Research networks accelerate corona research

Bela and Sake fell in love through Veritas

Literally a matter of life and death

Professor Catrin Finkenauer talks about her research on relationships
FOREWORD

25 years of Illuster

Keeping the relationship with former students alive. Our university — I feel that, as an alumnus among other alumni, I can say ‘our’ — has been doing just that for over 25 years, including via this magazine. The first edition appeared in 1995. A year later, I boarded a train in Limburg with a 55-litre backpack, headed for my new life as a student. The bicycle on which I had pedalled to secondary school for years, was stolen from the Janskerkhof during orientation. Welcome to Utrecht, indeed. And yet those introductory days marked an important turning point in my life. I never went back to Limburg; Utrecht became my home and remains so to this day. And now, less than 25 years after beginning my degree in Theatre, Film and Television Studies, I am a UU employee working on the silver anniversary edition of this fine magazine. Who would have thought? Not me, in any case.

In 1995, Désirée Majoor was alumni relations officer and had the idea that a magazine for alumni would be a good way to keep them connected to the university. Twan Geurts was the first editor-in-chief and, with his help, Illuster came into the world. Which is why I asked him to write for Illuster once more. And so, this past August, the two ‘founders’ of Illuster sat together in Désirée’s garden in Groenekan, and Twan interviewed her for the column ‘The career of...’. You can read the result on page 18.

Our university provides the foundation for many and various interpersonal relationships. These relationships are both enduring and valuable, because many of them are formed during our student period, when we are open to forging true connections. Over the past six months, it has once again become abundantly clear how vitally important our connections to other people are. That is why this Illuster is about relationships. Personally, I look forward to another 25 years of Illuster.

Drs. Floor Peeters
Editor-in-chief Illuster

Contents

‘Relationships are literally a matter of life and death’

32 ‘Our only way out of this crisis is a vaccine’

Marc Bonten
became a famous face of COVID-19

37 Well-stocked archive

38 The big picture

6 Short

9 Hall of Fame

10 Made possible — plastic-free oceans

16 Same degree ... different career

28 Life after graduation

30 Made possible — large legacy for Utrecht University

34 Past and present

36 A message from ... São Paulo

37 Tips

40 Jan’s perspective

Publication details

Illuster is a publication by Utrecht University and the Utrecht University Fund. It appears twice per year and is sent to alumni of Utrecht University. Editor-in-chief Floor Peeters Publication management Inge Mathijssen Editorial staff Karder Brandt, Joost Dankers, Armand Heijnen, Stephanie Kaelberer, Inge Mathijssen, Nathalie Oliver, Maarten Post. With contributions from Jurgen Sijbrandij, Sabine de Lucht, Ine Groenstra, Jim Koning, Mariska Oosterhoff, Vicky van Tiggelen, Maartje Kwanten, Sadia van Reenen de Lange, Myra Tijsmans, Twan Geurts. Editing board Ellen Horng, Iris Lu, Julianna Stanssens, David Vedelme, Sophie van den Steen. Concept and design flowdesign.nl Printing paper IS 1338-4703 Year 25, no 3 © Utrecht University The use of images is permitted with citation.

Follow us on Facebook (Utrecht University Alumni), LinkedIn (Utrecht University) and Instagram and Twitter (@AlumniUU). Email: alumni@uu.nl. Changed your address? please let us know via alumni@uu.nl, which can also be used to send us your email address.
Roots for thought

‘It is important to consider the world through relationships. Everything is relational, and therefore everything is interconnected as well.’

Dr Kathrin Thiele studies the complexity of how we humans relate to one another and to the context that we live in from a feminist and philosophical perspective. The image of a rhizome — a plant root that, rather than producing neat vertical growth, tends to generate shoots in unexpected directions — can be helpful here. Thiele: ‘In philosophy, the rhizome is often viewed as the opposite of the tree or family tree, which depicts relationships primarily in a hierarchical or top-down manner. Rhizomatic thinking gives us a better understanding of the complexity of how we relate to one another and to the world around us. That’s because those relationships, like the roots of a plant with rhizomatic growth like this one, are entangled, intertwined and often with unexpected outcome. Which is not to say that hierarchies or power structures no longer exist — just that these do not always display a vertical structure. They can be entangled relational phenomena as well.’
Because this year’s Anniversary Day celebration was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic, he had to wait just a bit longer. The big moment finally came, however, during the Opening of the Academic Year: alumnus and UU researcher Erik van Sebille received the third Agnites Vrolik Award, presented to him by Lodewijk Hijmans van den Bergh, chairman of the Utrecht University Fund. Van Sebille designs software that models ocean currents and maps out the journey made by plastic waste in our oceans. According to the jury: ‘Eric is an outstanding scientist, whose academic output and intense commitment to society are truly admirable.’

The Agnites Vrolik Award, which is made possible by a legacy from an alumnus, recognises and rewards the significance of the impact made by UU research. Van Sebille will receive €25,000 to fund extra-curricular research. You can read more about the research into a plastic-free world on page 10 of this Illuster.

‘The more people feel as though they belong, the greater the power to achieve something amazing together’

Appeal from former politician and writer Jan Terlouw in Volkskrant newspaper. He studied Mathematics and Physics in Utrecht and earned a doctorate in nuclear physics.

Is the coronavirus a laughing matter?

‘Achoo–ston, we have a problem.’ Madelijn Strick (Psychology) studied the impact of humour during the COVID-19 crisis. Through different phases of the lockdown, the jokes shifted from puns and self-deprecating humour about stockpiling to jokes about staying home and loneliness. But do people truly find comfort in COVID-related humour? Strick’s research involved people from the Netherlands, the United States and the United Kingdom. Her conclusion? While jokes about the coronavirus usually do not result in an increase in positive emotions, they do serve to mitigate negative emotions. Remarkably, no differences were observed between the results from the three countries.

Strick’s new book Humor is one of de vier pijlers onder het universum [Humor is one of the four pillars of the universe] was published this past August. A special additional chapter on coronavirus-related humour (in Dutch) is available at madelijnstrick.com/humorboek.

UU evaluates General Administration

How can you prevent civil servants with poor job performance from being given a new role elsewhere in government service? At the behest of the House of Representatives, UU scientists in the School of Governance are conducting research aimed at determining whether there are structural problems with civil servants in the upper tiers of the Dutch government. The results and recommendations obtained from the study will be presented in November, and the report will be highlighted on uu.nl as well.

A network of letters

Ever so slowly, the shape of what is being called the Republic of Letters — a network of male and female scholars who exchanged letters sharing their knowledge in the Early Modern Period — is beginning to emerge. By coding an enormous collection of letters, UU researchers are helping to chart the full breadth of the Republic of Letters. Many alumni have helped so far, and that help remains more than welcome. Factual information including the date, sender and recipient must be recorded for each letter. Participation in this project requires no prior knowledge — all that is needed is a computer with an internet connection.

