



UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM
**EXCHANGE
EXPRESS**

**2023 - 2024
EDITION II**

CULTURAL EXCHANGE AMBASSADORS PROGRAMME

Equity,
diversity and
inclusion in
student
mobility

Photo by Shan Jiang

The Transformative Power of Student Mobility.

Explore the stories and experiences of our Cultural Exchange Ambassadors as they dove into their unforgettable and transformative journeys abroad.

Whether you stumbled on this magazine by accident or are actively seeking cultural exchange, let these stories inspire you!

The *Exchange Express* is the culmination of the hard work of the University of Amsterdam's Cultural Exchange Ambassadors over the past semester. In weekly meetings, our Ambassadors came together to develop their **intercultural awareness** and skills ranging from **communication** to **leadership** and **problem solving**. They learned to put their experiences and lessons learned abroad inside a broader framework, useful for navigating the complex and dynamic world of today and tomorrow. Trained by experts of intercultural competence, these students are ready to be the leaders the future needs.

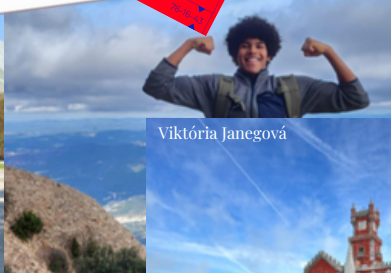




Julian Lagos Martin



Thaïno Martis



Viktória Janegová



Dariia Bielik



Lisa Witt

Elisabeth Koopal

my LIFE-CHANGING experience

Eh, let me tell ya 'bout my wild ride up at the University of British Columbia, eh? It's like, the perfect blend of city hustle and Mother Nature's chill vibes, ya know? This is probably how a very country Canadian person would start this testimonial. I, however, am going to follow a more standard vibe.

The UBC campus, strategically distanced from the downtown core, offers a **beautiful small-town vibe**, perfect for immersing oneself in academics with an ocean view and coffee breaks spend at the beach or in campus gardens. It's like studying in a place where each glance out the window feels like a scenic postcard.

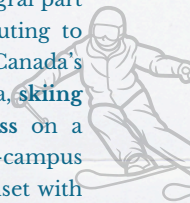
Contrary to the famed rainy reputation of Vancouver, my **fall semester** at UBC proved to be surprisingly dry, even less rainy than my time in Amsterdam. As the colder months approached, it provided an ideal backdrop for exploring nearby ski hills just 45 minutes away from campus. During the warmer months, time can be spend hiking around Vancouver or making a short trip to Vancouver Island and Tofino for some surfing. Throughout my UBC time, I explored the greater Vancouver Area a lot, which offers many **breathtaking** hikes, beaches and more.

In a nutshell, my time at UBC was truly an **amazing and lifechanging experience**. Whether you're a hardcore outdoorsy type or a couch potato, UBC will turn you into a nature-loving person. And of course, **leave you addicted** to Tim Hortons.

Júlia Celma Werthwein

Hopping at a ferry and renting two cars with friends and exploring Vancouver Island for a week became an integral part of my UBC experience. Commuting to Whistler for a long weekend at Canada's most famous ski resort of Canada, **skiing in Cypress Mountain after class** on a weekday, and heading to the on-campus beach post-class to watch the sunset with pizza and amazing company were among the **many highlights of my experience**.

Especially in the initial stages, **leaving home and going abroad** may not always be a bed of roses. Adapting to new learning environments and navigating life without the comfort of your familiar **support network** can be **challenging**. Fortunately, UBC's organized introduction events and exchange get-togethers makes it easier to find friends and people to **share those emotions that connect us across the world**. Due to its enormous campus and its thousands of students, at UBC, you'll find many people alike you and will form **lasting friendships that will last a lifetime**.



EXCHANGING STORIES

Rosan Groot

My reason for going on an exchange may differ from most people. Most people want to see different cultures, meet new people, learn exciting things, and travel. I was terrified: terrified that I wouldn't keep up at the university, terrified that I wouldn't make any friends, and most of all terrified that I would be unhappy for half a year. However, I also knew that if I didn't go the fear would win and I'm too competitive to let that happen.

So in the fall semester I flew 10 hours away from my support system to build a new life for 5 months. And yes, the beginning was stressful, but it ended up being one of the best experiences of my life. I know that it is such a cliché, but it is true.

