Study Center

Contact with home campus, department advisor, EAP, etc.

Send complete course descriptions to home advisor (use e-mail if available) and ask if course can fulfill specific UCSB requirements

UC Study Center Staff: role of director

UC Study Center office hours (limited?)

Confidentiality & gossipTh

The Netherlands EAP Study Center is located on the UCU campus. You can go to this office anytime if you have problems with anything (academics, traveling, residence permit, house issues, etc.), or just want to have tea or coffee. You can also check it for housing/room items, travel maps, school supplies, and old books that past EAP students may have left. You should, by now, be familiar with your advisor at UCSB (Kate) and the UO advisors for the Netherlands. If not, get that info before you go, and the study center in the Netherlands will also know this information. You should also be in contact with your department advisor, and ask them about classes you are thinking of taking while abroad. It is a good idea to keep a communicative relationship with them abroad so there are no surprises back home when you are petitioning for your classes to count for a major or minor.

F. Other

Your responsibility as a representative of UC and the U.S.

Bureaucracy in university offices (efficient vs. slow)

Official holidays and vacations, academic calendar

I suppose your responsibility as a representative of UC and the U.S. is to be respectful of the Dutch culture and people, and be aware and knowledgeable of current events, both about the U.S. and international news. UCU students are usually knowledgeable about US current events, and will ask you about them or want to discuss it with you. Dutch students in general, at least from what I learned at UCU like to discuss (sometimes argue...) politics, news, etc. I would suggest, if you like, to update yourself regularly by reading a news website, like the BBC, or reading a magazine like the Economist. The bureaucracy at UCU, at least when I went in 2007-08, was pretty slow for the most part, it just depends.

-As far as vacations, you will get a week break in both Fall and Spring semesters.

E. Other

Medical (insurance, prescriptions, pharmacies, hospitals, etc.)

Eye drops, contact lens solution

Pollution & air quality, cigarette smoke

Sex, contraceptives, STDs, hygiene

Controlled substances, alcohol consumption

Return transportation (round-trip vs. one-way)

Local transportation (bus, cab, subway, bike, walk, commute time)

Customs regulations: taxes, restricted items, etc.

Be aware of and abide by local laws that differ from or are stricter than US laws

Since you have the mandatory UC EAP health insurance, you should be able to go to a doctor, pharmacy, or hospital. You will probably have to pay upfront, and then get reimbursed later. You should check on the most up to date information though. Just in case, if you have a prescription, you should get enough to bring with you to the Netherlands, or check to see if it is available in the Netherlands. The Netherlands has pharmacies and clinics all over the country, and you can purchase over the counter medicines there.

-Dutch/European students usually drink at social events, and are more casual and laid back about alcohol consumption. They can start drinking beer and wine when they are 16, and hard alcohol at 18, so it will not be their first time drinking in college. They do not usually drink to get drunk and rarely get belligerent, so please do not act (or drink) like you are living in Isla Vista, you'll just embarrass yourself. Soft drugs (i.e., marijuana) are "de-criminalized" which means consuming or buying marijuana is not quite legal, but they won't charge or arrest you as long as you follow the rules/laws. So be sure and update yourself with current laws so you won't get in trouble. For example, smoking on the street in public is not quite legal, so be careful. Also, do NOT bring *any* type of soft drug or alcohol outside of the Netherlands and into other countries.

-I recommend buying a one-way airplane ticket to the Netherlands, so once you are there and know about your final academic calendar, you can schedule travel plans accordingly and buy your return ticket while you are there. I knew several people who regretted buying round-trip airplane tickets because they realized they wanted to stay longer after the semester was over.

-The best way to travel around town is definitely with a bike! Be sure and budget to buy one—there are bike lanes everywhere, and all of the students have a bike. They are pretty expensive (ca. 70-150 euros), so you should buy a used one, either from a student or a bike store. Otherwise, local transportation is frequent, really nice, and yet expensive. You can buy a "strippenkaart" which is a pre-paid bus and tram pass. Or you can pay with coins, but it's cheaper to buy the strippenkaart. The Dutch train system is also one of the nicest train systems in Europe, and their trains go all over the Netherlands, and there are many international trains as well. You should buy a discount card for the trains (the study center will tell you how to get one, and I'm pretty sure they'll reimburse you for it.)