You, too, can lend a hand. For more information on CEMROL, visit cemrol.hum.uu.nl/#intro.
scholarship has had on their lives. Here you will also find stories from Elena, Pinar online donation via uu.nl/steunvriendenvanGW. Support this scholarship programme with an eager to study in Utrecht end up dropping out, talented students from outside the EU who are primarily at the scholarship programme within of the Utrecht University Fund, is aimed Humanities’ fund. This new fund, which is part On 1 September, the Faculty of Humanities of Humanities UU Faculty Friends of the NEW FUND bit.ly/vliegenthart 2019 Learn more about Algül’s thesis at algül.vliegenthart2019.org Stories from Bosnian refugees Özge Algül, (International Development Studies, 2009) is the proud winner of the Utrecht University Fund’s Vliegenthart Thesis Award. Her thesis is about the migration biographies and migration dreams of Bosnians who fled the Yugoslav Wars at a young age and later returned to Bosnia. Learn more about Algül’s thesis at algül.vliegenthart2019.org. The New Normal Everyone in the Netherlands is trying to get used to the new socially distanced society. The Faculty of Science is conducting research into mobility and social distancing. Computer scientist Roland Geraets, together with the start-up u2crowds, has developed crowd-simulation software that renders visible the ways in which the ‘New Normal’ is changing how we use public spaces. ‘People don’t really know how far 1.5 metres is; that’s something you have to take into account,’ says Geraets. ‘What’s more, people who belong together tend to walk closer to one another, yet the entire group will maintain its distance from others. People are getting tired of the COVID-19 restrictions, the rules keep changing... You have to continuously update your simulations.’ VLEGENHTHART THESIS AWARD Stories from Bosnian refugees Özge Algül, (International Development Studies, 2009) is the proud winner of the Utrecht University Fund’s Vliegenthart Thesis Award. Her thesis is about the migration biographies and migration dreams of Bosnians who fled the Yugoslav Wars at a young age and later returned to Bosnia. Learn more about Algül’s thesis at algül.vliegenthart2019.org. Utrecht University is proud of its graduates, and alumni are an important part of Utrecht University’s academic community. But where do they all end up? In this section, Illuster presents some major appointments from the last six months.

Jip Samhoud First-year diploma in UCU Liberal Arts and Sciences (2011) has been appointed Chairman of the Genootschap voor Reclame (Netherlands Advertising Association).

Joris van Dijk University degree in Dutch Law (2000) has been appointed Commercial Director of Feijenoord. He was previously General Director of Madurodam.

Elise Oosterwegel University degree in Dutch Law (1991) has been appointed acting chief officer of the Public Prosecutor’s Office for the Midden-Nederland District.

Noor Lourens University degrees in Dutch Law (2006) and Law, Governance and Management (2006) has been appointed Strategic Director of Eramus University Rotterdam.

Douwe Biesma University degree in Medicine (1986) and Doctor of Medicine (1994) was previously President of the Executive Board of the St Antonius Hospital in Nieuwegein and is now the President of the Executive Board of the Leiden University Medical Centre.

Koen Becking PhD in Interdisciplinary Social Sciences (2001) is the new Rector Magnificus and President of the Executive Board at Nijenrode Business Universiteit.

Johan Kwisthout PhD in Computer Science (2009) has been appointed Programme Director of Artificial Intelligence at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Radboud University.

Cathelijne Broers University degree in Art History and Archaeology (1994) and 2017 Alumnus of the Year is the new director of the Prince Bernhard Culture Fund. She has previously served as Director of the Hermitage and Nieuwe Kerk.

Mildred Klarenbeek University degree in Interdisciplinary Social Sciences (1993) and Master in Higher Education Teacher Training (2012) is the new Director of the Vereniging Ouders Kinderen en Kanker, an organisation for children with cancer and their parents.

Wendy Borneman University degree in Medicine (2009) has been appointed Chair of the Executive Board of the Dutch College of General Practitioners.

Want to be ‘famous’?

Email us your new position at alumni@uu.nl. Who knows? You could see yourself in the next edition of Illuster, or be named Alumnus of the Month. Every month we announce their identity on LinkedIn (Utrecht University), Facebook (Alumni Universiteit Utrecht), Instagram and Twitter (both @AlumniUU). Friends of the UU Faculty of Humanities On 1 September, the Faculty of Humanities launched the ‘Friends of the UU Faculty of Humanities’ fund. This new fund, which is part of the Utrecht University Fund, is aimed primarily at the scholarship programme within the faculty. Experience has shown that many talented students from outside the EU who are eager to study in Utrecht end up dropping out, simply because they cannot afford it. The Utrecht Excellence Scholarship, a scholarship that provides for both tuition and cost of living, enables such students to study at the UU Faculty of Humanities without a care in the world. Support this scholarship programme with an online donation via uu.nl/vriendenvanGW. Here you will also find stories from Elena, Pinar and Kaarthi (photos) about the impact the scholarship has had on their lives.

Hall of Fame

NEW FUND

Vrouwke Tuinman University degree in General Arts (1997) has won the Grote Poetzieprijs poetry award.

Harmen van Wijnen University degree in Theology (2000) has been appointed Director of ABP pension fund.

Martine Margadant University degree in Dutch Law (1994) has been named in house council for the Royal Dutch Skating Federation, KNBS.

Luce van Kempen Bachelor of Public Administration and Organisational Science (2019) is the new director of the Prince Bernhard Culture Fund.

Mildred Klarenbeek University degree in Interdisciplinary Social Sciences (1993) and Master in Higher Education Teacher Training (2012) is the new Director of the Vereniging Ouders Kinderen en Kanker, an organisation for children with cancer and their parents.

Wendy Borneman University degree in Medicine (2009) has been appointed Chair of the Executive Board of the Dutch College of General Practitioners.

Want to be ‘famous’?

Email us your new position at alumni@uu.nl. Who knows? You could see yourself in the next edition of Illuster, or be named Alumnus of the Month. Every month we announce their identity on LinkedIn (Utrecht University), Facebook (Alumni Universiteit Utrecht), Instagram and Twitter (both @AlumniUU).
Erik van Sebille (1981) is an oceanographer and climatologist. He studies how ocean currents transport warmth, nutrients, organisms and plastic waste, and also develops computer models to simulate the transport of this material by the ocean currents. Erik van Sebille has a variety of awards, both for his research and for his interaction with a wide audience. He is a strong advocate for Open Science and is a member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences’ Young Academy.

Plastic-free oceans

Made possible

To turn the Galapagos Islands into the first ecosystem to be returned to a 100% plastic-free state, this is the goal of a new large-scale project in which Utrecht-based scientists Erik van Sebille and Stefanie Ypma are cooperating with international ecologists. Mapping ocean currents plays a crucial role in those efforts and requires a new type of drifters, i.e. floating buoys.