I ended up at a small liberal arts college in Portland Oregon in the US, with only 5 other exchange students. And together we dived into Reed College life. I joined the ultimate frisbee team and the choir, learned how to play pool and climb trees, and went backpacking and bungee jumping. In only five short months, I felt like I was part of that college and that I made friends for life

Exchanging Stories

Being in a new country with nobody I knew meant having a clean slate so I didn't have to meet people's expectations. I figured out that just being myself is way more fun and less exhausting than trying to be what others want me to be, which took an enormous weight off my shoulders and made me more confident and social.

What people don't often talk about is the end of an exchange: the last week and when you're back home. Because saying goodbye was very hard and I cried for like a week. Now 2 months later I still miss my friends very much. But that just means I met amazing people and I know that when I keep putting in the effort to keep in touch, I will see them again.



Whirlwind of love, laughter and true cultural exchange

At the beginning of the fall semester of 2023, I was ready to conquer academia at the University of Salamanca, armed with my B1-level Spanish. Little did I know that I was in for an **adventure** that would **redefine** my entire study abroad experience and would carry on even after my exchange would end.

In my first week, before lectures had even started, fate intervened in the form of a Spanish boy from León, also a student at the University of Salamanca. **Sparks flew faster than you can say fiesta**, and I found myself *smitten* with both him and Spain.

Unlocking doors to **Spanish authenticity**, he made me feel like I didn't just *study* in Salamanca, rather, I *lived* it: from leisurely three-hour lunches to the sacred siesta, when even the stray cats seemed to doze off. I learned that studying abroad isn't just about hitting either the books or the clubs.

It's about the little things, like savouring every spicy patatas bravas and mastering the art of Spanglish banter with newfound friends. The **highlight** of my Erasmus was a trip to León for Noche Vieja, New Year's Eve.

Twelve grapes at midnight, Leonese wine flowing and a whole pig's leg of jamón on the dinner table.

What truly made my experience extraordinary was how my friendship with the Spanish boy bridged the gap between national and international student cliques. He was the catalyst for cultural collision, uniting worlds that might never have crossed paths. It dawned on me that my societal perspective and overall worldview are heavily shaped by my Dutch background. Despite the temptation to draw comparisons between cultures, whether regarding cuisine, academics, or customs, I've come to realize that **maintaining an open, accepting, and inclusive mindset ultimately leads to greater personal growth and understanding.**

So, here's to Manuel, the boy from León who turned my study abroad adventure into a **whirlwind of love, laughter and true cultural exchange**. Salud to the unforeseen encounters that make life abroad worth living!



Cato Koomen

THE VALUE OF MY JOURNEY

Linh Trang Nguyen

It is hard to believe that it has already been 3 years since I travelled to the Netherlands for my Bachelor's. Moving to a completely new environment at the age of 18 after the pandemic, away from my closest support network back home, I constantly found myself in a turmoil of thoughts and uncertainties. How to manage this month's living expenses? How to get good grades? How do I still make friends while devoting time to studying? These questions have urged me to seek answers by practising genuine curiosity in everyday conversations, sympathy, and taking risks.

Moreover, the community of international students in the Netherlands is full of empowerment. Everyone has a different cultural background, but it seems we all share a mix of fear and excitement in our hearts when studying abroad, and we all gather here to meet each other and exchange knowledge. Surrounded by fellow international students, I realized the importance of sympathy and active listening in gaining new perspectives and getting to know people on a deeper level. I feel grateful to have amazing friends who have taught me their languages and empowered me to embrace discomfort and take more risks. Whether it is immersing myself in unfamiliar social settings, joining student associations, finding job opportunities, adopting healthy daily habits, or learning a new language, each of these has fueled my resilience, self-confidence, and adaptability, affirming the value of my journey here.

It feels wonderful to see how much we can learn from everyday conversations. While chatting about how broke students are nowadays due to inflation, my Dutch classmate taught me how to save money by getting Albert Heijn's bonus card and student discounts on sites like Student Beans, Unidays, etc. This has been a lifesaver for me after my landlord hit me with the news of a rent increase. Also from daily conversations, I learned the significance of being aware of non-verbal cues in intercultural relationship-building, as much of our feelings cannot be expressed through language.



Life indeed only happens beyond your fears

One day you are sitting on your couch at home anxiously applying for your study abroad destination, secretly wishing to find an excuse not to depart, next you are walking out of your exchange apartment crying after you hugged your roommates one last time, longing to stay there forever.

