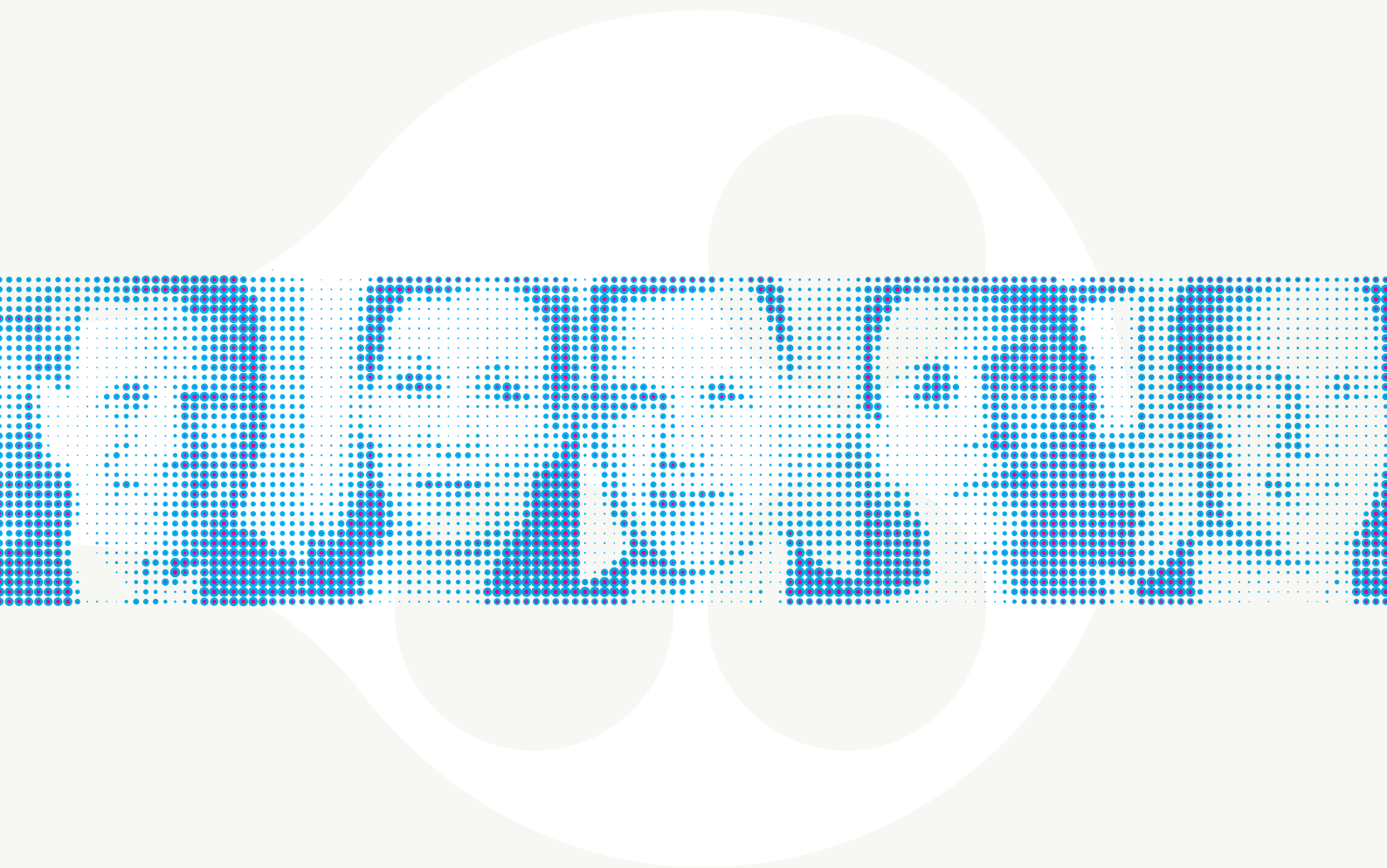


Annual Review 2008

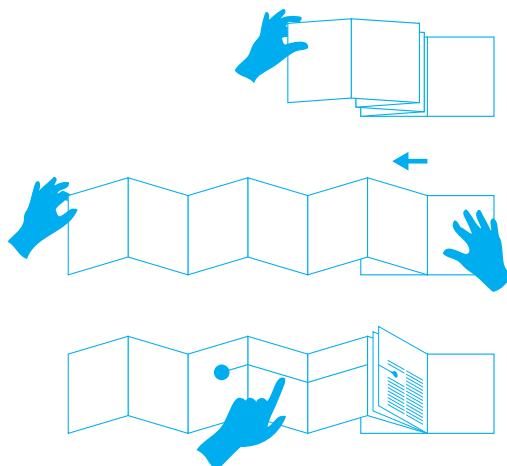
Facing Facts



This page covers a timeline of events in 2008 at VU University Amsterdam. If you unfold the pages - as shown in the instructions below - a table of contents will appear on the right. The table contains the names of a select group of people working at VU University Amsterdam, all of whom excelled in 2008. You can read more about their work and achievements by connecting the lines that run left from the table of contents into the unfolded timeline. Finding your way in this Annual Review couldn't be easier: the page numbers can be found in both the table of contents and the timeline. The back pages of the timeline provide a more general overview of the most important events of 2008 that have taken place in and around VU University Amsterdam. This timeline also serves as a calendar.

2008

Turn this page over and fold it out.



11 January

Five VU researchers
awarded ERC grants

7 February

Electoral Compass used
in internal elections at VU
University Amsterdam

8 February

Meeting to launch the
Interdisciplinary Institute
for the Study of Religion,
Culture and Society (VISOR)

11 February

Website Electoral Compass
for Youth launched

9

13 February

Dorret Boomsma;
Presentation of book on
research using twins

15 January

News headline: RFID-
security expert Melanie
Rieback heavily criticizes
the Dutch public transport
chipcard

14

14 January

Carin van der Wal;
Reprofiling the Science
Building

5 March

Former Prime Minister
Wim Kok visits Moroccan
Dutch Leadership Institute
(MDLI) at VU University
campus

5 March

Meeting to launch the
Interdisciplinary Network
Institute

6 February

Meeting to launch the
Interdisciplinary Research
Institute for Heritage and
History of the Cultural
Landscape and Urban
Environment (CLUE)

20 March

Exhibition of 'Fokke and Sukke' cartoons opened by Minister of Education

9 April

Mathematics student Demeter Kiss wins Vojtech Jasník mathematics competition in Eastern Europe

9 May

VU University Centre for Entrepreneurship develops a Minor study in Entrepreneurship.

15 May

Aroosa Khan; Making People Better symposium

32

1 April

Opening meeting of CASE (Center for Amsterdam Schools of Entrepreneurship)

23 May

VU University Amsterdam and Amsterdam Football Club Ajax formally agree to cooperate on football related science

21

17 April

Martijn de Koning; Thesis on the search for "pure" Islam

33

1 May

Lucy Kortram; Stimulation of multi-cultural competences in teaching

28 May

VU University Amsterdam's Laser Centre awarded major NWO grant

28 May

Agreement between City of Amsterdam, University of Amsterdam and VU University Amsterdam to join forces in Amsterdam University College (AUC)

7 June

Students organize a fundraising night for Amsterdam social project 'VoorUit'

13 June

Symposium to mark the 70th birthday of Prof. Ewald Kooiman renowned organist and VU scholar

2 July

Executive Board approves a new financing system for 10 faculties

7 August

Project 'VoorUit' is nominated for 'Pearl of Integration' Award

28 May

Prof. Halleh Ghorashi receives ZMV Award from Minister Ella Vogelaar

27 May

International movie 'Meat the Truth' given Dutch premiere on VU University

17 June

Dept. of Dutch as a Second Language develops a language aid for foreign women, living in isolation