‘In the Galapagos Islands, plastic particularly accumulates in areas with a lot of wash. Waste deposited on the shore by the ocean is then carried back out to sea by the waves at a subsequent high tide. There, it breaks down into many more, even smaller fragments of plastic that become impossible to clean up. This is what we want to prevent,’ says oceanographer Erik van Sebille, who in August was presented with the Agnes Vrolik Award for his social engagement. Van Sebille and postdoc Stefanie Ypma are taking part in this project, in which they have partnered with the Galapagos Conservation Trust, remotely from Utrecht. ‘By combating the waste while it is still on land, you reduce the amount of time plastic spends in the ocean — and therefore its opportunity to do damage.’

Weather forecast

The UU researchers are developing a computer tool as a means to efficiently clean up the plastic waste on the Galapagos Islands. This tool will predict where and when the plastic will wash up on shore. ‘It can offer a kind of weather forecast for the park rangers working on location,’Van Sebille explains. ‘The Galapagos Islands are extremely vast. This predictive tool will tell park rangers when they need to go to which island, to clean up the plastic before it washes back out to sea.’

Drifters

In order to develop this ‘plastic predictor’, the researchers are building software that combines all kinds of data on wind and water in a highly advanced way. Ocean currents play a crucial role in this. To effectively map those currents, they plan to release special ‘drifters’: small, floating buoys that will be carried along by the sea. GPS signals will enable the scientists to follow their exact routes. ‘Drifters are already commonly used in ocean research. But because the major ocean currents tend to carry them away from the Galapagos, there is still much we don’t know about this area. We must therefore release the buoys at very specific locations,’ Ypma explains.

‘And on top of that, this project will require a new kind of drifter, since the existing type floats at a depth of about fifteen metres — which is ideal for researching temperature and nutrients in seawater,’ says Ypma. ‘Plastic, however, floats on the surface and is more strongly impacted by waves and wind. This is why we are developing a new type of drifter.’

Starting point

The Utrecht University Fund has launched a crowdfunding campaign through which members of the public — like yourself — can sponsor drifters suitable for use in researching plastic transport on the ocean’s surface. Through your sponsorship, you can contribute to achieving plastic-free oceans. ‘When it comes to eliminating plastic, the Galapagos might be the best place in the world to start here, we need only to lend the ocean itself a helping hand. By efficiently cleaning up the plastic that the sea deposits on land, we can prevent the plastic from going on a long journey across the oceans,’ Van Sebille says.

And it won’t end with the Galapagos, as the islands are only the starting point for tackling the global problem of plastic in the oceans. The researchers are making the software behind the plastic predictor open source and intend to apply it to other areas as well, such as Spitsbergen, Indonesia and the Wadden Sea. ‘The Galapagos are only the beginning.’

Donate a drifter

Through the Utrecht University Fund, you can contribute to achieving plastic-free oceans. Van Sebille’s project is one of five causes selected for the annual Pay it Forward campaign. Donations from alumni will enable the researchers to release specially-designed drifters around the Galapagos Islands in order to map the local ocean currents. Donate a drifter yourself today! Visit uu.nl/doorgeven or donate directly.

Donate a drifter

Ms Margot van Sluis-Barten is the new Director of the Utrecht University Fund and head of Utrecht University’s Relationship Management department. She succeeds Ms Fenna Hanaaets-van Charldorp. As Director of the Erasmus Trust fund, Margot led the successful ‘Challenge Accepted’ fundraising campaign on behalf of Erasmus University Rotterdam. Margot: ‘I want to continue to build even stronger connections within the UU academic community by enhancing alumni involvement, creating additional partnerships and establishing an endowment fund. Because the only way to truly support research is to be able to offer a multi-year commitment. And so we’re going to ask everyone who has a special place in their heart for the university or for the city of Utrecht to contribute to this endowment fund.’

Lodewijk Hijmans van den Bergh, chairman of the Utrecht University Fund: ‘A fantastic foundation has been laid, and now it’s time to continue building towards our future.’ Anton Pijpers, President of the Executive Board: ‘Our alumni are crucial to us. Margot understands this and knows how to forge lasting relationships. In addition, we have a growing need for funding independent of the regular channels in order to support our implementation of specific projects. That way, we can give free spirits the space they need, which can result in major impact. I am pleased to see the Utrecht University Fund is undertaking action in this area.’

New director for the Utrecht University Fund
Bela and Sake fell in love through Veritas

‘He started in 1953, and I came along in ’56. An upperclassman, in other words... the type of man you could really look up to.’ Bela Rypkema Brom (82 years old) casts an amused glance at her husband, Sake Rypkema (90). The pair met in Utrecht while they were studying medicine. Sixty-five years later, they are sitting at the kitchen table in Oss reminiscing about their time as students.

Having earned high marks in secondary school, the eighteen-year-old Bela had the opportunity to attend university. She chose to study Medicine in Utrecht. Although she briefly commuted back and forth from her parents’ house in Bussum, she soon found a room of her own to rent. ‘I lived in the Nassaustraat and my mother — despite being an extremely emancipated woman — gave the landlady instructions on what was and wasn’t permitted. Gentleman callers were forbidden, of course.’

Bela joined the Catholic students’ association Veritas. She jokes: ‘I was one of nine children in our family, so I was basically already initiated before I left home.’ Suddenly, and without hesitation, the alumna sings the initiation song from so many years ago. ‘Our memories may not be what they once were, but our time as students is so deeply engrained that it all comes rushing back right away.’

Idealism

It was in the year 1929 that Sake Rypkema was born in Friesland. His family later moved to Utrecht. ‘It was there that I began to feel a kind of idealism. I wanted to live a life of service and become a doctor.’ After his mandatory military service, Sake moved back in with his mother in Utrecht and began his life as a student. ‘I had a room in the attic where I could have friends over to visit, but I spent most of my time at Veritas, where I also sat on the board of the study association.’ That board was to play a crucial role in bringing him together with his future wife.

Bela: ‘I remember it quite clearly. Once a year, we took the whole gang to camp.’ With a wink, she continues: ‘That’s when important speakers came to tell us what life was about, and so on. As a board member, Sake was on the camp committee and they were still looking for members. Apparently I caught his eye, because he recruited me to join the committee. After that, we went to Schoorl together to look for a suitable holiday farm to go camping at. And then we went for a walk in the dunes... And yes, that’s where we fell in love. In the summer camp newsletter, everyone had a description next to their name. Next to mine, Sake had written: Bela Brom, silence de la mer! At that, she bursts into laughter, briefly touching her husband’s arm.

Idealism

It was in the year 1929 that Sake Rypkema was born in Friesland. His family later moved to Utrecht, and when it was time for secondary school, Sake enrolled in a seminary just as his mother wanted. Yet he felt no true calling to become a priest. After three years, he traded the seminary for a boarding school. ‘It was there that I began to feel a kind of idealism. I wanted to live a life of service and become a doctor.’ After his mandatory military service, Sake moved back in with his mother in Utrecht and began his life as a student. ‘I had a room in the attic where I could have friends over to visit, but I spent most of my time at Veritas, where I also sat on the board of the study association.’ That board was to play a crucial role in bringing him together with his future wife.
Double interview

`Sake: ‘Although boys and girls were generally kept separate within the student association, we did take meals together and there were working groups and activities where you mingled with each other. So more relationships got started that way. Veritas was a major factor in our lives. It was where the real friendships were forged, rather than in the lecture halls in the hospital on the Cartharinecon or during the anatomy and pathology lessons at the Janskerkhof. Students from other faculties were members of the association as well, so you built up a wide circle of friends.’