At first, I didn't want to accept my offer to study at UC3M in Madrid, despite it being my top choice on the list. It was not my first experience abroad as I already had moved abroad to Amsterdam for my studies, but it was the first time I would embark on this kind of adventure completely alone, and the thought of the challenge left me feeling overwhelmed.

Reflecting on it now, I cannot imagine not having lived this whole experience. I don't know if it was the sun always covering Madrid, the savory Spanish cuisine, the lively culture or the exchange students' openness and inclusive mentality, but something about it immediately felt like a second home.

Iona Pirv

and had I listened to the small voice in my head that was too scared to go out and explore everything the world has in store for her, I would have never found out how eating paella Valenciana on a beach can so easily lift up your mood, or how magical a sunset over Palacio Real can look like.

I have always been drawn to international environments, and this exchange has even more heightened my curiosity for exploring cross-cultural connections. Conversations with people who are not sharing your culture can never get boring; there are always countless facts about their country, language or cultural upbringing they can share that never cease to amaze, it can only get more and more captivating.

Eventually, it makes you realize how cultural barriers mean nothing when people share the same friendship language.

Besides the exciting friendships, my exchange experience was a journey of self-discovery, developing me into a more complex individual. I had the chance to immerse into the Spanish culture and education, which were so distinct from the Dutch lifestyle I was accustomed to for the past 2 years, and learning how to adapt to it was a challenging, but rewarding adventure. Transitioning to a new place is an ideal opportunity to explore a new passion, expand your music taste, learn the local language (and, I have to admit, Spanish is now my favourite), or simply view things from a fresh perspective.

A night view of a city skyline, likely Singapore, with a bridge over a river. The city lights are reflected in the water. In the foreground, a woman is sitting on a bench, looking towards the camera. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

I went completely OUT OF MY COMFORT ZONE

My recent study abroad at the National University of Singapore has had a **TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT** on me personally and academically. I went **completely out of my comfort zone** as I moved to a different continent and immersed myself in various cultures. I was quite nervous about this, wondering if I would fit in, but this **culture shift** has taught me a lot about myself. Through studying in Asia and being able to travel abroad with friends, I am much more familiar with Asian culture. It was **refreshing** to get an education where the **Western stance** is not the dominant point of view. I became more educated about Singaporean politics and culture and was fortunate to engage and discuss with a diverse group of students about **societal and global issues**.

These academic skills have substantially also led to my **personal development**. I have found myself being more **open-minded** to other people's opinions and eager to learn more about these perspectives. Especially during my public speaking class, it was very important to listen carefully to each other and respectfully give feedback.

During and after my exchange I was able to travel to other Asian countries such as Malaysia, Vietnam, and Thailand. I have also solo-travelled for almost a month and this has taught me to be more **independent** and **adaptable**. Instead of organizing everything precisely as I used to do, I enjoyed **being free** and living by the day. Every day I met countless different people, who again have educated me more on their perspective and their country.

Exchange was a **highlight**, where I have made not only academic and personal **growth**, but also have an intercultural **network** with countless **friends all over the world**.

Isabel de Gier



THE CULTURAL EXCHANGE AMBASSADORS



DIPLOMATIC DREAMS: an Exchange Ambassador's Career Journey

Story by Elisabeth Koopal

Lara Neervoort's inspiring career journey began at Amsterdam University College. An exchange semester at the New School in New York City sparked her passion for global engagement. Back in Amsterdam, Lara joined the Cultural Exchange Ambassador's Program, leading to a job at the UvA's Global Office. Eager to study abroad again, she applied for a Master's at the London School of Economics (LSE). "After my first week in London, I knew I wanted to stay there," Lara says.

After briefly working for a startup and a bigger company in London, Lara realized she wasn't there for the money, but wanted to make social impact. Joining the Dutch Embassy in the UK fulfilled this aspiration. After five years in the UK, she was ready for a new challenge. Inspired by diplomats she met at the Embassy, Lara applied to become part of the yearly "diplomat class" of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After an intensive selection procedure, she is now a Diplomat in training. While building her career within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, she looks forward to her next adventure abroad.

Life as a Diplomat: Challenges and Inspirations

"Being a diplomat isn't always *glamorous*," Lara says. While she interned at the Dutch Embassy in Prague, she visited a Dutch citizen in a Czech prison. "Walking through the prison felt like entering a scary movie." Diplomats have to be able to work under **high pressure**. Her colleagues in Prague recently had to deal with a shooting where a Dutch citizen got injured. The work of Dutch embassies can be very impactful for citizens abroad.