19 June

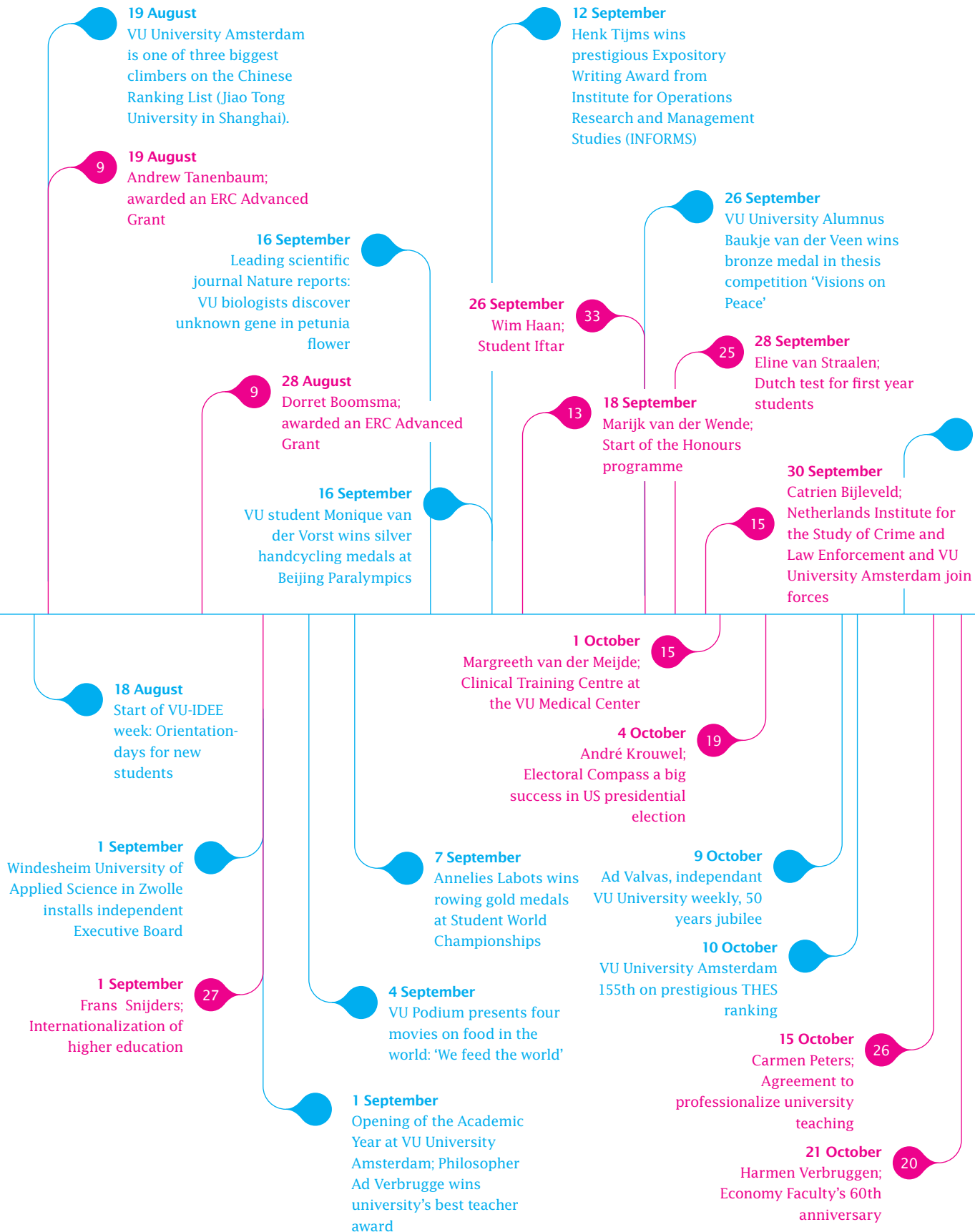
Informationday for potential students

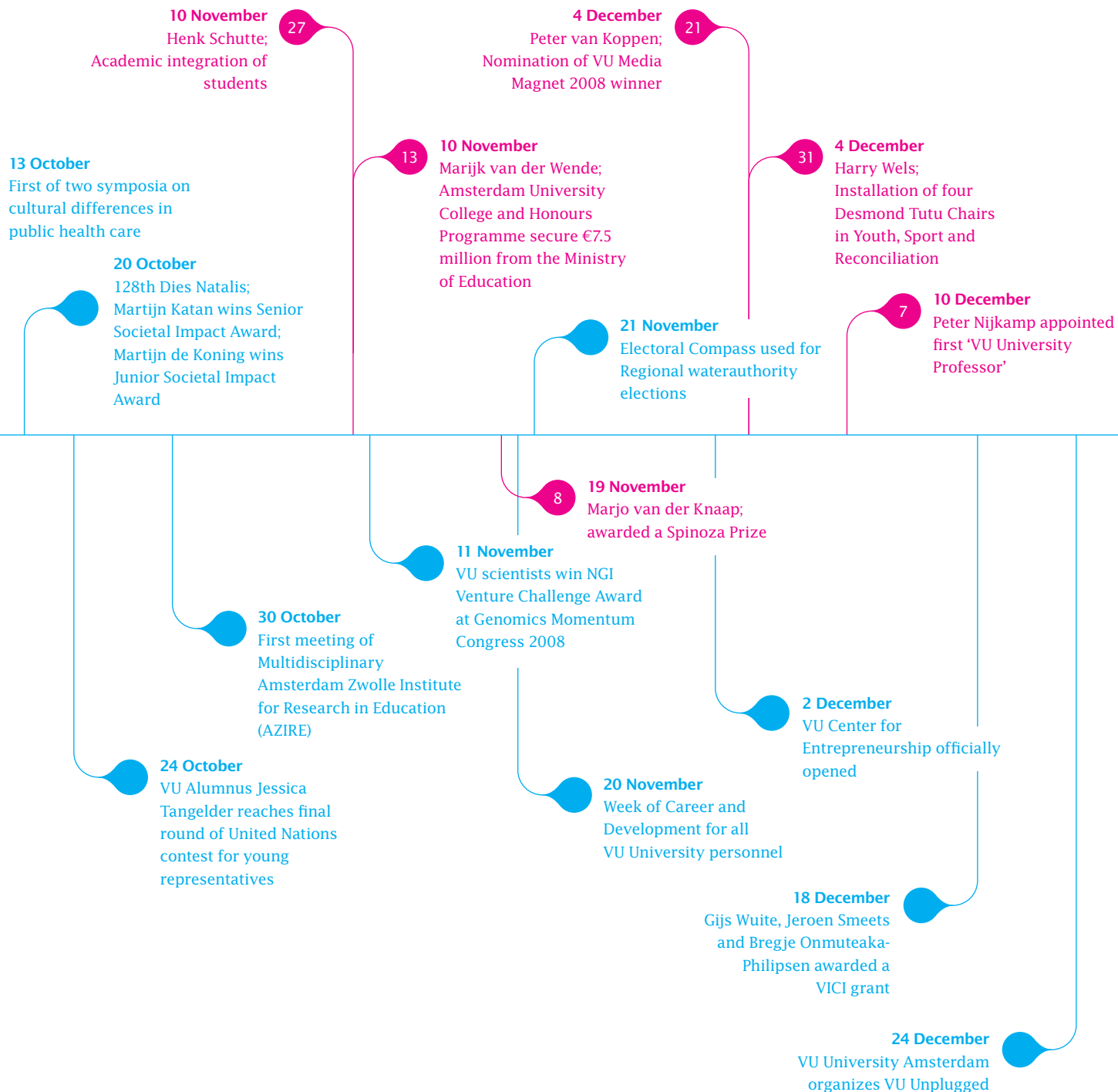
30 June

To make room for education and research, the Executive Board now offices at Uilenstede, Amstelveen

22 July

Alternative options for students aspiring to study medicine: What do you do if you're not offered a place?





Dorret Boomsma

13 February

Presentation of book on
research using twins
page 9



Carin van der Wal

14 January

Reprofiling the Science
Building
page 14



Martijn de Koning

17 April

Thesis on the search for
"pure" Islam
page 21



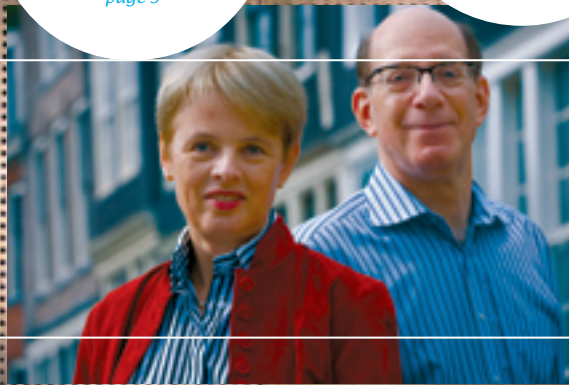
Lucy Kortram

1 May

Stimulation of multi-
cultural competences
in teaching
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Andrew
Tanenbaum
19 August
Awarded an ERC
Advanced Grant
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Dorret Boomsma
28 August
Awarded an ERC
Advanced Grant
page 9



Frans Snijders
1 September
Internationalization of
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Aroosa Khan
15 May
Making People Better
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Marijk
van der Wende
18 September
Amsterdam University
College secures €7.5
million from the
Ministry of Education
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Catrien Bijleveld
30 September
Netherlands Institute
for the Study of Crime
and Law Enforcement
and VU University
Amsterdam join forces
page 15

Eline van Straalen
28 September
Dutch test for first-year
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page 25



Wim Haan
26 September
Student Iftar
page 33

foto: Digidaan



Margreeth
van der Meijde
1 October
Clinical Training Centre
at the VU Medical
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page 15

André Krouwel
4 October
Electoral Compass
a big success in US
presidential election
page 19



Carmen Peters
15 October
Agreement to
professionalize
university teaching
page 26



Harmen Verbruggen
20 October
128th VU Dies Natalis;
Honorary doctorate of
Gerrit Zalm
page 20





Marjo
van der Knaap
19 November
Awarded a Spinoza
Prize
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Peter Nijkamp
10 December
Appointed first 'VU
University Professor'
page 7

Peter van Koppen
4 December
Nomination of VU Media
Magnet '08 winner
page 21

Henk Schutte
10 November
Academic integration
of students
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Harry Wels
4 December
Installation of four
Desmond Tutu Chairs
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Reconciliation
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Introduction

VU University Amsterdam is a prominent European research university. With 21,000 students, about 4,300 staff and twelve faculties, we are a modern organization at the cutting edge of academic higher education. Yet our distinctive origins still shine through in our unique characteristics: a fundamental esteem for personal principles, a deep-seated appreciation of diversity, active social engagement and freedom from ideology or dogma. Our core values – excellence in research and education, mutual respect and close links to society – are a direct product of that background.

The 'Vrije Universiteit' was established in 1880 by the statesman and theologian Abraham Kuyper as the first Dutch university free of state and church interference. Instead, thousands of ordinary people contributed to make the university a success. To this day, that heritage fuels our drive to excel and our closeness to the society in which we are rooted. We seek quality in education through close personal contact and supervision, whilst allowing ample scope for personal development and expression. Students and academic staff work closely together in pursuit of new knowledge, with investigative work as a key part of the educational process from beginning to end. Our students are challenged to ask critical questions, to tackle problems and to place what they are learning in a wider philosophical, ethical and social context.

VU University Amsterdam today

One of our primary duties is to train the educated citizens of tomorrow: people with the academic grounding needed to pass on a better world to the next generation. VU University Amsterdam combines accessibility to all with opportunities for those with both ambition and talent to shine – as demonstrated by such initiatives as our 'honours programme' for outstanding students. Nor do we neglect broader personal development, providing a wide range of cultural, sporting and social facilities.

In our research, too, we are committed to serving society. Acquiring knowledge is not an end in itself, but a means to benefit the greater good. Hence the prominence of key topical themes like sustainability, world food, integration, public health, traffic congestion and diversity. We are now bringing even greater focus and mass to these activities with the establishment of interdisciplinary research institutes. These bring together scholars from different academic backgrounds, allowing them to approach research issues from new perspectives, as well as concentrating the capacity needed to attract greater funding and to use it in an efficient, effective way. In selected focal areas, ranging from cultural heritage to network studies, we are building the kind of structure needed to remain a top research university in the 21st century.

VU University Amsterdam is also very much aware of its physical location. Recent years have seen us strengthen ties with our host city. Intensified partnerships with the local authorities and other academic institutions have produced a shared vision of the Dutch capital as one of Europe's

knowledge hotspots: a centre of scholarship, a magnet for high-value entrepreneurship and a great place to live, work and learn. We have been playing an active part in developing local structures to exchange know-how. Similarly, we contribute to city-wide networks for knowledge transfer, the stimulation of new ideas and the formation of collaborative 'clusters'. We are also working with local government, the University of Amsterdam and business partners to establish Amsterdam University College, which will offer an undergraduate liberal arts and sciences programme as good as any in the world.

On our doorstep, the development of the Zuidas business district is providing new opportunities to forge strategic alliances with the crème de la crème of international financial services, commerce and law. These have borne fruit in 2008 with the launch of a Master's degree specialization in Enterprise Law, offered in collaboration with 13 Zuidas-based law firms, and the opening of the new Duisenberg School of Finance.

The core tasks of VU University Medical Center (VUmc) are patient care, scientific research and medical training, with its position as a leading teaching hospital reflected in its ability to treat patients with complex conditions and the intensive care it can provide for those who need it. A much-needed community service for Amsterdam and the wider region.

VU University Amsterdam is a respected centre of academic learning and scientific investigation. But we are not resting on our laurels. We intend to continue growing and improving. Plans are being developed to build an entirely new campus close to our current site. This 'VU Quarter' will incorporate public housing, offices, sports and cultural provisions, as well as accommodating

state-of-the-art research and educational facilities for the university. It will thus be a more open environment, encouraging greater interaction with the community. A place where everyone is welcome.

This 'new' university will be a place of interaction. A place where business and science, creativity and professionalism meet. An institution ready to face new academic challenges, from shifting patterns of research funding to the internationalization of higher education. Only by meeting them head on will VU University Amsterdam continue to play a full part in nurturing talent, in pushing forward the boundaries of human knowledge and advancing the city, the society and the world in which our roots run deep.

Strategic themes

VU University Amsterdam is a very special institution looking back on a rich history and ahead to an exciting future. As we enter our 130th year, we have defined five strategic themes to guide us through the challenges and transitions ahead. Based upon our core values – inspiration, innovation and engagement – these themes clearly define our position as a leading academic centre for today's world. And they explain where we stand for all those who come into contact with us: current and future students, graduates, our own teaching, research and ancillary staff and their colleagues throughout the world, fellow institutions, public and private partners, funding organizations, every level of government, people of influence in all sections of the community and, of course, the general public.