Chastity obsession

‘We did fudge the rules a bit where the prohibition on male visitors was concerned,’ Bela recalls. ‘One time, my father came to visit. When he rang the doorbell, a window opened upstairs and Sake’s head poked out. After that, my father told the landlady that she should keep an eye on things.’ The memory spurs an infectious laugh from the couple.

‘Listen, things really were very different back then. Sex before marriage wouldn’t have been any fun anyway, since you knew how absolutely forbidden it was.’ And then, reproduced just as flawlessly as the initiation song: ‘Hell and the devil are nonexistent. And so before the move. We even left for Tanzania — officially the social associations have rallied together since UU

Africa

After the kandidaats examination, Bela decided not to further pursue her studies. She jokes: ‘I thought, oh well, I can just marry a doctor instead.’ Yet her own medical knowledge would also prove quite useful when the couple travelled to Africa with their baby in 1963.

Sake: ‘The time at university had further stoked my idealism and I wanted to go to the tropics. As a doctor in the bush, you have to be able to do everything yourself, the facilities are practically non-existent. And so before we left for Tanzania — and later Zambia — I trained in Surgery and Obstetrics. Bela completed a bacteriology programme in preparation for the move. We even taught ourselves Swahili — although once we got there, it turned out that few people spoke that language. I needed an interpreter the entire time.’

The couple had four more children during their time in Africa. With the children’s future prospects in mind, the family returned to the Netherlands in 1970. They settled in Oss, where Sake took a job as a physician with the Occupational Health Service.

Utrecht continued to play a major role in their lives. All five children attended the university — at their own initiative — in the 1980s.

Bela: ‘And four years ago we went to the University Hall for the graduation ceremony of our granddaughter, Milou.’ Sake: ‘I think a great deal has changed since then. For us, the student association was really the core of our lives at uni — we still see some of the friends we made during that period. For our children, it was different. Although apparently the social associations have rallied somewhat since then.’

‘Sex before marriage wouldn’t have been any fun anyway’

Recipe for an enduring relationship

In a theme edition about relationships, who better to ask about the recipe for an enduring relationship than an alumni couple who has been together for sixty years? Bela: ‘Conflict is a part of life. But it’s important to always look for the common ground. I learned that in Africa: when you look for common ground, you will find it. We’ve had a bellyful of principles, now too soon. Now we’re free, free, free to live, not a moment’s delay.’

Sake: ‘The time at university had further stoked my idealism and I wanted to go to the tropics. As a doctor in the bush, you have to be able to do everything yourself, the facilities are practically non-existent. And so before we left for Tanzania — and later Zambia — I trained in Surgery and Obstetrics. Bela complemented a bacteriology programme in preparation for the move. We even taught ourselves Swahili — although once we got there, it turned out that few people spoke that language. I needed an interpreter the entire time.’

The couple had four more children during their time in Africa. With the children’s future prospects in mind, the family returned to the Netherlands in 1970. They settled in Oss, where Sake took a job as a physician with the Occupational Health Service.

Utrecht continued to play a major role in their lives. All five children attended the university — at their own initiative — in the 1980s.

Bela: ‘And four years ago we went to the University Hall for the graduation ceremony of our granddaughter, Milou.’ Sake: ‘I think a great deal has changed since then. For us, the student association was really the core of our lives at uni — we still see some of the friends we made during that period. For our children, it was different. Although apparently the social associations have rallied somewhat since then.’

‘Sex before marriage wouldn’t have been any fun anyway’

Recipe for an enduring relationship

In a theme edition about relationships, who better to ask about the recipe for an enduring relationship than an alumni couple who has been together for sixty years? Bela: ‘Conflict is a part of life. But it’s important to always look for the common ground. I learned that in Africa: when you look for common ground, even if you don’t share a language, things will work out fine.’

Ad Petermeijer (83) and Joke ter Borg (82) met as classmates in the Human Geography programme, which was then still being taught at the Drift. There were not many students in each year, so it did not take long for them to meet. They officially became an item during an outing with the VUGS study association in 1960. After graduation, the couple left Utrecht to start work as geography lecturers. For a good part of their careers, they taught at the same school: ‘t Rijks in Bergen op Zoom, where Ad later became rector. ‘Our shared passion for our profession and the pupils we teach has been a major component of our relationship.’

Neither ever asked the other to ‘go steady’, as that was not the way it worked in the late 1960s. But when Tooon Geevers (72) asked her to be his date for a party at Veritas, Hanneke Joordens (72) didn’t think twice. After the pair graduated, not only Tooon but Hanneke too took a job. ‘Many of my girlfriends stopped working as soon as they had children, but I always felt it was important to have my own little world and to be more than just “the partner of”.’

The couple has been together for 50 years and will celebrate their golden wedding anniversary in 2022.
Same degree ...

Florian Pennings (39)

Degree programme: International Relations
Work: Government Affairs Manager (Cybersecurity) for Microsoft

'I wanted to be a diplomat, to meet people from other cultures and contribute to the world in some way. Which is why I decided to study International Relations. But during my traineeship at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna, it became apparent that diplomacy and I were not an exact fit. I was more interested in national security issues. At the Ministry of the Interior, I analysed domestic and international threats and security risks and became acquainted with cybersecurity. Now I’m on the other side of the table, representing Microsoft in the European arena. It is a privileged position, because I have the opportunity to contribute to EU policy with regard to cybersecurity. How I ended up in this job? My international relationships were an important factor. Your network makes you extra valuable, because you learn new things from every person in it. Ultimately, I hope to make the world — digital and otherwise — a little bit safer.'

Osiris Hoepel (34)

Degree programme: International Relations
Work: Diversity and Inclusion trainer

‘Even as a child, I was curious about other cultures and how the world worked. During my time at university, that question evolved and I was primarily interested in understanding why problems like apartheid, discrimination and sexism exist, and what we can do to resolve them. To see more of the world and to experience the problems described in my textbooks first-hand, I worked in South Africa as a project assistant with HURISA (Human Rights Institute of South Africa). That’s where i gave an international training course, and realised that I had a real talent for it. In 2018, I was able to combine my goal of solving world problems with my work as a trainer. Now I help companies increase diversity on the workfloor. In some cases, a real wake-up call is needed. Because only when you are aware of your own prejudices and shortcomings can you begin to better understand others and take better decisions. Mutual respect is not enough. Every time you meet someone whose perspective or cultural background differs from your own, your world becomes a bit bigger. That is why I make sure an entire team builds relationships with one another and no one is excluded.’