What Lara loves most about her job are the inspiring people she meets. She recently attended a gathering of female ambassadors in The Hague. Carmen de la Soledad Moreno Toscano, the eighty-six-year-old Ambassador of Mexico, told her about women's long fight for equal opportunities within diplomacy. Inspired by such encounters, Lara uses her work to make positive change. For instance, as Policy Officer for Reconstruction & Support Ukraine, she organized an NGO knowledge exchange on Ukraine.

Lara's Career Advice for Students

Reflecting on her own career path, Lara shares valuable advice for students. "Your first job doesn't have to be the perfect fit." While working in the private sector, she quickly realized she had different aspirations. "It's okay to quit and try something else."

"Try to learn from everyone you work and study with." During her diplomatic training at the Clingendael Institute, Lara was very inspired by her colleagues that have fled from Afghanistan and Iran. Their turbulent lives are a testimony to the importance of international cooperation and peace.

The last advice: always try and never give up on your dreams. "I hesitated to apply to the London School of Economics because I didn't imagine I would be accepted." Nevertheless, Lara tried and secured not only a spot in a competitive Master's program but also a scholarship. "Dare to take risks, you never know what the future holds for you."

"Lara realized she wasn't there for the *money*, but wanted to make *social impact*"



🌀 *Seek new horizons*
Do more of what you love



Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in student mobility



Reguliersdwarstraal
Amsterdam

Knowing that the Cultural Exchange Ambassadors play an important role in raising students' awareness and promoting student mobility, they were asked to brainstorm during a so-called 'privilege assignment' and think about what group of students deserve extra attention. And what can student ambassadors do to better support these students?

They were also asked to pick a place in Amsterdam that, for them, represents **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**. These are some of the locations the ambassadors visited!



National Holocaust Names Monument
Amsterdam

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in student mobility



Mezrah
Amsterdam

The ambassadors talked about the many **challenges** students face, ranging from having trouble finding **housing**, to barriers due to **physical disabilities**, **mental health** issues, and coming from a low **socio-economic** background. Through this, the ambassadors were forced to reflect on their own biases and privileges and were thus able to think about the **needs** of **underprivileged** students who face difficulty in realizing **student mobility**.

Some ambassadors proposed a one-to-one **mentoring** program to enable **greater diversity** in the exchange student demography and to provide assistance, while others believed an **online platform** where students can interact with each other to be an effective measure to, for example, share ideas and tips about housing. *What do you think?*



Begijnhof
Amsterdam

Brainstorming Session: enhancing Support for (International) Exchange Students

Join a **brainstorming session** with Cultural Exchange Ambassadors, and colleagues from the *Office of International Student Affairs (BIS)* to help us look into recent trends among students and tackle specific challenges our office faces. What role could ambassadors play in supporting us in these tasks?

The Office of International Student Affairs provides **support and oversight for various aspects of international student affairs**. It oversees and manages global student mobility, facilitates (international) student engagement including the award-winning Cultural Exchange Ambassador Programme, administers and disburses student scholarships and loans and collaborate with academic units and faculty international offices to cultivate and build strategic partnerships and collaborations around the world. In doing so, students insights are of immense value to keep updating and improving our processes.

The Ambassadors were asked to reflect on what role they should play in effectively contributing to services offered by BIS - and to think about how the university might increase student involvement. This is what they came up with!

1 LINKEDIN NETWORK FOR (EXCHANGE) STUDENTS

Purpose: create a LinkedIn network tailored for (exchange) students to stay connected beyond their time in Amsterdam.

Benefits: facilitates updates on professional achievements, job opportunities, and maintains valuable connections. Provides a platform for exchanging career advice, insights, and resources.

2 DUTCH-THEMED RELAXED GOODBYE EVENT

Concept: host a Dutch-themed farewell session with traditional snacks like stroomwafels and bitterballen.

Features: include a photobooth for personal memories, a board for sharing their favorite experiences, and materials for creating individual collage boards.

3 ACTIVE INSTAGRAM PAGE

Function: implement an Instagram page for sharing messages, posts and advice from previous exchange students to prospect exchange students.

Content: use Q&A stories, posts, and videos to provide real-life glimpses of exchange experiences. Utilize polls, direct messages, and instant updates for interaction.