Reflecting the reputation VU University Amsterdam has gained over many decades and intends

to continue building, the new strategic themes provide us with the focus needed to pursue that ambition with absolute resolution. They emphasize our commitment to quality and innovation, our relevance in contemporary society and our forthright approach. Moreover, as outlined below, they form the basis for this annual review.

Top research university

VU University Amsterdam is a broad-based institution at which top researchers can excel. This is demonstrated by our high placing in respected independent rankings and by outstanding inspection reports, but also by our consistent ability to secure funding in competitive situations: European Research Council grants, Spinoza Awards and so on. It is also clear from our ability to attract research talent from all over the world. By establishing interdisciplinary research institutes which transcend the traditional boundaries between faculties, we are encouraging outstanding investigative minds to focus upon those areas where the most exciting scientific breakthroughs are waiting to be made.

A dynamic campus

VU University Amsterdam is seeking to maximize the potential of its strategically located campus in Amsterdam's expanding Zuidas business district. By making the most of the proximity, we not only forge connections with the local, national and international business community and with other social partners, but we also create a more dynamic research and learning environment – not least by attracting leading international researchers and the best students. As the Zuidas continues to develop, so too will our campus. The planned VU Quarter will integrate the university

into the very heart of the district to create a unique combination of commercial enterprise, academic endeavour and social life with genuine global allure.

Research for society

As an institution born out of a community initiative, VU University Amsterdam has always been sensitive to issues affecting society. Even in our most fundamental research, we endeavour to focus upon those aspects which resonate in society at large. We encourage critical, rational reflection so that our researchers appreciate the full relevance of their work, both to the international scientific community and in the wider world. This is an approach reinforced by our governance structure, based upon a public association with thousands of members. Stakeholders through whom we maintain a real and direct link with the people we seek to benefit.

Well-organized education

By providing a well-organized educational environment in which academic rigour is combined with flexibility and freedom of choice, VU University Amsterdam offers opportunities for everyone entering the university to develop their abilities to the full. And we are proud to give our most talented and ambitious students the space they need to excel. In doing so, we are building on a long tradition of emancipation through education. Now, as throughout our history, a significant proportion of our students are first-generation academics. Today, moreover, many of them are drawn from ethnic minorities. Our community of learners is characterized by enquiry-based learning, intensive tutor-student interaction, a personal approach and wide participation in relevant extracurricular activities.

This produces graduates with both the academic qualifications and the personal maturity to play a meaningful role in the world.

Diversity for excellence

VU University Amsterdam brings together people from different backgrounds and with different beliefs. We regard diversity as a positive opportunity. By facilitating interaction between personal interpretations and convictions in a spirit of openness, we allow new paths to be trodden and new forms of understanding to take shape. Respect for diversity was a founding principle of VU University Amsterdam in 1880, and never has it been more relevant than in today's multicultural, multiethnic, multireligious society. Science and learning can never be value-free, so for us ethical and societal reflection is as important as empirical results.

Review of 2008

Many people, projects and activities throughout the university epitomize the aspirations underlying our chosen strategic themes. For the annual review we have selected just a few of those individuals whose work and achievements in 2008 embody the qualities enshrined in each theme. They describe their success or progress in their own words, whilst prominent figures in the theme's unfolding story look ahead to where it will take us in 2009 and beyond.

Naturally, you will also find key facts and figures about VU University Amsterdam in 2008. And, in the run-up to our 130th anniversary year, we have included a historical timeline of important events typifying our distinguished past and our successful present on the way to our 26th lustrum in 2010.

Top research university

VU University Amsterdam is a broad-based institution at which top researchers are encouraged to excel. Believing that the most decisive breakthroughs are to be made when innovative scientists work together at the highest level on themes which transcend traditional academic boundaries, we continue to pursue our policy of clustering research within interdisciplinary institutes. These combine efficiency benefits at the organizational level with the focus and mass needed to attract both the best people and the necessary funding in a highly competitive environment.

As the institutes founded over the past couple of years now begin to produce groundbreaking results, others are following in their footsteps. AZIRE, the new Amsterdam-Zwolle Institute for Research in Education, is addressing issues in learning, teaching and upbringing. EMGO+, the inter-faculty Institute for Health and Care Research, launches in 2009 with a focus upon primary care and public health, including such urgent matters as depression, obesity and ageing. And plans have been announced for a Research Institute for Social and Economic Behaviour, bringing together scientists from the faculties of Economics and Business Administration, Psychology and Education and Social Sciences.

Our research leadership is confirmed by independent analysis. In the prestigious publication-based Leiden Ranking 2008, for example, VU University Amsterdam is the number four Dutch university in terms of overall research impact and is in fifteenth position in Europe as a whole. Moreover, our performance is particularly strong in a number of the fields we have selected as research priorities, such as medicine, earth sciences and life sciences.

Once again, several VU University researchers secured major funding for their work in 2008. Computer scientist Andrew Tanenbaum and biological psychologist Dorret Boomsma were awarded substantial European Research Council Advanced Grants, whilst VUmc's Professor of Child Neurology, Marjo van der Knaap, earned a Spinoza Prize worth €1.5 million from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) for her work on serious brain disorders. And to raise our research profile even further, we have appointed our first "university professor", Peter Nijkamp, and given him a wide-ranging scientific and policy mandate. He is an economist, a Spinoza Prize winner and a former chairman of NWO.



A man in a dark suit and tie stands by a large window, looking out. The office has a grey brick wall, a desk with a computer, a filing cabinet, and a small globe. A speech bubble contains a quote about returning to university.

“For me,
coming back to the
university is always
a homecoming.
An ecologist would
say that this is
my natural
habitat.”



Peter Nijkamp

Scientific ambassador at large

Peter Nijkamp appointed first
“university professor”

Peter Nijkamp is a Renaissance man for the global age. He flew in this morning from Suriname, where he has been conducting research on human migration. This afternoon he is being inaugurated as chairman of a government committee on the nanosciences. Tomorrow he travels to Italy to give a speech on e-governance. In his campus office, he has just been chatting to a Spatial Economics student about his thesis. And that, he says, is still the best part of the job. “Students are the most wonderful people. They’re so extraordinarily brilliant and creative. So full of fresh ideas. So unhindered by all the experiences that weigh down the older generation. We have such lively debates. For me, coming back to the university is always a homecoming. An ecologist would say that this is my natural habitat.”

In 2008, after seven years as President of NWO, the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research, Nijkamp – an economist by training – was named as VU University Amsterdam’s first “university professor”. Part of the remit is to act as an ambassador for the university, but what he really loves is the academic freedom the role

gives him. “The idea behind this professorship is to raise the faculty’s and the university’s profile, projecting a positive image. To that end, though, I can pretty much do what I want: research, teaching, public lectures, sitting on committees, you name it. I have a packed diary, but it’s up to me to decide what it’s packed with.

Marjo van der Knaap

Spinoza for the brain

“So far we’ve been looking mainly at causes and diagnosis. Now it’s time to start trying to find a cure.”

“What I enjoy most is the chance to break out of my own discipline. Since I took up the post I’ve worked on cultural heritage, migration, transport systems and urban sustainability, to name but a few. And I’ve been teaching an evening course for international students on European development. That covers everything from the Treaty of Rome to peacekeeping missions to ethnic conflict in modern cities, combining theory, policy and practice.

“On behalf of the university, I want to capitalize on all my recent experience by bringing together insights from every branch of science. I have lots of new ideas, drawn from areas as wide-ranging as maths, biology, law, ecology, linguistics... What they all have in common, I guess, is that they’re about how people behave. How do people interact? How do they respond to challenges? Human behaviour is so complex that you can’t box it into departments and faculties. Just as science only really blossoms when you give people the opportunity to work across boundaries of traditional disciplines.

“What inspires me about this post is the chance to head in new directions and to develop new initiatives with all sorts of different people. That’s clearly something that appeals to the university as well, because it’s given me the space to flourish and to do the most exciting things. Which, I think, is the most telling statement of all.”

Marjo van der Knaap, Professor of Child Neurology at VU University Amsterdam, was awarded a Spinoza Prize worth €1.5 million in November 2008. The honour recognizes her 22 years of work on the group of brain diseases known as white matter disorders. During that time she has used magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) technology to diagnose a number of distinct conditions, and so far has identified nine of the genes specifically responsible for some of them.

About one child in a thousand suffers from some form of white matter disorder, says Van der Knaap. “They affect the ‘wiring’ of the brain. But there are many different forms, with symptoms varying widely. The most common is motor deterioration, but there can also be cognitive degeneration. The prognoses differ, too: some young patients die within months of diagnosis, others live for many years.”

Sometimes labelled as the “Dutch Nobels”, the Spinoza Prizes awarded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research are the nation’s premier accolade for scientific excellence. The jury praised Van der Knaap for her combination of authority in her field and a sympathetic yet down-to-earth approach to patients and their families.

She plans to invest her prize money in treatment research. “So far we’ve been looking mainly at causes and diagnosis. Now it’s time to start trying

to find a cure – or at least ways of improving these children’s quality of life. The medication we have is becoming smarter and smarter, so I think we’re going to make a lot of progress over the next twenty years or so.”

Initiated by Boomsma in 1987, the Netherlands Twin Register currently contains details of almost

“(...) depression is genetic in origin. We are now trying to track down the actual genes responsible.”

Dorret Boomsma

Twin research rewarded

The European Research Council awarded Professor of Biological Psychology Dorret Boomsma an Advanced Grant worth €2.5 million in 2008, to fund her ongoing research on the genetic aspects of psychiatric disorders. This is based upon data drawn from the Netherlands Twin Register, which is maintained by her department. This grant is the largest single personal award ever secured by a researcher at VU University Amsterdam.

“Depression in adults is the biggest cause of non-fatal disease in Western countries,” says Boomsma. “And the number of people with depression is rising in other parts of the world, too. Moreover, depression often brings with it anxiety disorders, migraine, substance dependency, obesity and cardiovascular disease. My research is trying to find the underlying causes of individual differences in health – including conditions like depression – and behaviour by looking at both identical and non-identical twins.” By comparing them, she can analyse the degree to which genetic characteristics and environmental factors determine variations in the pattern of such complaints.

“What we’ve found so far is that, to a large extent, depression is genetic in origin. We are now trying to track down the actual genes responsible.” The first of these, called “picolo”, was reported early in 2009.

40,000 sets of twins and other multiple births. The fact that these children are followed from birth is unique in the world, and in 2001 her work on twins earned her a Spinoza Prize.

Andrew Tanenbaum

Coming soon: computers that work!

Professor of Computer Science Andrew Tanenbaum has been awarded €2.4 million by the European Research Council (ERC) to fund five years of research on reliable and new secure systems software.

The amount is impressive, but then Tanenbaum’s project could change the life of every computer user. “We’re trying to make an operating system that actually works,” he explains. “One which functions according to its specifications. Which doesn’t crash. Our model is the TV set. You buy it, you plug it in and it works for the next ten years. No problem. As we all know only too well, computers aren’t like that. But why not? Why don’t they work all the time?”

The answer, he says, is that nobody really knows how they work at all. “The Vista OS contains about 70 million lines of code. Not even Microsoft really has any clue how they all interact. Our system is going to be much smaller and more compact, with a modular design.”