... different career
Creative pioneering in education and culture

Désirée Majoor was among the very first Erasmus scholars and had a hand in establishing the earliest alumni policy at Utrecht University. Education and culture form the common thread that runs through her colourful career. That, and the desire to learn something new in every job.

She was part of the very first group of exchange students to receive an Erasmus scholarship. In the late 1980s, Désirée Majoor went to Bologna to work on her final degree with the Utrecht University Erasmus Student Scholarship. In the late 1980s, Désirée was leading the Erasmus Student Network, for which she received the Erasmus Award from the European Commission. As alumni manager for Utrecht University, she had a hand in setting in motion the idea of alumni policy, something in motion back then, without having any idea of how big it would become... I think that's really special.'

Design-based approach
All that experience came in handy when, in 2001, she became chair of the faculty of Arts at the HKU Utrecht School of the Arts. 'There, I learned how to manage final programmes. And we carried out the first job-market surveys as well.'

Alumni relationship management
The pioneering spirit comes naturally to Désirée. In the mid-1990s, she helped shape UU’s alumni policy, which was still uncharted territory at that time. She remembers when Illuster, the magazine you are reading right now, was founded exactly 25 years ago. ‘The concepts of relationship management and community building were relatively new. The magazine offered a perfect way to reach out to our alumni while also updating our database. The inaugural edition of Illuster was sent to 60,000 addresses. It was an absolutely enormous undertaking and I myself was quite young and inexperienced.' Désirée experienced her ‘golden age’ at Utrecht University as a senior policy adviser with the Utrecht University Strategic Programme. ‘It was a creative and innovative time for us. We discovered programmatic working methods and developed long-term plans for the university’s research and education programmes. And we carried out the first job-market surveys as well.’

'I was lucky to be able to learn a great deal everywhere I went'
And then the pandemic struck
For the past year, she has been firmly planted in the cultural sector as General Manager of a small organisation that runs two theatres in Utrecht: Theater Kikker and Podium Hoge Woerd. ‘We had just finished our new long-term plan when the pandemic hit. Since then, it’s been a matter of crisis management: we’ve completely rearranged our programming until 1 January and are looking into ways to limit the damage if we can only fill theatres to one-fourth capacity. But that, too, can be educational and requires a certain creativity on my part.'
‘It is even so that having a partner seems to have a greater effect on the treatment of cancer patients than a round of chemotherapy’

Catrin Finkenauer: ‘Relationships are literally a matter of life and death’

‘Not having a supportive relationship and a stable social network is even more detrimental to your health than smoking or obesity.’ This bold assertion comes from Catrin Finkenauer, Professor of Youth Studies and scientific director of the strategic research programme Dynamics of Youth (DoY). Many people fail to grasp how important relationships are in that regard. But there is simply no way to live a long, healthy and happy life without other people!’

text: Armand Heijnen, image: Ed van Rijswijk
Research such as the 2010 study by Julianne Holt-Lunstad and her colleagues has shown that people who belong to social networks live longer and recover from illness faster than singletons. Strong social relationships are a clearer predictor of mortality than factors such as smoking or obesity, says Finkenauer.

What do medical experts make of this type of assertions from those in the social science field? “If you ask me, that is precisely what makes the university in Utrecht so inspiring: a rather negative message isn’t confronted with a great deal of others, including with the University Medical Centre, and that provides an enormous boost when you’re not only doing the research tasks. One of the joint studies deals with loneliness and its role in disease processes. A 2013 study by Ayal Aizer and colleagues, for instance, even showed that having a partner seems to have greater and more beneficial effects on the treatment of cancer patients than a round of chemotherapy. A partner is a matter of course, they accompany the patient to doctor’s visits, talk to them frequently, makes sure they take their medications, talk to them... You name it, they do it. As it turns out, this is incredibly valuable and beneficial.”

According to Finkenauer, the core task of Dynamics of Youth is to study how children and young adults can live the world’s longest, healthiest, and happiest lives. Relationships play a key role in this regard. What does a child need in order to form relationships and to develop themselves within relationships? That means looking not only at the relationship between the parents, or between each parent and their children, or between the children and other family members or friends. It means also taking into consideration the societal context, which is what I’ve personally been focusing on in the recent period. My research has shifted from marital relationships to relationships in social contexts, relationships in which people — including children — can rely on the people they trust for support.”

For this reason and others, DoY also seeks out social partners: primary and secondary schools, educational support services, after-school care, community centres and FC Utrecht. “This is not only a means for the university to contribute to expanding knowledge within society,” Finkenauer says, “but most importantly, it’s based on reciprocity: schools and sports clubs ask questions that we, as scientists, can pursue further. This is also what makes alumni so important to us: they work in the real world and run into questions for which DoY might have an answer, or that might help DoY continue its research. Those questions might concern combative divorces, child-rearing interventions, parenthood, education, disease, premature babies, designing playgrounds, the transition to the labour market... so I truly hope alumni get in touch with us.”

If relationships are so important to your well-being and health, what does it take to have good relationships? Is there a ‘top 5 list of criteria, for instance? Finkenauer: “First of all, it’s important to talk to one another and to listen to what the other has to say. A major pitfall of many relationships is assuming you know exactly what the other person is thinking or feeling, “because we’ve known each other so long.” In many cases, however, that assumption isn’t right at all. One example of this — which we’ve used in our research — is the menu prediction test. It’s very common among couples that one person will have no idea what the other will order, even though they know each other’s food preferences. This is also because it is extremely difficult to put yourself in another person’s position.

We all have certain filters that colour how each of us perceives the circumstances of the physical world, as well as the social world, at any given moment. Is the weather nice, are you tired, is it an ordinary work week or are you on holiday? For that reason, it is important to always do a quick reality check: have I really understood what the other person is saying, or what they want from me? Don’t blindly assume the other person is feeling insecure or out of sorts — ask them how they are doing. And another crucial bit of advice: don’t try to change other people! I say this not only because it simply cannot be done, but also because it sends a rather negative message to the other party, by which I mean not only your partner, but your friends or your children. Because what you are actually saying is: I don’t think you’re ideal as you are, I’d prefer it if you were different. Which is not a nice message at all!”

More than ever, relationships are a topic of discussion. This can be explained in part by the zeitgeist. In the 1950s, people believed in preserving their romantic relationships no matter what the cost. Having been influenced by individualism and emancipation, however, the current view is that a relationship should enhance your personal life. Whereas staying together was once a moral obligation, people these days tend to stay in relationships when it benefits.
them to do so. And if both partners are unhappy in the relationship, their children will be unhappy with it as well. What’s more: people are living much longer than they used to, meaning they have some 20 additional years to spend in a relationship — or not, as the case may be. This is another reason why Finkenauer views relationships as an excellent topic of study.

It seems that in day to day life, relationships are a theme reserved for women. Many women’s magazines devote pages and pages to the subject, which you’ll seldom encounter in a magazine marketed to men. Right?