III. CULTURAL LIVING

A. Fitting In

Culture shock, ways to cope with adjusting to host culture

Appropriate dress (more formal vs. "California casual", different rules for women?), manners, and etiquette

Time and punctuality

Eye contact, staring

Acceptable and unacceptable behavior, taboos

Anti-American sentiment

Behavior and alcohol consumption (you represent UC and the U.S., what image do you want to convey?)

Culture shock varies for everyone, it just depends on if you've educated yourself about Dutch and European culture, have traveled before, and are willing to adapt to and accept their culture, especially if its something really different from what you're used to. The Netherlands isn't as different as some of the other countries that students travel to, but there are still culture differences that sometimes take getting used to. One thing that many of us noticed was how bluntly honest Dutch people can be—they don't mean to be offensive, they are just really honest. There are some other things too, but that's the fun of going abroad ☺

-Dutch people have really good style and dress casually, but classier and a bit more formal than us Californians. The guys definitely dress nicer, and the girls dress more modestly (partly because it is much colder there). Also, at student nightclubs they dress pretty casual (i.e. the girls don't usually wear really nice dresses), and more modest (i.e. the girls don't have the boobs or butt hanging out). I remember a Californian girl who wore really short dresses and her boobs were always showing, and other Dutch people in the club were all talking about her and how she was dressed—so if you want to fit in, I suggest dressing more modestly and casually.

-For class and appointments, be on time. For casual events with friends, or parties, its pretty much the same as it is here, don't be extremely late, but it's okay to show up a little late.

-Try not to be very loud. Americans are usually much louder than everyone else (it seems!), and it's not polite to be extremely loud with your friends in a train or bus or whatever.

-There is not much anti-American sentiment there, but a lot of students will probably want to discuss politics (American and international), American foreign policy, culture differences, etc., so like I said earlier, be up on your current events and read the news!

-I already wrote about behavior and alcohol consumption for another question. Just remember, don't get "wasted;" they are much more casual and laid back about their alcohol consumption. However, Dutch people do love to party and go to pubs (there is a bar on the UCU campus that has parties all the time), and student clubs (Thursday nights are free! Bring a student I.D. card), so have fun!

B. Relationships, friendship and dating customs

Male-female, male-male, female-female

Discrimination, harassment, personal safety

Age differences, ethnocentricity, etc.

Hanging out with Americans vs. making international friendships

A lot of people at UCU date. It's just up to you if you want to date or not. I personally don't suggest it because you'll be there for such a short time, but do whatever you want. Dutch culture is also really open about and acceptable towards gays and gay relationships.

-Utrecht is a really safe city, but if you are a girl and are going out at night, bring a guy friend along (or at the *least* another girlfriend). Just remember to have common sense, and stay away from stupid, overly drunk guys.

-People at UCU are not generally ethnocentric. You should not be either.

-You are going to UCU orientation, and most of the people there are freshman, and will be around 18 years old. A lot of us made younger friends and UCU, because they are more open to new friendships. Some of the older people are harder to become good friends with (since they already have their group of friends), but it's possible if you make the effort. If you are casual acquaintances with someone, don't expect to get invited to everything. Dutch people are a bit more reserved and much more honest when it comes to friendships, but if you really do make an effort you can make some great Dutch friends. Once you are good friends with someone, they really are great friends—so don't always hang out with the other Americans, although it will be really tempting to! I found it was best to strike a balance—I made some great American friends, but I also made an effort and made great Dutch friends as well. Also, it's important to know that when you invite Dutch people to something, or if they invite you, you must keep those plans unless you have a good excuse, and NOT be flaky. Being flaky, and casually inviting someone to something without really meaning it, or ditching someone, is a really bad stereotype of Americans. If you invite them to something, or if you accept an invitation, they will expect you to follow through.

C. Other

Local geography & weather

Current events, new sources, etc.