4 CONNECT WITH HOME UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Objective: pair outbound students with current exchange students from their home universities for sharing exchange experiences.

Method: Organize social events where students can share local tips and integration advice about their home city/university.



Photo by Jur Kous

Student Experience: what does the ideal Introduction Week look like?

The Ambassadors joined forces with ESN, Erasmus Student Network, in Amsterdam to develop the 'ideal introduction week', with the theme of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in mind.

ESN plays a key role for exchange students arriving in Amsterdam, because many of them depend on such organizations and their events when navigating the city and getting to know people.

An important component of any introduction is getting to know your surroundings and the people around you, and what way better to do that than a **scavenger hunt**! To make the hunt a success, it should be challenging, yet do-able, competitive and independent, and a prize should be included. A scavenger hunt would be the perfect start to a new life in Amsterdam and to break the ice.

We also recommend more sports activities as these can greatly benefit exchange students by fostering a sense of community and enhancing social integration. Through these events, students can create long-lasting friendships when meeting those with similar interests.

When it comes to an exchange, you'll likely remember the meaningful bonds you've forged more than anything else. As many students find it challenging to combine studies with socializing, 'teambuilding activities' with your friends can be a viable way to deepen your promising friendships. A day or weekend trip to a nearby city, for example, allows exchange students to get to know each other in a different environment. Who knows what heart felt connections might unfold in the picturesque Haarlem!

It's also vital to think about how to make an introduction week accessible for as many people as possible/ Organizing online activities provides a wider audience and takes off some pressure some students might feel to always be physically present. A balanced approach satisfies different exchange students' needs!

Written by: Iñigo Aramburu
Sánchez, Iona Pîrv, Rosan
Groot, Yu Yue & Otilia Badea

EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION EDI FESTIVAL 2024

Welcome to the 2024 edition of the yearly festival in equity, diversity and inclusion, jointly organised by the University of Amsterdam and the University of Birmingham. We are delighted to bring you this festival as part of our intensified collaboration, aimed at promoting equity, diversity and inclusion across both universities and beyond. This year's festival proved to be a unique experience, featuring a hybrid format that combined virtual webinars and face-to-face events in Birmingham and Amsterdam. Students and staff engaged in meaningful conversations and thought-provoking discussions!

Just like in previous years, the Birmingham EDI Student Ambassadors and Amsterdam Cultural Exchange Ambassadors will collaborate to organise this festival, as we come together to celebrate diversity, foster inclusivity, and explore innovative approaches to promoting equity in our communities.

this year's theme: Make Change Happen

The EDI Festival 2024 spanned an entire month dedicated to sparking transformation. What roles can Higher Education Institutions, alongside their faculty and students, play in driving positive change in their communities? Students were invited to a series of empowering and inspiring events focused on sharing strategies that foster inclusive practices, challenge existing norms, and empower individuals to address and reduce inequalities, also in the context of student mobility and exchange. Visit our website to find out more about this year's EDI festival, as well as previous editions, and learn about what your role might be in creating a more equitable (student) world!



UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

EDI WEBINARS: MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

Our Ambassadors were invited to take part in the various webinars which the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Festival offered for this year, all in the theme of ‘making change happen’. Topics ranged from ‘embracing diversity in dialogue’ to the ‘importance of global education fairs’. Read some of our Ambassadors’ experiences below!

REDEFINING GLOBAL EDUCATION FAIRS

The webinar on Redefining Global Education Fairs explored the opportunities for studying abroad, including language opportunities, internships, and short- as well as long-term stays. I was unaware of all the short-term opportunities that the universities offer, so I learnt a lot from this webinar. It was inspiring to hear what the different universities do to make it more accessible for everyone, both in terms of grades, economic ability, and belonging to marginalized groups, such as disabled and LGBTQ-identifying persons. I really liked to hear about the different summits and fairs the different universities host, despite having similar equality, diversity, and inclusion approaches, their approach was different, also responding to different cultures and problems universities face. Despite all this, I think there could have been more focus on physically disabled persons that wish to go on an exchange, is anyone done to accommodate them and their student mobility? Moreover, I also really liked the interactive elements of the webinar with videos and so many different speakers, as well as the Q&A section. Particularly considering the efforts in student engagement, I think it is really important to also make such activities more student-inclusive, which fosters greater attention to all the opportunities available - JULIE ZACHO THORBALL