Finkenauer: ‘Let me indulge for a moment in what I feel is a hugely stereotypical view. In general, women tend to take the lead in relationships; they usually hold the key positions in social networks as well. Men tend to want to fix things, while women are more focused on emotions. A husband and wife team of professors at UU, Margaret and Wolfgang Stroebe, once conducted research into the question: “Can you die of a broken heart?” You can, as it turns out, but their research showed that when the woman dies first, the chance that the man will die soon after is greater than the other way around. Women are better able to cope, not only because they are better at managing the household, but more importantly because they tend to call upon their social network. Like I said: this is a stereotypical view. But if a man has exciting news or juicy gossip, he will call his wife and say: “You’ll never guess what just happened to me!” A woman, on the other hand, will call her mother first, followed by her sister, then her girlfriends and finally her husband.’

But if, as you say, relationships are literally a matter of life of death, shouldn’t men be concerned with them as well?

‘Absolutely,’ Finkenauer agrees. ‘But it’s not in their nature. It is in their nature to form relationships, because this is a result of evolution: we weren’t made to survive alone, we’re stronger in a group. As humans, we have to be able to delegate, assign tasks, not do everything ourselves — you can’t hunt and care for the children and keep the fire going, all at the same time — because we would die if we tried. Yet in many cases, relationships are a difficult theme for men. This is evident in fights, too: she wants to talk, he clams up. And in many cases, this is where the problem lies. To see an example, go to YouTube and watch the video clip “It’s not about the nail”.’

So even now, as we’re all struggling to get through the COVID-19 pandemic and men, too, are facing ‘skin hunger’, it’s still difficult to get men interested in the theme of relationships?’ I suspect that people have become more aware of the importance of relationships. Online meetings are effective, but your brain and eyes have to do all the work; there is no way to smell or feel the other person. Everyone is longing for those chats by the coffee machine, for catching up in between work tasks. If you ask people what they miss most during the lockdown, the answer won’t be “the work”, it will be “my colleagues”. You and I are conducting this interview from behind our respective laptops, and I keep hearing you say “um-hm”. The point is, I don’t know exactly what you mean because I’m missing signals that I might have been able to pick up on and interpret if we were actually sitting across from one another.’

‘It is important to always do a quick reality check: have I really understood what the other person wants from me?’

Dynamics of Youth

Through its Dynamics of Youth (DOY) research theme, Utrecht University aims to find the answers to questions that will be crucial to future generations. What can we do to help our children grow into adults with an ability to successfully thrive and develop to the fullest in a rapidly changing world?

Want to stay up to speed or help out? Follow DoY on LinkedIn: linkedin.com/showcase/dynamics-of-youth or visit uu.nl/doy and subscribe to the email newsletter.

‘Relationships are often a difficult theme for men. This is evident in fights, too: she wants to talk, he clams up’
More research

Legal parenthood and parental authority can be a hot-button issue

When two parents split up in a problematic way, the children in the family will be affected as well. Agreements regarding parenting practices or contact arrangements are especially complicated when one of the parents has no legal parenthood or authority status. Wendy Schrama, juvenile court judge and Professor of Family Law and Comparative Law, studies how the statutes might be arranged in order to help familial relationships function better.

Legal parenthood and parental authority are not automatically granted to both biological parents. If a man and a woman do not have a legal marriage or registered partnership, the father must acknowledge parenthood of the child first. ‘Unfortunately, practical experience shows — and research confirms — that a portion of parents fail to take care of this properly. As long as they live in harmony, this lack of concrete arrangements does not present a problem. But when parents find themselves in a combative divorce, it can lead to complex legal cases,’ says Wendy Schrama.

Legal parenthood or authority are also complicated in multiple parent families, such as when two mothers and two fathers share child-rearing responsibilities. By law, a child can have no more than two legal parents. ‘This is the subject of some debate. Some experts feel the potential for conflict should the relationship end is too great in multiple parent families. If that happens, the children might be caught in the middle,’ Wendy Schrama explains. She expects a change in the legislation to occur at some point. In the ‘Where do I belong?’ project, Schrama — together with social partners and researchers from the social sciences, geography and linguistics — is conducting research aimed at finding the best possible way to protect the interests of children who grow up with more than one home situation.

No more hugs, no? Never?

A relationship is something you share not only with a romantic partner, but with your family as well. Kirsten Buist is an associate professor of Pedagogy and studies familial relationships. She is one of only a few scholars to focus specifically on the relationships between brothers and sisters.

Currently, Kirsten is part of the #BlijfThuis research team, a European project that is studying how the measures to combat the coronavirus have affected children. Researchers want to find out how this is linked to the relationships between brothers and sisters.

The ‘Where do I belong?’ research project is part of the interdisciplinary EU theme ‘Dynamics of Youth. More information is available via: wendy.schrama@rug.nl.

The ‘Where do I belong?’ research project is part of the interdisciplinary EU theme ‘Dynamics of Youth. More information is available via: wendy.schrama@rug.nl.

If you put an arm around a loved one, or shaking someone’s hand when meeting them for the first time: since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the act of touching other people is no longer the most normal thing in the world. But what kind of effects will social distancing have on society in the long term? Dr Anouk Keizer, associate professor of Experimental Psychology, is conducting research in this area. ‘As far as I know, no studies have been conducted in which touch deprivation or social isolation were the variables manipulated. No studies in which half the test subjects lived “normally” and the other half was required to spend a number of weeks sequestered at home. Such a study is completely infeasible, of course — except during a coronavirus lockdown. In that regard, I’m interested to see what social isolation does to society in the broad sense. I think we stand to learn a great deal about the importance of touch.’

Keizer’s research will conclude at the end of this year. Despite the fact no results are available yet, it is evident to the researcher that people find it extremely difficult to maintain social isolation. Especially now that the measures to prevent the spread of the virus have been relaxed. ‘You can see an increasing tendency for people to seek one another out and that they clearly miss physical touch. Confronting that presence in painful situations and hugging them in greeting were automatic gestures, a means of communication. You don’t get that out of your system overnight.’

Relationships

For updates, see bit.ly/blijfhuisonderzoek (in Dutch).
As Associate Customer Success Manager for LinkedIn, Florian de Roo van Alderwerelt (27) helps businesses learn to use digital tools to find the right employees and make contact in a personalised way. ‘I find it really special that I’m able to contribute to connections that have the potential to change people’s lives.’

**How did you end up at LinkedIn?** During a work placement at a law firm, I realised that I wanted to do something else after graduation. There was a course on companies like Facebook and Google that I found so interesting, I decided to look for a job in the technology sector. I started out as Client Happiness Manager for a small media agency in Amsterdam, Media Distillery. The experience I gained there ultimately helped me land this job at LinkedIn.

**What do you miss most about your time as a student?** ‘The relationships with my fellow students; we shared a closeness you don’t typically get with colleagues.’