The ERC grant should enable Tanenbaum and his team to develop their current early prototype of the MINIX (MINi unIX) operating system into a fully fledged computing solution. One with an



“We’re trying to make an operating system that actually works.”

approach fundamentally different from that we are used to: software that actually analyses and improves itself, whilst at the same time continuing to run safely and reliably.

With EMGO+ we are now formalizing that, to further stimulate the existing collaborations.

“But the real plus lies in the fact that this is an initiative which has evolved out of demand from the workforce, not one imposed from above by the bigwigs. The researchers know that when you look at the important issues in public health, long-term care and so on, doctors alone are not enough. Psychologists alone are not enough. Health scientists alone are not enough. They know that they have to break out of their own worlds if they are ever going to solve the really important problems. And that, in a competitive research environment, they have to strengthen the areas they are good in. So they, the grass-roots researchers, have been the driving force behind EMGO+.”

Facing the future

Hans Brug

Health and care plus

Launching in April 2009, the new interfaculty EMGO+ Institute for Health and Care Research builds on a strong tradition of cooperation between the VU University Medical Center (VUmc) and the university’s psychologists and health scientists, says Director Hans Brug.

“The ‘plus’ stands for something more. Health and care are complex issues, which have to be tackled from a variety of perspectives. Take the obesity epidemic. To really do something about that, you need people who understand nutrition and human movement and the medical consequences of being overweight, but also specialists in the psychological causes and consequences. And, because society has to change if we are going to tackle the root of the problem effectively, policy experts as well. The need for a multidisciplinary approach lies in the very substance of the issues.

A dynamic campus

VU University Amsterdam's compact, accessible and dynamic campus is a central element of its identity. All our primary academic processes are within easy walking distance of one another, generating a creative synergy between research and education across the twelve faculties. The advantages of this concentration were reiterated in 2008 by NSCR, the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement, which decided to relocate to our campus in order to benefit from close physical proximity to academics engaged in all kinds of work related to its field of study.

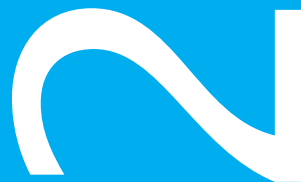
For those seeking a quality undergraduate experience with an international flavour, Amsterdam University College – the city's new liberal arts and sciences institution, in which VU University is an active participant – is due to welcome its first students in September 2009.

To create more room for research and education on the main site, the Executive Board and several administrative services have recently moved to premises a short distance away. The space they have vacated has been transformed into new classrooms, computer rooms and offices for researchers. Now that they are clustered in on place, moreover, the relocated departments also find themselves working more effectively together.

Other developments on campus in 2008 include a successful reprofiling of the Science Building despite the budgetary constraints imposed by its short remaining life.

Meanwhile, we continue to develop our plans for a whole new kind of campus. This will integrate the university more closely than ever with the wider community, by incorporating its functions into an open, mixed-use section of the Zuidas district. Extending the site of the present campus, the so-called VU Quarter will see classrooms and research facilities situated side by side with commercial offices and shops, with cultural, sports, leisure and entertainment facilities and with homes, including student housing. The new development is due to cover more than 20 hectares, and its buildings will provide some 500,000 square metres of floor space for these various functions.

Following the declaration of intent signed with the City of Amsterdam in 2007, last year work continued to develop the financing arrangements and architectural plans. A draft partnership agreement between the university, the city and the Zuidas is now ready, so 2009 will see the final decision on how to proceed with the scheme. The first building in the VU Quarter – a new science block – should open its doors in September 2016.



A woman in a black suit is smiling and standing at the bottom of a set of stairs in a school hallway. Several students are walking up the stairs. In the foreground, a student in a plaid shirt is walking up the stairs, and another student in a green shirt is walking past. In the background, a student in a purple shirt is walking up the stairs. The hallway has large windows on the left and a tiled floor.

“It’s been
overwhelming, all
these young people
who are so incredibly
motivated by what we’re
trying to do. They’re
a breath of fresh
air...”



Marijk van der Wende

All systems go

Amsterdam University College
prepares for launch

With Amsterdam University College due to receive its first intake of 200 students in September 2009, last year was extraordinarily busy for Founding Dean Marijk van der Wende. "But very satisfying, too," she says. "We've been accredited. The finance is settled. The programmes have been finalized. The website is up and running. We're recruiting staff. And the students are on their way!"

A joint initiative with the University of Amsterdam (UvA), with substantial financial support from the City of Amsterdam, the AUC is offering an innovative undergraduate education in the liberal arts and sciences. Taught entirely in English, its three-year international programme is aimed at those who want more than a conventional BA or BSc can provide. Rather than traditional majors, the interdisciplinary curriculum is organized around six broad themes combining with a strong emphasis on the exact sciences. Examples include "Health and Well-Being" and "Cities and Cultures". Learning how to work across borders and cultures as well as across disciplines, students from all over the world will gain a solid preparation for life in the 21st century knowledge economy.

AUC graduates will be the scientific, academic and corporate leaders of tomorrow.

Carin van der Wal

Creative construction

The College received a major boost in November when it secured funding worth €7.5 million from the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. That came in the form of a Sirius grant for institutions offering challenging courses for excellent students and is the largest amount ever invested directly by central government in an initiative of this kind.

Even as the university forges ahead with plans for its new campus, the VU Quarter, it continues to face more pressing accommodation issues. Keeping a complex nearing the end of its life up to

“We’ve introduced a rhythmic architectural effect that actually makes the long corridors dominating the science building quite appealing.”

For Van der Wende, this grant – and another five million euro received in May from the City of Amsterdam – confirms that the new College is filling a genuine gap in the higher education market. “It proves that we’re doing the right thing at just the right time. We received it because we’re breaking down barriers. Our aim is to create a free academic space, unhindered by the mass of rules that still tend to divide up higher education.

“An institution like ours really is needed, perhaps now more than ever, to bring together ambitious people from throughout the world to learn together. Today’s global problems can’t be solved in the Netherlands alone, and not even just in Europe. We all have to work together. If you create the space to do that, people are only too eager to fill it. That’s proven by the enormous interest we’ve already had from prospective students, teachers, and tutors. In total, more than a thousand people have come to our information events. And that’s not counting all the requests we’ve had online. It’s been overwhelming, all these young people who are so incredibly motivated by what we’re trying to do. They’re a breath of fresh air, and my inspiration to make Amsterdam University College an outstanding learning environment.”

standard presents its own challenges. The 2008 reprofiling of the Science Building, prompted by the relocation of the science library, is a case in point. The space that made available has been transformed into classrooms and other student facilities.

“We had to work on the assumption that the building will only be standing for another five years,” explains Carin van der Wal of Campus and Estates Services. “Whereas in general you expect to work with a horizon of about 15-20 years. Effectively, then, we had to implement a temporary solution on a limited budget. Yet despite that we’ve managed to produce something special. The building is dominated by long corridors, but in the former science library we’ve introduced a rhythmic architectural effect that actually makes them quite appealing.”

The secret of this project’s success, she continues, is a combination of creative design – the cost-effective use of modern materials – and heeding user wishes. “We can’t do everything, but can try to give people what they want most. For the students that was quiet study areas and computer facilities to replace those lost with the departure of the libraries. From the feedback we’ve had, they seem very pleased with the

results.” Other buildings on campus need similar refurbishments, so this success is likely to serve as a model. As Van der Wal points out, “Five years isn’t long in planning terms, but it represents a whole generation of students. We can’t sell them short.”

Margreeth van der Meijde

Clinical practice



“The Training Centre is a reminder that looking, listening, asking and examining are the most important skills a doctor needs to master.”

Developing clinical skills – the ability to deal with patients effectively and sympathetically – is a vital part of medical training. To help prime its aspiring doctors for this aspect of the job, the Institute for Education and Training at the VUmc has recently opened a dedicated Clinical Training Centre.

“This is a place to practise patient contact and everything associated with it,” says Margreeth van der Meijde, Director of the Institute. “It’s important for us that students are properly prepared for that before they have to do it for real. The new Centre allows us to provide them with ‘dry run’ opportunities. They train here in simulations, practising either on actors or fellow students, to develop a professional attitude and thought processes. As well as practical skills like giving a physical examination, taking blood pressure and giving injections, the communicative aspects of the clinician’s work are a very important part of the programme: how to take a medical history, for example, and also how to give bad news.” The Clinical Training Centre is a reminder that looking, listening, asking and examining are still the most

important skills a doctor needs to master.

Students attend the Centre from the first year of the new Master’s programme in Medicine, beginning with an intensive three-week course of basic training. And once they start working in the hospital as junior housemen, they continue to return one day a week. There are also extra training sessions every six weeks, focusing upon specific aspects of clinical practice – neurology and cardiology, for instance.

Catrien Bijleveld

Partners in crime research

VU University Amsterdam and NSCR, the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement, have agreed to join forces in their criminological research. As part of a deal, signed in September 2008, NSCR moved from Leiden to the VU University campus at the beginning of 2009.

Catrien Bijleveld is both Professor of Research Methods in Criminology at the university and coordinator of the NSCR theme group on Life Course, Crime and Interventions. She views the relocation as paving the way to far greater synergy in research. “This is a growing, enterprising university, so it offers the institute a new and stimulating environment with much better facilities. NSCR is now close to academics working in all kinds of fields with a bearing on crime and law enforcement. Even apparently unrelated subjects like demographics and econometrics. That physical proximity is important: it can give the institute’s specialist researchers a real boost. Being on the same site makes things much more efficient.

“Take my own field, for example. I look at how delinquent behaviour evolves over time, and what influences that process. But perhaps there are contributing factors I haven’t yet considered properly. By working more closely with other people here, I really hope to be able to see things from a new perspective. And so to broaden and deepen my research.”



“By working more closely with other people here at the VU, I hope to be able to see things from a new perspective.”

NSCR is the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) institute dedicated to the fundamental, multidisciplinary study of key themes in criminology and also specializing in the analysis of complex databases. It currently employs more than thirty people.

Facing the future

Cok Sas

VU Quarter

The VU Quarter will be more than just a modern university campus, says project leader Cok Sas: it will be a whole new kind of urban academic environment.

“The past year has been a period of drawing and counting. We have reached broad agreement with all the parties involved about the mix of functions to be incorporated into the VU Quarter, and now we’re finalizing the financial aspects.

“Things are really starting to take shape. First and foremost, our aim is to create a better working environment for the university’s students and staff. It will be very much adapted to the more flexible ways of working we now see emerging. But above all it will be an inspiring, inclusive place to be. The university is going to throw open its doors, to connect physically and intellectually with the Zuidas district.

“I’m starting to envisage what it will look like, perhaps fifteen years from now. When I leave my state-of-the-art office, instead of dead streets I’ll walk out into a lively public space. Overlooked by modern, architecturally interesting buildings, there will be a bustle of people: students, university staff and office workers from the companies based in the VU Quarter. I could go shopping or sit on one of the terraces. Perhaps there’ll be a special event on, or I could take part in a performance or play some sport. This won’t just be a place for work and study, but somewhere you want to linger. If I’m living in one of the homes we plan, I may hardly ever have to leave at all.”