EMBRACING DIVERSITY IN DIALOGUE

During the workshop ‘Embracing Diversity in Dialogue’ I learnt how open conversation can transform moments of conflict into opportunities for shared understanding. I received an introduction to the Mixed Classroom Educational Model and the concept of ‘hot moments’. This was exemplified by the Keti Koti dialogue table, an initiative aiming to change the conversation around polarising topics. We concluded the session with one-on-one conversations on our experiences of exclusion in academia. It revealed many shared experiences between my conversation partner and myself. This struck me, since we belonged to different generations and I did expect us to have so much in common. Our conversation made me aware of the progress that has been made over time, but also showed me that there is a long way to go before everyone will feel included. - ELISABETH KOOPAL



UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

Ambassadors take on Birmingham!

From 20-22 March 2024 I had the opportunity to visit Birmingham and participate in a **collaborative EDI festival** between University of Amsterdam and University of Birmingham. Throughout the visit we explored the university campus including Guild of Students and the Lapworth Museum, and we got a glimpse of the city and its history through a graffiti tour and a tour about queer history in Birmingham.

However, the main EDI (equality, diversity, inclusion) Festival attractions were the student led events. Personally, I was a part of a post-it wall initiative – a reflective activity where students passing by could write on a post-it note about the things they want to start, keep or throw in terms of EDI topics. The activity was very successful and we got a lot of involvement of the students! It was a great highlight of my trip how Alex Ferranti (the student EDI officer) helped me to become more open and approach the students in the library without feeling awkward. Though, one aspect that really stood out to me was how welcoming and kind people in Birmingham were! Just in three days I made connections with not only students of Birmingham, but also the staff and other members of Birmingham University. Furthermore, at the end of our visit we had a reflection session where an artist Jelena Pedic was invited to make an artwork from the topics of our discussion about EDI. She is a very inspiring artist and I'm glad that I had a chance to meet her too.

Altogether, besides the daytime activities we also enjoyed dinners together where a more informal atmosphere took place. It was a great time to get to know each other better and reflect on our day together. On one of the evenings I even managed to visit the Birmingham Hippodrome to see ballet "The Sleeping Beauty", adding a nice cultural experience to this trip. Overall, throughout this visit I gained so much knowledge about EDI and how it reflects in the University of Birmingham, as well as experiencing the city itself through the eyes of locals.



BY ANETE PAULA TOMIÑA

Ambassadors take on Birmingham!

EDI FESTIVAL 2024

I am deeply honored to have been selected as one of the student ambassadors from the University of Amsterdam to participate in this remarkable project, which included a visit to Birmingham.

This brief journey, alongside staff and fellow student ambassadors, was truly enjoyable.

Experiencing the events firsthand allowed me to appreciate the meticulous organization and the efforts put forth by the university staff to make this festival a success. My role involved supporting the 'Post-it Wall Initiative', designed to encourage students to engage in self-reflection and set new goals for the year—identifying what to throw, keep, or start. Observing and participating in this initiative, I noticed that, despite the simplicity of these questions, many students seldom contemplate them. Therefore, I believe this activity serves as an effective means for students to connect deeply with themselves.

Furthermore, the city tour of Birmingham and the campus tour at the University of Birmingham (UoB) offered me fresh insights into the city and the university. Prior to my visit, my knowledge of Birmingham was limited to its status as the UK's second-largest city and its financial struggles. I was pleasantly surprised to discover the city's vibrant arts scene, particularly its graffiti, which serves as a powerful medium for expression. The preservation of queer history and memories throughout the city was equally unexpected, as was the UoB's authentic campus atmosphere. The university's commitment to student engagement, evidenced by its wide range of activities, and its respect for diverse perspectives, was commendable. These elements underscore the city's evolution and the stories behind it, highlighting the transformative journey it has undergone. This trip is one of the best I have experienced, and I am grateful to everyone who contributed to making it such a memorable experience.



Photo and text by Xinyu Lin

READ ABOUT THE AMBASSADORS'
EXPERIENCES WITH THE CULTURAL
EXCHANGE AMBASSADORS PROGRAMME!

YOUR EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE

Do you want to BECOME a CULTURAL EXCHANGE AMBASSADOR at the University of Amsterdam too? Go to <https://student.uva.nl/en/topics/cultural-exchange-ambassadors-programme>

See you next semester!