**What do you enjoy most about your work?** ‘We’re given a great deal of freedom and there is room for creativity. The company also takes really good care of its employees. The food is good and there’s a barista in the office, but they also offer events and workshops so you can continue to develop your talents — not only professionally, but as a person, too.’

**So what’s next?** ‘I think it would be quite exciting to be a manager and lead my own team. Not only to achieve goals as a team, but to make good use of each team member’s unique talents and interests. Hopefully, I’ll have the chance to do so at LinkedIn, because it’s a really great company to work for.’

---

**The relationships with fellow students involve a closeness you don’t typically get with colleagues’**

---

A longer version of this interview will also be published on DUB, Utrecht University’s independent news site. Visit dub.uu.nl for all the latest news and background information on our academic community.
For the second time in a relatively short period of time, the Utrecht University Fund has received a large legacy. Professor van der Maas, who passed away on 2 June 2020, named the Fund as his sole beneficiary. His purpose was to see his legacy spent for the benefit of students who, through no fault of their own, have encountered financial or emotional problems. This remarkable legacy, which is expected to exceed one million euros, will enable the Utrecht University Fund to help a great many UU students for years to come. Together with the University, the Fund is now working out exactly how the money will be spent.

J

Joop van der Maas was born in Oosterland, in the province of Zeeland, on 21 September 1936, as the only child of Leendert Marinus van der Maas and Pieternella Cornelia Wagemaker. He grew up on his parent’s farm, surrounded by vast expanses of pastureland and country estates. Even in primary school, Joop proved to be a clever pupil and a quick learner. Shortly after the war, he became one of only a few children in his village to attend the Higher Civic School in Zierikzee.

North Sea flood
His carefree childhood in rural Zeeland was brutally interrupted by the devastating North Sea flood of 1953. The flood was a traumatic experience that Joop preferred not to talk about. Because his family home was destroyed by the flood, Joop was evacuated to Hilversum. There, he graduated from secondary school at the Nieuwe Lyceum with a science-focused subject package, after which he enrolled in the Chemistry programme at what was then known as ‘Utrecht State University’.

Exceptional student
In those days, attending university was still a rare achievement — particularly for someone born into a farming community. But Joop was an exceptional student who found his path in science. After graduating with a major in Chemistry in 1959, he set up a doctoral research project aimed at infrared (or vibrational) spectroscopy. He defended his doctoral thesis — Potassiumumbromide disk sampling for infrared spectrometry — on 11 October 1965. Van der Maas was appointed a member of senior academic staff and, from 1966, a lecturer in the Analytical Chemistry department at the university in Utrecht. The crowning achievement of his academic career came in 1980, when he was appointed Professor of Spectrochemical Analysis at the Faculty of Chemistry.

Passionate lecturer
Joop van der Maas was a passionate lecturer who was eager to share his knowledge and knew how to generate enthusiasm in his students. Teaching was never a rote activity for him. His lectures, in which he would gesticulate wildly in an attempt to mimic the movements of molecules, made an indelible impression on countless students. As a PhD supervisor, he was demanding and critical, but also able to motivate and encourage his candidates while allowing them a large amount of freedom.

Love for the field
Van der Maas published over two hundred articles and books over the years, both alone and with co-authors, earning him a reputation as an international authority in his field of study. Love for the field and the conviction that there was a great deal left to discover kept him involved in those academic circles even after receiving emeritus status in 2001. Until the start of the coronavirus pandemic, he continued to visit De Uithof nearly every day. On 2 June, he suffered cardiac arrest while riding his bicycle and subsequently died.

Joop van der Maas was a warm individual who took a genuine interest in his students. Fear of drowning in the 1953 flood, evacuation and living with a host family had shaped him to a strong degree. As a result, he felt a particular affinity for disadvantaged students. His motto was: unforeseen events are always a possibility in life, and everyone deserves a second chance. This credo was certainly a factor in his dedication to helping those students who carried some extra burden, as well as his decision to name the U Fund as the sole beneficiary of his estate.

A longer version of this article is available at uu.nl/illuster.

Joop van der Maas was born in Oosterland, in the province of Zeeland, on 21 September 1936, as the only child of Leendert Marinus van der Maas and Pieternella Cornelia Wagemaker. He grew up on his parent’s farm, surrounded by vast expanses of pastureland and country estates. Even in primary school, Joop proved to be a clever pupil and a quick learner. Shortly after the war, he became one of only a few children in his village to attend the Higher Civic School in Zierikzee.

North Sea flood
His carefree childhood in rural Zeeland was brutally interrupted by the devastating North Sea flood of 1953. The flood was a traumatic experience that Joop preferred not to talk about. Because his family home was destroyed by the flood, Joop was evacuated to Hilversum. There, he graduated from secondary school at the Nieuwe Lyceum with a science-focused subject package, after which he enrolled in the Chemistry programme at what was then known as ‘Utrecht State University’.

Exceptional student
In those days, attending university was still a rare achievement — particularly for someone born into a farming community. But Joop was an exceptional student who found his path in science. After graduating with a major in Chemistry in 1959, he set up a doctoral research project aimed at infrared (or vibrational) spectroscopy. He defended his doctoral thesis — Potassiumumbromide disk sampling for infrared spectrometry — on 11 October 1965. Van der Maas was appointed a member of senior academic staff and, from 1966, a lecturer in the Analytical Chemistry department at the university in Utrecht. The crowning achievement of his academic career came in 1980, when he was appointed Professor of Spectrochemical Analysis at the Faculty of Chemistry.

Passionate lecturer
Joop van der Maas was a passionate lecturer who was eager to share his knowledge and knew how to generate enthusiasm in his students. Teaching was never a rote activity for him. His lectures, in which he would gesticulate wildly in an attempt to mimic the movements of molecules, made an indelible impression on countless students. As a PhD supervisor, he was demanding and critical, but also able to motivate and encourage his candidates while allowing them a large amount of freedom.

Love for the field
Van der Maas published over two hundred articles and books over the years, both alone and with co-authors, earning him a reputation as an international authority in his field of study. Love for the field and the conviction that there was a great deal left to discover kept him involved in those academic circles even after receiving emeritus status in 2001. Until the start of the coronavirus pandemic, he continued to visit De Uithof nearly every day. On 2 June, he suffered cardiac arrest while riding his bicycle and subsequently died.

Joop van der Maas was a warm individual who took a genuine interest in his students. Fear of drowning in the 1953 flood, evacuation and living with a host family had shaped him to a strong degree. As a result, he felt a particular affinity for disadvantaged students. His motto was: unforeseen events are always a possibility in life, and everyone deserves a second chance. This credo was certainly a factor in his dedication to helping those students who carried some extra burden, as well as his decision to name the U Fund as the sole beneficiary of his estate.