Research for society

Born out of a grass-roots initiative, VU University Amsterdam has a long tradition of commitment to themes relevant to society at large. As well as addressing fundamental questions, our research work also concerns the pressing issues in today's world. Throughout the university, dedicated researchers are producing work for the common good – from the climate scientists seeking to understand and counter global warming to the spatial economists grappling with the intricate mathematics of flexible road pricing in order to optimize traffic flows so that we all spend less time in jams.

Positive results reinforce our reputation within the academic community and on the public stage, so we are not afraid to celebrate our successes. VU University's Societal Impact Awards spotlight investigators who have substantially enhanced general understanding of their subject, a goal exemplified by the 2008 winners. Nutritionist Martijn Katan won in the senior category for combining an ability to present scientific results in such a way that industry is persuaded to use them to produce healthier foodstuffs with efforts to raise public awareness concerning nutrition and health, as illustrated by his recent book, 'What Should I Eat?'. The junior recipient, anthropologist Martijn de Koning, was honoured for his PhD thesis on faith and identity amongst

young Dutch Muslims of Moroccan origin, a work which has resonated everywhere from Parliament to the streets, from the media to mosques. Also in the public eye was legal psychologist Peter van Koppen, winner of the university's Media Magnet for his proactive efforts to explain complicated legal matters to lay audiences. The Media Comet – for young researchers with great media appeal – was won by movement scientist Ivo van Hilvoorde.

Marking its sixtieth anniversary in 2008, the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration organized a widely reported symposium on the highly timely theme of prudence in public finance. Confirming the faculty's significant contribution to Dutch economic policy over six decades, speakers included current and former government ministers – amongst them alumnus Gerrit Zalm, who also received an honorary doctorate.

That social relevance can also be coupled with commercial success is demonstrated by the Electoral Compass voter orientation system, developed by VU University political scientist André Krouwel, which stormed the global stage in 2008 with its service guiding the US electorate through the complexities of their presidential race – and at the same time delivered vast amounts of fascinating research material.



“With the mass of data we now have elections all over the world, there is some fascinating analytical work to be done.”





André Krouwel

Guiding site

Online Electoral Compass orientates voters

Political scientist André Krouwel likes to meet colleagues and students at his favourite tapas bar in the heart of Amsterdam. "This place is less hierarchical than an office environment on campus," he says. "Young people, especially, feel more comfortable here. There are no barriers, so people speak easier. That makes it a good place for brainstorming."

One of the ideas Krouwel has put plenty of thought into over grilled Cabrales and Gran Sangre de Toro is the Electoral Compass, the online application he and his team at VU University Amsterdam have developed to guide voters in their choice of candidates. That really paid off last year, with the service hitting the global stage thanks to Barack Obama and John McCain. "For me," says Krouwel, "2008 **was** the US presidential election. We launched there at the beginning of January, in the run-up to the first primaries, and from then on we followed events day by day until the final vote in November. That was a hugely complicated process, but a fascinating journey. We had 3.7 million visitors, and attracted huge media attention."

"For us as researchers, it also produced some very interesting data. We've been able to conduct numerous analyses. For example, it seems clear that McCain would very probably have won had the economic crisis not broken out in earnest barely a month before the election. Until then the dominant issue was identity politics, including America's place in the world, and that consistently favoured the Republican."

But there was an even bigger logistical challenge much closer to home. "The year's busiest job was actually the Dutch regional water authority elections. With 212 parties – all of them new – in 24 districts, that was much more work. We had to conduct in-depth interviews with experts and hold debates just to identify the issues and where the parties stood. The public response was very positive, though, because many people really had no idea how to vote until they consulted the Electoral Compass. In the end we had 800,000 visitors, out of about 3 million who voted."

Yet even that pales in comparison with the next milestone: the European elections of June 2009. The Electoral Compass will be guiding voters in all 27 EU member states, including several with multiple electoral systems or more than one official language. Meanwhile, after three years of building an organization, the project is now beginning to bear academic fruit. "The books and chapters are set to start appearing soon," says Krouwel. "For example, we have taken on three researchers to investigate what we call 'calibration'. That is, how parties and candidates are placed in a spectrum of issues. With the mass of data we now have from elections all over the world, there is some fascinating analytical work to be done."

Harmen Verbruggen

Talking prudence

FEWEB, the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, celebrated its 60th birthday in October 2008. Highlight of the festivities was a one-day symposium attended by more than 900 staff, students, alumni and friends of the faculty. The chosen theme, Prudence in Finance and Budgeting, proved highly topical and the event attracted an impressive array of speakers. They included both current Dutch Minister of Finance Wouter Bos and his predecessor, FEWEB alumnus

"Dr. Zalm wasn't afraid to highlight the perverse effects of modern business culture on the behaviour of managers in the financial world."

Gerrit Zalm, who was also awarded an honorary doctorate to mark the diamond jubilee of the Faculty.

"Zalm is a real VU University man," says Harmen Verbruggen, Dean of FEWEB. "He's part of a great tradition at our faculty. That goes back to one of its founders, Jelle Zijlstra, who himself went on to become Minister of Finance and who was a great innovator in budgetary policy. Prudence was selected as the topic for our symposium because it relates to two subjects Zalm was intensively involved with during his time as minister: budgetary restraint and regulation of the financial sector. As it turns out, the economic crisis made that more relevant than we could have imagined. I like to joke that I saw it all coming, but it wasn't quite like that."

In his address at the event, Zalm homed in on one of the main causes of the current malaise: the influence of modern business culture on the

behaviour of managers in the financial world. "And he wasn't afraid to highlight the perverse effects of that culture," says Verbruggen. "You could tell that FEWEB is in his blood."

Peter van Koppen

Legal magnet

Peter van Koppen is the 2008 winner of the VU Media Magnet for scientists who make their work more accessible to the general public. The legal psychologist secured the award for his active co-operation with the media, the jury praising his

"I live off Dutch taxpayers' money. (...) So they deserve something in return: an explanation of how things work."

efforts to explain complicated legal matters to a lay audience and his ability to take a scientific approach to "sensational" topics.

Van Koppen investigates both the psychology of crime and the behaviour of those involved in the judicial process, from suspects and witnesses to judges and police officers. For him, describing this work on a mass stage is all part of the job.

"I live off Dutch taxpayers' money. That's what allows me to do my work. So they deserve something in return: an explanation of how things work. I regularly write lovely articles in fine academic journals which are read by maybe a hundred people. If I appear on TV for ten minutes, I may only be able to put across a simple message but it reaches a much bigger audience. The return is different, but it's as important as all that academic endeavour. We're here for other people, after all, not ourselves."

With the VU Media Magnet comes a cash prize of €6000, which Van Koppen is free to spend on activities to encourage the wide communication of science. "I still haven't decided what to do with it," he admits. "I'd be glad to hear any good ideas!"

Martijn de Koning

Between me and God

The winner of VU University Amsterdam's 2008 Junior Societal Impact Award is anthropologist Martijn de Koning, for his research into the day-to-day meaning of Islam for Dutch-Moroccan

"When they ask religious questions, they want straight answers. What they then do with those answers, though, is very personal."

teenagers. Having talked at length with some 230 young mosque-goers in Gouda, meeting some of them almost daily for years, he has built up a unique fund of inside knowledge which has inevitably attracted considerable media attention within the national debate on Islam.

"My conclusions don't really tally with the general public image," he says. "The media tend to focus upon radicalization and delinquency, but most of the kids I've studied have quite a bourgeois mentality. They want to do well at school, get a good job and settle down. And they're not as religious as the rest of society thinks. The importance of Islam in their lives ebbs and flows. It reaches peaks at puberty and around the age of 19 or 20, on an annual cycle around Ramadan and also when other people challenge them about incidents like 9-11 and the murder of Theo van Gogh."

The other striking thing is that, when they are interested, they're looking for a 'pure' form of the faith. One not influenced by other cultures, either that of their parents or the Dutch society around them. When they ask religious questions, they want straight answers. What they then do with those answers, though, is very personal. 'Between me and God,' as they put it themselves."

As well as countering preconceptions by disseminating research-based knowledge about young Dutch Moroccans, De Koning also considers it important to keep his subjects informed of his findings. To that end he plans to use part of his prize money to make his book, "Pure" Islam, more widely available.

There is a place for greater diversity within the organization, as appropriate to our position in society.

"That's only worthwhile, though, if we as institution interact effectively with the association's membership. We need to be more proactive in consulting our social conscience, so we are now working hard to develop VU Connected, a mechanism that facilitates two-way communication with members.

"We also want to involve our alumni. Our ideal is that every graduate maintains a relationship with the university, and that if they are truly committed to us then they channel that through active participation in the association.

"This policy is something we as an Executive Board intend to put a lot of effort into over the next year or two. But that will be done primarily through the faculties, as in the first instance graduates tend to identify with them – or the specific degree they attained – rather than the university or an association."

Facing the future

Lex Bouter

The supreme governing body of VU University Amsterdam and VU University Medical Center – as well as Windesheim University of Applied Science in Zwolle – is the VU-Windesheim Association. By actively diversifying the organization's membership over the next few years, says Rector Lex Bouter, the university plans to enhance its societal base.

"We are unique in the Netherlands in being governed by a public association. It is our social conscience. The membership – about 10,000 people at present – has traditionally been drawn from our religious grass roots, but we now want to extend that to more closely reflect the make-up of what is a very pluriform university.

Well-organized education

Rooted in a mission to emancipate through education, VU University Amsterdam is committed to producing citizens with the academic skills needed to make a lifelong contribution to society. And that is about much more than imparting knowledge. It means creating a community of learners in a well-organized educational environment. One that encourages all students to pursue their ambitions and to achieve their full potential.

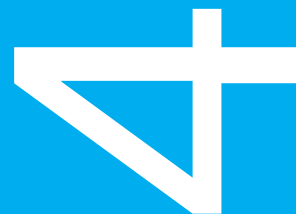
Our community of learners is characterized by enquiry-based learning, intensive tutor-student interaction, a personal approach and wide participation in relevant extracurricular activities. This produces graduates with both the academic qualifications and the personal maturity to play a meaningful role in the world.

Our efforts in 2008 focused upon raising standards and enhancing the educational experience we provide. Acting on the conclusions reached at an internal conference attended by teaching staff, students and administrators, we have taken steps to increase success rates during the Bachelor's phase by making sure that newcomers choose the right programme for them and are motivated to see it through to a successful conclusion within a reasonable time. Measures adopted include reaching out to secondary schools so that potential students are better informed about what a course

entails before deciding to enrol. For example, they can now spend a day at the university attending trial lectures. Once here, contact hours during the first year have been increased so that new students are enthused – and hence engaged – by their subject at the earliest possible stage.

To facilitate freedom of choice, we have improved curriculum flexibility by standardizing timetables and thus widening the choice of modules available. Funding arrangements have also been revised, encouraging faculties to welcome students from other parts of the university. Plans to introduce fully fledged minors are well advanced, too, as are moves to make the Bachelor's phase more international in nature. Quality in education will benefit from the requirement that all new Bachelor's students take a Dutch language test – and remedial classes if necessary – whilst the professional training of their tutors has also been made a high priority.

For the most ambitious students, a so-called "honours programme" has been developed. Open only to those who have combined rapid progress with excellent grades during their first year, this selective component is designed to stimulate high-potentials in their pursuit of academic excellence.