Food, groceries, snacks, drinks

Gratuities (tips) customs in host country

As you probably know, the Netherlands is extremely flat (hence why there are bike lanes everywhere!) and it rains a lot. Bring a raincoat, boots, and an umbrella. Bring warm clothes too. If you want, you can buy that stuff there as well. When it's sunny, the Netherlands is beautiful and everyone will be out in the parks, on the canals, or at cafes.

-Most of Dutch news is in Dutch, but I suggest reading up on current events with an online website, like bbc.com, or the economist, or whatever else you like.

-Albert Heijn is the main grocery store in the Netherlands (they are everywhere!), and Dutch people go really often and buy way less than us Americans (they usually have to bike home with their groceries...you will have to as well, but you'll learn to master biking with tons of stuff!). Bring cash; they don't take credit/debit cards usually. You'll soon love Albert Heijn, and you'll definitely miss it when you leave (you have to try the Albert Heijn milk chocolate, by the way!). Remember though that you'll eat most of your meals in the Dining Hall, but you will soon learn the ups and downs of Dining Hall life, and will want to visit Albert Heijn every once in a while.

-Dutch people DO tip. At cafes, just round up the bill. At nice restaurant, you'll want to tip around 10 percent.

IV. LEISURE TIME

A. Recreation

Athletics, student teams, gymnasiums, jogging (may get stared at)

Cultural: theater, dance, concerts (student discounts?)

Student government / clubs/ societies

-Dutch people are pretty fit/athletic and love sports. You can join a sports club at UU (one of my friends joined a volleyball team with some UCU students to compete with UU students, and she loved it), which is a lot like intramurals here. Just ask around to see how to join. You can join the UU gym or UCU gym but both cost money. People do jog there, so go for it if you want (if you're a girl and jogging at night, just remember to have common sense—its probably best just to jog during the day and some place you know).

-There are tons of clubs, theaters, and concerts in the Netherlands. Some clubs have student nights (Thursdays-bring your student I.D.). Be sure to check up on the Amsterdam venues (like the Milkweg) for concerts- because there is a ton! There are also really fun music festivals—everything from techno to rock.

-UCU has two student governments, one that exists for the social life/clubs of the students, and one for more practical and academic related things for the students. There are tons of random clubs you can join as well. You'll learn all about it at orientation.

B. Travel

Passes (Eurail vs. Interrail), ISIC, hostel cards, discounts, train types, buses

Excursions organized by Study Center or campus groups, ads for good deals may be posted at university by local travel agencies

Travel tips (seasons, discounts, packing for trips)

-I highly recommend buying the Europe travel book called "Europe on a Shoestring" by Lonely Planet- it is one of the best Europe travel books and has up-to-date information on places to see/go, museums, hostels, travel deals, airlines, transportation, etc. You should read up on it before you go, and research for yourself on the best travel deals concerning eurail passes, busses, and cheap airlines. There are many websites with cheap airline tickets, and they are listed in that book (and probably other travel books as well). It is also a good idea to get a Lonely Planet travel book specifically about the Netherlands.

-My travel tip would be to research *before you go* and choose which countries and cities you absolutely want to travel to. When you arrive in the Netherlands, you can then figure out your school schedule and make travel arrangements. Remember that you will have a week break in the fall and spring semesters. You can also arrive early, and leave late for extra travel time. You won't be able to see everything in Europe, so don't stress out about it! Just choose a few must-see cities. Once you've chosen your must-see destinations, research the best deals on trains, buses, and airlines, and plan accordingly. The earlier you plan, the cheaper the deals. There are also last minute deals as well, so check on those.

-Remember to also get to know the Netherlands, which has great cities to explore and get to know (don't spend all of your time traveling! Get to know the country you're in).

-For hostels, use www.hostelworld.com and www.hostels.com, or even try couch surfing (be safe though and travel with a buddy!) www.couchsurfing.com. Remember to bring small locks (for lockers at hostels), and converters.

-Pack light with a small/medium travel backpack. You will regret it if you pack heavily and with a roll-away or large suitcase.

-And, try to stay away from tourist traps! Explore the local parts of countries and cities. Don't go somewhere or see something just because everyone else is doing it.

-Remember to respect any country and city you're in (be aware of large culture/etiquette differences), and always travel with common sense!