Instagram: Uvaglobal

Photo by Ecem Naz Boyacıoğlu

KANUBHA SHARMA

BRIDGING WORLDS: MY CULTURAL EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE

Embarking on a journey to a foreign land can often be daunting, filled with uncertainties and apprehensions. When I received the email inviting me to join the course just two days before my departure to Amsterdam, I was a little hesitant about it. Little did I know that this spontaneous decision would become the **best decision of my life.**

In the first session, we were given the opportunity to express ourselves without the fear of any judgement. I can say that, the session provided me with a **SAFE SPACE** in an unknown country. We were grouped in a team of people from different countries having diverse cultures. That day, I made my first friends in Amsterdam.

Throughout the course, we learnt various skills that I am sure would help me in my professional as well as personal life. Some of them are **Multicultural teamwork**, which is an essential skill to have in order to work with people globally. I learnt it as well as applied it while working with my team on multiple assignments. I also applied these skills in my academics and it benefited me greatly. Apart from it, we had sessions based on the themes: different *leadership styles*, *presentation skills*, *empathy*, *social identity* and *deep democracy*. All these sessions taught me the importance of communication skills in one's life being it is personal or professional. **I learnt that it is really important to be empathetic towards others because it is crucial for teamwork and assisting others in any way possible.**

We also got the chance to explore Amsterdam. We had boat tours in the canals of Amsterdam. As a part of our assignment, I got the chance to visit the **National Slavery Monument in Amsterdam**, which helped me to **gain a deeper understanding into city's past** and its significance in shaping modern day society.

At the end of our session, we received the **best gift ever**, which is: **Gratitude**. We as a team wrote our feelings about our respective group members (now my friends) in our own language. It was a **really memorable session.**



IN THE END, I WOULD JUST SAY THAT BEING THE PART OF THIS PROGRAMME WAS THE BEST DECISION OF MY LIFE. I NOT ONLY LEARNT NEW SKILLS BUT ALSO, I MET NEW PEOPLE, MADE FRIENDS AND MADE MEMORIES FOR LIFE.



to be *vulnerable*

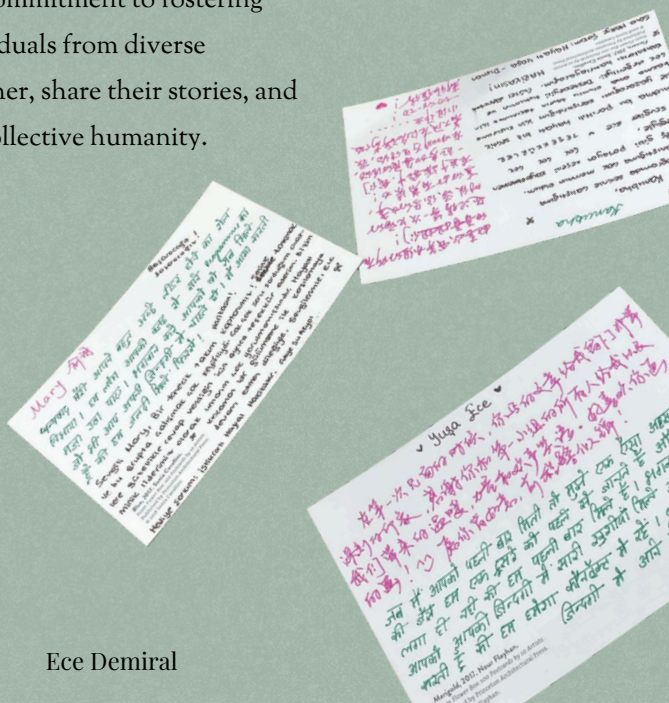
The program emphasized how historical, cultural, and environmental factors shape our perception of "home."

It taught me that home is more than just a physical location; it's a tapestry woven from memories, traditions, and connections that transcend borders.

This realization deepened my understanding of identity and belonging, fostering an appreciation for the diverse experiences that contribute to our sense of home.

In essence, the program equipped me with multidimensional perspectives on humanity, fostering a deep appreciation for the richness of our global tapestry. It instilled in me a commitment to fostering inclusive spaces where individuals from diverse backgrounds can come together, share their stories, and celebrate the beauty of our collective humanity.

I am grateful to be part of such a *global community*, where everyone is enthusiastic to be there for each other and to share a safe space when you need a break from the carousel of life.



Exchange Express:

the magazine for the global student of tomorrow



Artwork by: Elena Peña Cadarso