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Eline van Straalen

Mind your language

Dutch language test for first-year students

For the 4521 new Bachelor's students arriving at VU University Amsterdam in September 2008, there was a shock in store. Barely had they found their way to the campus and they were being called in for an exam. Its purpose: to assess their basic skills in the Dutch language.

The test has been developed by Taalcentrum-VU, the university's specialist language centre. As project leader Eline van Straalen explains, "For years there have been complaints from various quarters that many first-year students just can't write good Dutch. In 2007 the Executive Board decided to look into the matter seriously, so it made funds available for a pilot test of 1100 students in three faculties. In 2008 all first-year students have been invited. The pilot test showed that there was indeed a problem. A lot of students arrive here lacking some quite fundamental knowledge. Correct spelling, how to conjugate verbs properly, gaps in their vocabulary... So next year the test will be made compulsory for all first-years."

Her biggest challenge was to design a reliable means of checking that students have sufficient command of written Dutch to embark upon an academic study. Working closely with the university's Centre for Educational Training, Assessment and Research, Taalcentrum-VU devised a 200-question exam, covering spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary, choice of words and formulation. "We confine ourselves to the basics," she points out. "The test isn't about academic writing skills – they're one of the things students come to university to learn. As much as anything, this is a signal that we take good Dutch seriously here."

Then there were the logistical nightmares. "To be credible," says Van Straalen, "the test has to be taken in a controlled environment. But with 4500 students sitting it in just nine days, you have two big problems: marking and physical accommodation. The only way of assessing so many papers is electronically, which means setting the test on computers. And that meant having to convert the university's main examination hall into a digital test centre. There were 250 laptops to be installed, complete with all the cabling and power they need. It was the first time something on that scale had ever been done, and it felt like total chaos when we were setting it all up. But it all worked in the end. I'm very proud that we were the ones to do it."

The test results are divided into three bands: good, satisfactory and poor. Students in the latter category – 14 per cent of the total in 2008 – have to take a mandatory refresher course in Dutch, also organized by Taalcentrum-VU. According to Van Straalen, most accept that there is a problem and are only too happy to do something about it. "A few seem to take it as a personal affront, though. We have received a few angry letters, but

they've been so badly written that you just think: I rest my case!"

Carmen Peters

Teaching the teachers

The Dutch universities passed a milestone in January 2008 when, after ten years of preparation and negotiation, they concluded an agreement on the mutual recognition of schemes to professionalize their teaching. Although teaching quality has long been a priority at VU University Amsterdam, the new accord has solidified the foundations of its training programme, says Carmen Peters of CETAR, the Centre for Educational Training, Assessment and Research.

"New young tutors find it quite normal that they should take courses like this when they're starting out. As in any job, you expect to begin by learning the trade."

"We saw an immediate jump in interest for our courses," she explains, "with the number of registrations going up by 40 per cent year on year. Now that this topic has been acknowledged nationally, the faculties in particular are paying much more attention to it. They have started pointing their new tutors in our direction."

CETAR offers a range of courses to help tutors take a more professional approach to their work. The most popular are the ones aimed at those new to teaching, to learn basics like how to prepare for lessons, keep them varied and interesting, achieve learning goals and set tests, as well as designing modules to fit the broader curriculum and meet quality and accreditation requirements.

"New young tutors find it quite normal that they

should take courses like this when they're starting out," Peters continues. "As in any job, you expect to begin by learning the trade. For them, that's logical. And by catching them at this early stage, we make sure that they have a more permanent focus on the quality of their teaching. We find that they want to keep improving throughout their careers, so we are now planning to introduce follow-up courses in more advanced skills, such as managing curriculum change."

Frans Snijders

Teaching the world

Spurred by the Bologna process, internationalization has become an important goal for higher education in recent years. But perhaps nowhere is it more imperative than at FEWEB, the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration.

"(...) attracting international students is a strategic priority. We use every method we can think of to draw in the best students from overseas."

"In our world," explains Managing Director Frans Snijders starkly, "there's only one future, and that's global. Even if they stay in Amsterdam, the vast majority of our students are going to work on the world stage when they graduate. That's the reality. So it's an integral part of our job to prepare them for it. Not just through the curriculum, but in the whole learning environment."

"Bringing different languages and cultures to the classroom introduces our students to the atmosphere they're going to encounter later in life. Like other faculties, our Master's programmes are now taught entirely in English. Unlike most, that's

also increasingly important in the Bachelor's phase. We already have one English-language BSc, International Business Administration, but on top of that 20-30 per cent of all third-year modules are in English. At FEWEB, we make sure that all students get at least one international experience."

To feed this dynamic, attracting international students is a strategic priority. "We use every method we can think of to draw in the best students from overseas. Their quality is vitally important, because by drawing in top international talent we encourage our local intake to set their own targets higher. So it works both ways: we attract better students and we deliver better graduates."

Henk Schutte

Integration for success

"This project is all about connecting students to our courses, and the best way to do that is by getting them to do the connecting."

How do you encourage newly arrived Bachelor's students to knuckle down to their studies? FBW, the Faculty of Human Movement Sciences, believes the answer is simple: involve them as intensively as possible in the "real" science right from day one. "We call it academic integration," says Henk Schutte, who heads an FBW project group to improve the proportion of students completing their first year on schedule.

"It starts with the basics. We had the feeling that the new students found it difficult to engage with the business of academia. What's a university all about? What are they being expected to do

here? How do the challenges differ from school? What is this research thing, anyway? So we plan to show them all the ins and outs from day one. In a 'starter course', all the first-year tutors will describe their work and the themes which keep them occupied. The idea is to guide the students' curiosity. So we'll follow that up by getting them to devise their own research questions and formulate proposals. To reinforce their link with the faculty, and monitor progress more closely, the supervision ratio is just six students to one tutor."

Crucially, many of these ideas – which are due to be fully implemented in 2010 – have come from students themselves. Four of them sit on Schutte's project group, alongside tutors and a specialist from the Centre for Educational Training, Assessment and Research. "And they've been really actively involved in all our discussions. This project is all about connecting students to our courses, and the best way to do that is by getting them to do the connecting."

Facing the future

Ad Verkleij

Internationalizing the Bachelor's

VU University Amsterdam has decided that in future every student must gain international experience during the Bachelor's phase. Ad Verkleij, Senior Adviser on Strategic Education Policy at the Centre for Educational Training, Assessment and Research, explains.

these days. You can no longer obtain a first degree in a purely domestic context. Our criterion is that every student must have at least one 'international experience'. Ideally, that would be a placement abroad, but we know that not everyone can or wants to do that. Second best is what we call 'internationalization at home'. That might be learning in an international classroom, alongside exchange students from different parts of the world, or being taught by a tutor from another country in a language other than Dutch.

"This is not just receiving a Dutch-style education in English. The style and content have to be adapted to the international group. By joining and interacting with peers from a variety of cultural backgrounds, the local student will acquire new skills and a different way of thinking.

"The great thing about this initiative is that students have been the driving force behind it. They were the ones who first told us they needed international and intercultural experience, not least to make it easier for them to progress to the Master's – be that one taught in English here or a programme elsewhere in the world. They asked for it because they know only too well that international experience improves their prospects. So the real message is: listen to students. After all, it's their future."

"By doing this, we want to make it clear that even education at the Bachelor's phase is international

Diversity for excellence

VU University Amsterdam regards diversity as essential to academic and scientific excellence. True to our heritage, we respect the great variety which characterizes today's society. We embrace differences of belief, conviction and culture, and we seek to foster mutual understanding within the university and in wider society.

As an institution at the heart of a multicultural, multireligious city and society, in 2008 the university continued to make active efforts to reflect the community we serve. We are in close contact with the City of Amsterdam and seek to make a positive contribution to its diversity policy.

Many of our students, including a large proportion of those from ethnic minorities and those hailing from our host city, are so-called first-generation academics for whom there is no family history of university attendance. Taking our lead from – and working in collaboration with – the University of California in Los Angeles, where an Academic Advancement Program has achieved considerable success with similar groups, VU University is now piloting a scheme to help them make the transition to the higher education environment and perform effectively once they are here. This begins with more intensive contact with “feeder” schools, to make sure that suitable prospective students

consider enrolment, followed by a summer course to introduce them to the demands of academic study. Participants are then supervised throughout their first year, so that they achieve their initial study goals. Once the pilot has been evaluated, this scheme is due to be introduced across VU University Amsterdam in 2010.

Also in focus are the multicultural competences of our tutors: the qualities they need to teach groups drawn from heterogeneous cultural and ethnic backgrounds in such a way that they produce graduates able to succeed in multicultural workplaces and society. A major research project initiated in 2008 is endeavouring to identify and evaluate best practices in this respect, with a view to incorporating them into tutor training. For students, too, plans have been developed to include diversity as a topic in the compulsory basic curriculum. And in an effort to make the most of the university's existing diversity at grass-roots level, students associations have been encouraged to organize joint activities across traditional cultural boundaries.



“Southern
Africa has been
central to my life,
personal as well as
professional.”





Harry Wels

Cooperation at the Cape

South Africa-VU University-Strategic Alliances

"Southern Africa has been central to my life, personal as well as professional," says Harry Wels. "I'm a frequent visitor, for work and for leisure, and my home is almost a little piece of Africa in Holland. You could even say it's in my genes: my great-grandfather emigrated to Transvaal in 1897 to work on the railways, and my grandfather was born there, although they were expelled after the Boer War. I went to Zambia in 1986 to conduct research for my MA. It was a 'frontline' state then, so indirectly South Africa was very much part of the regional political context. The same held for Zimbabwe when I went there for my PhD in the late 1990s: you couldn't understand what was happening without taking South Africa into account. So it was probably inevitable that I would end up there."

Wels now heads SAVUSA, South Africa-VU University-Strategic Alliances, the office which coordinates the university's many ties with the country. "Every one of our faculties has some form of relationship with South Africa," he explains. "Educational links, research collaboration, co-authorships, staff exchanges, all sorts of things."

That's unique. It's maybe the only nation in the world where they're all active." In fact, the university's relationship goes back much further than his own. "In 1880, when the university was founded, there was a lot of sympathy here for the Dutch settlers. They were seen as 'our Reformed brothers' far away. Relations since have often been complicated, but to some extent South Africa has always remained part of our identity."

For SAVUSA, the highlight of 2008 was the creation of four Desmond Tutu Chairs in Youth, Sport and Reconciliation, installed in the presence of the former archbishop himself in December. They are part of the university's flagship programme of collaboration with six partner institutions in South Africa, which focuses upon the co-supervision of PhDs and student exchanges at Master's level. "South Africa has a desperate shortage of PhDs," Wels explains. "The crowning glory of our commitment to the country is an agreement with its National Research Foundation that our Desmond Tutu professors will work closely with colleagues there to boost doctorate numbers. Hopefully, others will follow"

"SAVUSA's 'core business', though, is cooperation through publishing. We currently have four active series of books, two of them peer-reviewed and one produced in partnership with the largest academic publishing house in southern Africa."

There is one thing Wels is especially keen to point out: "This is a totally equal partnership. There's not the slightest whiff of aid or development work about it. The driving force is science, pure and simple. We work with our counterparts in South Africa because it's intellectually stimulating, not because we think we have something to teach them. That makes the whole exercise far more inspiring for all concerned. Indeed, I believe

that ours could be a model for VU University Amsterdam alliances with other nations around the world."

Aroosa Khan

Halal hollandaise

When Aroosa Khan enrolled at VU University Amsterdam in 2007, she discovered that there was no forum for Muslim students like her to explore and discuss their faith in a Dutch cultural context. So she and a group of like-minded friends started their own, a local section of the association MashriQ, which is already established in Rotterdam and The Hague.

"Our main aim is to provide a network for Muslim students," says the BSc Health Sciences student. "But we also want to show the positive side of Islam to the wider university community. To try to break down some of the barriers caused by the often prejudiced media coverage of Muslims in this country. Anybody is welcome to take part in our activities. Unlike other Islamic student

"We cherish Dutch cultural values – there is no segregation of the sexes at our meetings, for example."

groups, we're not organized along ethnic, national or cultural lines. And we cherish Dutch cultural values – there is no segregation of the sexes at our meetings, for example."

Amongst the events organized by MashriQ are a regular "halal borrel" – a typical Dutch drinks party, but then without the alcohol. These gatherings include talks and debates on such topics as the Muslim student and fellowship

within Dutch society from a Islamic perspective.

MashriQ currently has some 30 members at VU University, plus 150 people who have shown an interest in its activities. “They’re from all sorts of backgrounds,” says Khan. “Men and women, Turkish, Moroccan, Pakistani, Surinamese, Afghan... Even Dutch!”

Lucy Kortram

Exploring multicultural competences

What special skills does a lecturer need in the multicultural university of today? How do you teach a group of students from diverse backgrounds? And how do you acquire that ability? In 2008, as part of its ongoing effort to turn cultural diversity into a key institutional asset, VU University Amsterdam asked independent expert Lucy Kortram to advise on multicultural competences in teaching.

As an institution educating members of a diverse society, the university is expected to produce graduates who are able to function effectively in

They’re really quite basic qualities, like an open attitude, tolerance, self-reflection, the ability to view issues from a variety of perspectives and an understanding of different cultural backgrounds, as well as their significance.”

In addition to teaching staff, Kortram has spoken with others active in the educational environment – deans, managers and administrators – and with students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. “When I started out, it was said that there wasn’t much interest in multiculturalism. But in talking to people I’ve discovered there is a continuum of interest that you can activate with a clear vision of diversity. We must think and act not in terms of problems and deficiencies, but opportunities and benefits. I’ve actually found it very inspiring. I think some of my results may be surprising, too, but the study is not completed yet.” She is due to report in 2009, paving the way for the university to make multicultural competences a core component of its teaching skills training programme.

Wim Haan

California dreaming

“We must think and act not in terms of problems and deficiencies, but opportunities and benefits.”

“We’ve already been very successful in bringing together diverse students (...) to organize events together.”

the face of such diversity. At work and elsewhere, they will encounter people with many different cultural identities. “So the question I’m asking is this,” says Kortram, “do the university’s teaching staff feel well enough equipped to prepare all students to succeed in that respect when they go out into the professional and social world? This process begins in the classroom, which is where multicultural competences come in.

“Diversity there is equated with quality. It’s considered an asset. Not a problem, as it so often is here in the Netherlands.” Wim Haan has seen the diverse future of VU University Amsterdam and it lies in California. As Diversity Coordinator, he has been impressed by the so-called Academic Advancement Program (AAP) at the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA) and is now

working to bring elements of it across the Atlantic. “I truly believe that we would achieve much more if we were to adopt a similar approach.”

“What I like about AAP is that it takes a very positive attitude towards students from different backgrounds. It looks at them in terms of their talents and abilities, not what holds them back. We, too, want to be as positive and constructive as possible. Particularly for so-called first-generation students – those with no family history of academic endeavour – we want to hold a summer school to introduce them gently to the higher education environment. We also hope to reshape the introductory week at the beginning of the year so that more students from ethnic minorities take part; hardly any do at present. And we’ve already been very successful in bringing together diverse students by getting different kinds of associations to organize events together. After they’ve done that once, they see the added value and so the collaboration takes on an impetus of its own.”

VU University Amsterdam and UCLA plan to sign a full-scale cooperation agreement in November 2009. That will pave the way for a joint research programme on Diversity and Social Cohesion, as well as collaboration in policy, student support, student exchanges and so on.

Facing the future

Aukje Schep

Halal on the menu

VU University Amsterdam caters for many sections of the community, and now that means

literally as well as figuratively. In response to demand from staff and students, halal dishes are being added to the “Mensa” menu. Aukje Schep of the Marketing & Communications Department explains.

“We’re always thinking about how to nourish the university community’s bodies, not just their minds, and with a fairly large proportion of Muslim students it seemed only right that halal food should have a place here. It fits in perfectly with the character of the university, our respect for every world view. Until now, those strict about their diets have had to eat at home or bring packed lunches. That wasn’t perceived as a major problem, but in surveys halal catering came out high on the wish list.

“The aim is to offer at least one hot halal meal a day, plus snacks, and to roll out the scheme across the university’s food outlets. But for the time being it’s confined to the restaurant in the main building. The logistics involved are pretty daunting. Our caterer has had to find preferred suppliers with the right certification, and the kitchens have to be reorganized. It’s important that there is a clear separate preparation and distribution line, with its own equipment, and that the staff is properly instructed so that even behind the scenes they respect the distinction between halal and non-halal service.

“This is about meeting demand, not preferential treatment. We do our best to satisfy all kinds of requirements. There’s also a good range of vegetarian options, for instance, and we’re introducing more and more organic food. As for other dietary needs, like kosher and vegan, the demand simply isn’t there at the moment. But you can never rule out anything for the future.”

Facts & Figures

1 Key facts of VU University Amsterdam

Executive Board

Drs. R.M. Smit - *President*
Prof. dr. L.M. Bouter - *Rector*
Mr. H.J. Rutten - *Member*

Secretary to the Executive Board

Drs. I.R. Vunderink

Supervisory Board

Prof. drs. P. Bouw - *Chair*
Drs. A. de Widt-Nieuwenhuizen - *Vice-Chair*
Ir. R. Willems - *Vice-Chair*
A. H. Berg
L. Bikker
Prof. dr. F. Leijnse
Mr. drs. F. J. Paas
A. E. J. M. Schaapveld MA
A. Weijsenfeld

Faculties

- Arts
- Dentistry (Academic Centre for Dentistry Amsterdam)
- Earth and Life Sciences
- Economics and Business Administration
- Human Movement Sciences
- Law
- Medicine (VU University Medical Center)
- Philosophy
- Psychology and Education
- Sciences
- Social Sciences
- Theology

Research institutes, centres and schools

- 11 interdisciplinary research institutes
- Participant in two national research centres of excellence, of which one as coordinating institution
- Participant in 37 accredited research schools, of which five as coordinating institution

Education

- 20,984 students, including 4,521 first years; 3,570 master enrolments, 434 international students also including 2,405 medical students of which: 331 first years, 196 master enrolments, 10 international students
- 48 Bachelor's degree programmes, including one taught in English
- 84 Master's degree programmes, including 47 taught in English, one in French and one in German
- 16 postgraduate programmes
- Postgraduate continuing education courses provided by seven faculties and institutes
- Contract teaching
- Higher education for senior citizens

VU University Amsterdam personnel (excl. VUmc)

- 2,572 academic staff (1,924 FTEs), including 468 university professors and 179 endowed professors
- 1,809 non-academic and ancillary staff (1,506 FTEs)

VU University Medical Center

- 1,815 academic staff (1,585 FTEs), including 142 university professors and 31 endowed professors

Rankings

- Leiden Ranking: 15 in Europe and 4 in the Netherlands; VU position in Leiden ranking (CWTS, green list): 112 (crown indicator = 1,39) among 400 world universities. In the Netherlands only EUR and TUE have a higher position.
- Times Higher Education QS World University Rankings: 151
- Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities: 101-151
- Webometrics Ranking of World Universities by web presence: 182
- European Research Council: fourth in overall ranking of institutions awarded ERC grants
- CHE Ranking of Excellent European Graduate Programmes in the Natural Sciences: Biology ranked in the excellence group

Academic prizes and grants

Spinoza Prizes

Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO)

Four winners:

- Peter Nijkamp, Economics and Business Administration, 1996
- Bob Pinedo, Medicine (VUmc), 1997
- Dorret Boomsma, Psychology and Education, 2001
- Marjo van der Knaap, Medicine (VUmc), 2008

Academy Professorships

Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW)

Four professorships:

- Gün Semin, Psychology and Education, 2003
- Andrew Tanenbaum, Sciences, 2004

- Martijn Katan, Earth and Life Sciences, 2005
- Sierd Cloetingh, Earth and Life Sciences, 2006

Young Academy (KNAW)

Eight members:

- Petra van Dam, Arts
- Fokke Gerritsen, Arts
- Huib Mansvelder, Earth and Life Sciences
- Brenda Penninx, Medicine (VUmc)
- Danielle Posthuma, Psychology and Education
- Elies van Sliedregt, Law
- Wim van Westrenen, Earth and Life Sciences
- Gijs Wuite, Sciences

NWO Innovational Research Incentives Scheme

Veni grants are awarded to researchers who have recently completed their doctorates, to develop their ideas over three years.

The VU University Amsterdam recipients in 2008 were:

- Tobias Müller, Sciences;
- Artem Belopolsky, Psychology and Education;
- Dirk Smit, Psychology and Education;
- Sophie van der Sluis, Psychology and Education;
- Wieske van Zoest, Psychology and Education;
- Barbara Vis, Social Sciences;
- Maaïke Groot, Arts;
- Philip Verhagen, Arts;
- Coen Ottenheijm, Medicine (VUmc);
- Michiel Pegtel, Medicine (VUmc);
- Marije Martijn, Philosophy.

Vidi grants are awarded to researchers with several years of post-doctoral experience and in the best 10-15 per cent of their discipline, to develop their own innovative lines of research. The VU University Amsterdam recipients in 2008 were:

- Remus Dame, Sciences;
- Pol van Lier, Psychology and Education;
- Anton Vonk Noordegraaf, Medicine (VUmc).

Vici grants are awarded to outstanding senior researchers, to set up their own research groups.

The VU University Amsterdam recipients in 2008 were:

- Jeroen Smeets, Human Movement Sciences;
- Gijs Wuite, Sciences;
- Bregje Onwuteaka-Philipsen, Medicine (VUmc).

ERC (European Research Council) Advanced Grants

The VU University Amsterdam recipients in 2008 were:

- Andrew Tanenbaum, Sciences
- Dorret Boomsma, Psychology and Education

2 The interdisciplinary research institutes at VU University Amsterdam

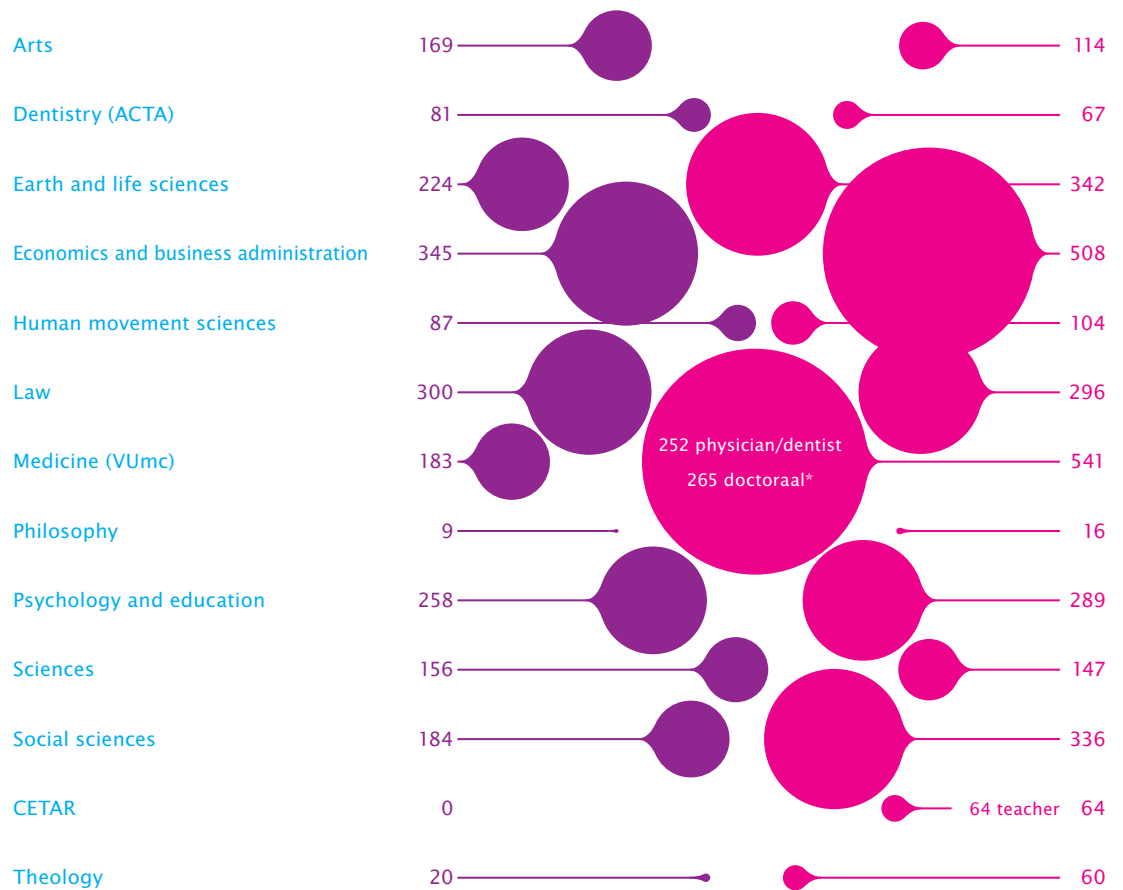


3 Degrees awarded in 2007-2008

bachelor's

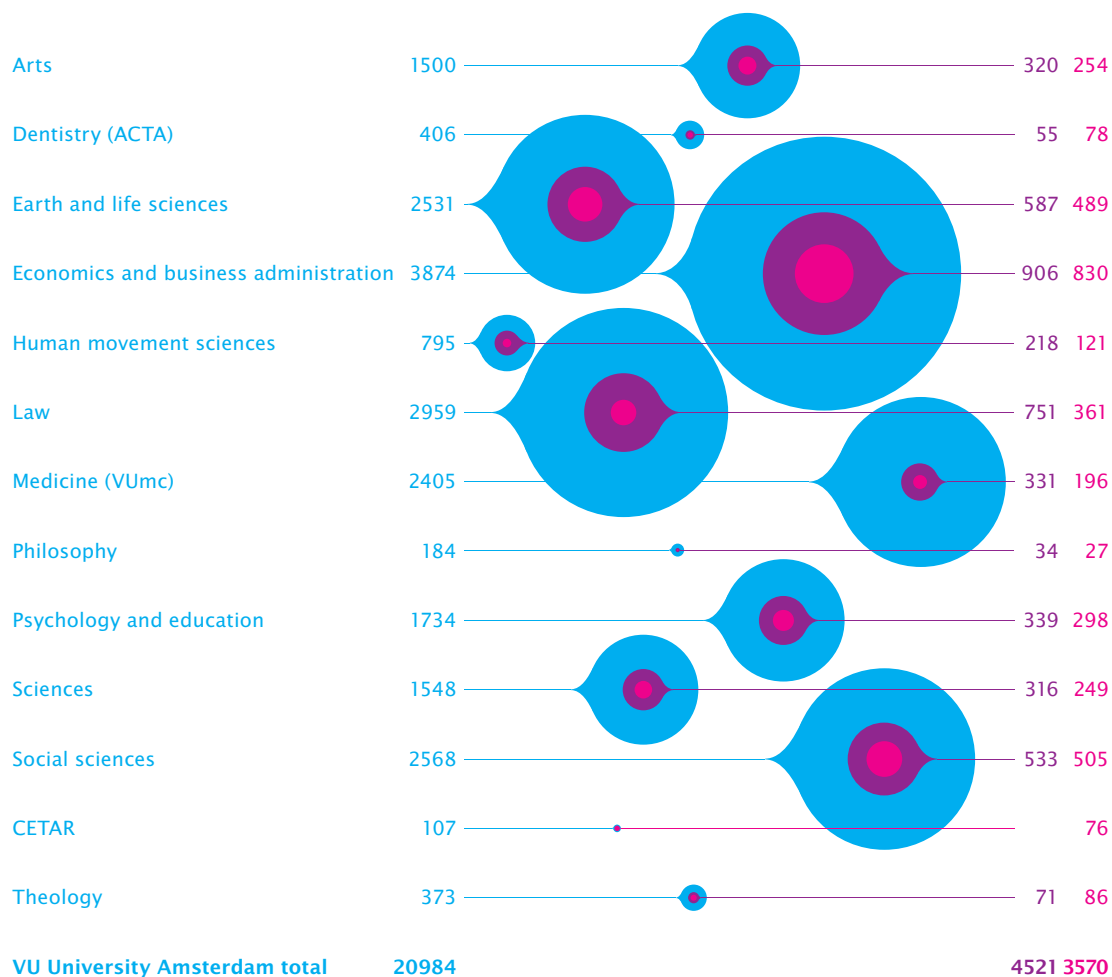
master's and others

* Doctoraal degree is the Dutch equivalent of the Master's degree



4 Admissions and enrolments 2008-2009

admissions
bachelor enrolments
master enrolments



5 VU University Amsterdam Consolidated income and expenditure account

Amounts in millions of euros

	2009 Budget	2008 Actual	2008 Budget	2007 Actual	2006 Actual
Income					
State funding	257.7	245.0	243.2	236.6	229.6
Tuition fees	32.0	31.5	28.6	26.9	27.8
Indirect funding	19.6	17.2	18.6	18.8	18.2
Contract funding	54.4	63.3	41.6	50.3	46.7
Other income	61.6	41.6	33.2	39.3	42.9
Total income	425.2	398.6	365.2	371.9	365.2
Expenditure					
Staff costs	241.7	233.7	213.8	213.3	198.4
Depreciation	19.0	18.4	18.3	16.7	16.8
Premises	37.6	32.1	30.0	28.1	32.3
Other operating expenses	135.5	122.2	113.4	107.8	104.4
Release of provisions				-6.4	0.0
Total expenditure	433.7	406.4	375.5	359.5	351.9
Operating balance	-8.6	-7.8	-10.3	12.4	13.3
Financial income and costs	5.3	3.9	4.3	5.3	4.1
Exceptional items		-6,5			
Surplus/deficit	-3.3	-10.4	-6.0	17.7	17.4

6 Academic staffing by faculty and source of funding, with number of publications

	Academic staff (FTEs)				Publications		
	Directly funded	Indirectly funded	Contract funded	total	Theses (A and B) *	Academic	Professional
Theology	15.9	1.5		17.4	3	215	96
Law	36.0	4.6	4.6	45.2	8	301	219
Arts	36.6	16.8	3.7	57.1	9	316	137
Philosophy	11.0	3.2		14.2	0	110	12
Medicine (VUmc)	225.8	110.4	256.0	592.2	104	2007	91
Dentistry (ACTA)	46.2	9.6	6.1	61.9	6	238	98
Sciences	116.0	98.1	45.2	259.3	40	802	28
Earth and Life Sciences	67.7	65.0	103.9	236.6	26	749	52
Economics and Business Administration	53.0	8.8	33.2	94.9	23	324	235
Social Sciences	61.7	15.6	13.4	90.7	15	478	108
Psychology and Education	34.7	34.1	17.9	86.7	24	493	54
Human Movement Sciences	28.8	11.6	6.8	47.2	6	169	12
CETAR	5.4	2.8		8.2		24	52
Total	738,8	382,0	490,7	1611,5	264	6226	959

* VU University Amsterdam also awarded Dr. Gerrit Zalm with an honorary doctorate in Economics and Business Administration

Historical timeline

VU University Amsterdam



1880

1880

Dr Abraham Kuyper
founds the Vrije Universiteit.

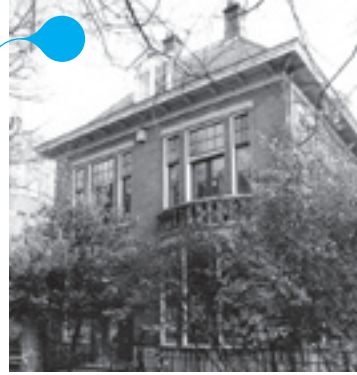


The university's first
students.



1910

Van Eeghenstraat 90,
built by H. P. Berlage.



1930

Politician Hendrik
Colijn is awarded
an honorary
doctorate.

1890

The reading and
conversation room at
Keizersgracht 162 is
converted to become
the Senate Chamber.



1920

Student
performance
of the play
Charley's Aunt.

1940

Prof. mr. V. H. Rutgers,
the university's
wartime Rector.

1895

Prof. D. P. D. Fabius
gives his valedictory
address and hands
over the rectorship
to Prof. J. Woltjer.



1915

Death of Willem Hovy, one
of the principal financiers
behind the establishment
of VU University.



1885

Keizersgracht 162, the university's original building.
Students were also housed here, in the "Hospitium".



1935

The student society Nil Desperandum
Deo Duce celebrates its jubilee.



1965

The library moves from Keizersgracht to De Boelelaan.



1980

VU University Amsterdam celebrates its centenary at the Nieuwe Kerk, in the presence of Queen Beatrix, with an academic meeting.



1990

Honorary doctorate for the Nicaraguan poet, priest and Minister of Culture, Ernesto Cardenal.



Opening of the VU tramline stop.

1995

Open-air party to mark the renovation of the university's central precinct.



2000

Specially brewed jubilee beer, in sweet and bitter varieties.



1970

Mrs B. Bos-Koning is appointed President of fundraising organization Women Help VU University, following the death of Mrs S. Verdam-Okma.

1975

Honorary doctorate for Brazilian archbishop Dom Hélder Pessoa Câmara.



1985

Occupation of the main building in protest at Education Minister Wim Deetman's plans for student finance.



2005

To mark VU University Amsterdam's 125th anniversary, the campus is transformed into a festival site with a whole range of cultural activities.



1965

Queen Juliana congratulates the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr, the American civil rights activist, on the award of his honorary doctorate.





2010

VU University Amsterdam

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