A longer version of this article is available at uu.nl/illuster.
A vaccine is the only thing that can get us out of this crisis

Without a conscious effort on his part, Marc Bonten became a famous face of COVID-19. In recent months, the medical microbiologist and Professor of Medical Microbiology at Maastricht University and the UMC Utrecht has appeared frequently on the news, as have his colleagues Patricia Brujinjing and Anne Wensing. “These days, we don’t have to spend a lot of time explaining the relevance of our research,” Bonten says with a grin. “Cool” might not be the right word, but it definitely has significance.” The COVID-19 pandemic arrived at a point when he was seriously wondering what contribution he could still make to research into antibiotic resistance. “While resistant bacteria is still pose an enormous threat to global health, here in the Netherlands, we’ve more or less answered all the relevant questions. To really make a difference, you would have to travel to Asia or Africa. That’s not a step I am willing to take.”

While studying Medicine in the 1980s, Marc Bonten developed a fascination with infectious diseases. While he began by researching life-threatening viruses such as HIV, his focus quickly shifted to bacteria. Bonten developed into an international expert in the field of antibiotic resistance. And then came the coronavirus. Since then, the pandemic has become the subject of virtually all research being conducted in his department.

Bonten is optimistic regarding the introduction of a vaccine and expects further improvements in connection with the treatment of COVID-19 as well. ‘All the knowledge in the world is being deployed for this purpose and the speed is breathtaking. Even so, many more people will become ill. And it is also so that treatment doesn’t begin until they arrive in the hospital. So far, a vaccine is the only thing that can get us out of this crisis. Let’s all hope that soon, we have a number of them.’
Past and present

**Introduction**

*It is a familiar image: every year, in mid-August, thousands of first-year students from both the research university and the university of applied sciences fill the streets of Utrecht. For many new students, the Utrecht Introduction Time (UIT week) marks the beginning of their time at university in Utrecht, when they leave their familiar surroundings behind to come to the city. Led by senior student mentors, these first-years explore the pubs, cafés and student associations Utrecht has to offer. The 1999 group, as it happens, very nearly made it into the Guinness Book of World Records. By arranging themselves into the UIT week logo on the Neude square, the thousand students seen in this photo broke the world record for largest ‘living mosaic’. Unfortunately for them, someone else broke the record again before the Utrecht students could be entered into the book.*

1999

*It’s probably not what they pictured when they thought about starting university. No strolling about, exploring the city, but taking a 360-degree virtual tour from behind your computer. Instead of a pub crawl, an online pub quiz. And the student associations? They are doing their best to attract new members via social media. Thanks to the coronavirus pandemic, the 2020 UIT week could not take place as usual. The relaxed measures did, however, make it possible to visit museums in small groups or dine out at the student association dining halls. All, of course, with designated walking routes marked out on the ground and 1.5 metres of social distance. Such activities, like the crew-rowing workshop in the photo, were the things closest to a normal student orientation. But breaking the world record for a living mosaic? That was not in the cards this time.*

2020

*Cor Mulder and Robin van Lonkhuijsen, ANP Foto.*
A life-long connection to Utrecht

My job is to help companies comply with environmental protection laws through consultancy and legal procedures. The ultimate goal of my job is to show companies how they stand to benefit from increasing the sustainability of their operations. That benefit might take the form of more sustainable end products, a better climate for employees or even financial advantages.

In the hustle and bustle of everyday life, we don’t always take the time to reflect on how we relate to the environment or the larger world, but because of the current pandemic crisis, I think that is starting to change. We are socially isolated, yet in a certain sense more connected with one another than ever. Now, for instance, I make time for discussion with colleagues regarding how we can improve the environment.

During my Master’s programme in Utrecht, it became clear to me that both environmental and human rights issues were a crucial part of my ambitions. In Utrecht, I learned to explore off the beaten path, to have greater empathy and to get to know other cultures. This led me to realise how all human beings are interconnected.

And those connections can be quite strong. I still have a loyal group of friends I made during my time in Utrecht. We keep in touch on a weekly basis, even though we now live scattered around the globe. That is the greatest gift that Utrecht University has given me.

It’s important to me to maintain a relationship with UU. Which is why I gladly help out at education fairs and during events in Brazil, I share my experiences with prospective UU students during the pre-departure events. Those events are now being held online thanks to COVID-19. While online events are effective, I find I’m better able to answer questions from future students at the face-to-face events.

‘I still keep in touch with my friends from university on a weekly basis’

Juliana Marcussi (LLM International Business Law, 2009) is head of environmental law with a large law firm in São Paulo. She earned her law degree in environmental law from Pace University (New York City), after which she returned to Brazil in 2016.

Tips

25 years of Illuster

Interviews with professors about their research and conversations with alumni about their careers: that was Illuster in 1995, and that is more or less what it is today. Yet those who do a bit of digging in the archives will find considerable differences between the former Illuster and the Illuster of today. Take the ‘Life after graduation’ column, for instance. While this column has been around since the 1990s — when it was known as ‘The big leap’ — it was not unusual in those days for the interviewee to be a 36-year-old who had just earned their first academic degree.

The Illuster archive is missing two previous editions: number 20 and number 60. If you happen to have these in your bookcase or attic, please email us at alumni@uu.nl.

The ultimate goal of my job is to show companies how they stand to benefit from increasing the sustainability of their operations. That benefit might take the form of more sustainable end products, a better climate for employees or even financial advantages.
Professionalism in an era of change

The last few decades have been marked by rapid and varied changes. These changes have had dramatic consequences for those in the workforce as well. For example, professionals have had to find new ways to work together as a result of the coronavirus pandemic; the emergence of the internet has had a major impact on the availability of information; and the acceleration of technological developments has resulted in the automation of an increasing number of tasks. The free course entitled ‘Professionalism in an era of change’ will offer an overview of how these changes have influenced the working lives of professionals and have forced them to adapt in response. In addition to an in-depth understanding of these changes, participation in the course will yield a road map for a new perspective, a paradigm shift and a way forward.

Feike Sijbesma talks about the world of tomorrow

Due to the COVID-19 measures, the Opening of the Academic Year was characterised by small-scale encounters. One of these was a college tour in TivoliVredenburg featuring UU alumnus Feike Sijbesma. He is responsible for increasing sustainability at chemical concern DSM and was named the most influential Dutch person of 2018. This spring and summer Sijbesma spoke with students about the world of tomorrow. He asserted that the time has come for a complete reset of our society.

Collaborating with students

The Thematic Interdisciplinary Challenge (TIC) is a new educational concept, developed for both students and professionals. During the TIC course, you will explore how your knowledge and specific skills can help find solutions to urgent societal issues while working in an interdisciplinary team. You can choose from the following issues: Green Teens, Drowning Deltas and Contesting Governance. No prior substantive knowledge is required.

SING ALONG WITH US
Presenting the new University Anthem

Last year, the Executive Board launched a competition for a new university anthem to be played during UU academic ceremonies. The jury received more than thirty submissions. The winning entry was written by Rosa Falkenburg, an alumnus who works at Parnassos cultural centre.

To listen to the new University Anthem and download the lyrics, visit uu.nl/universiteitslied.

By Rosa Falkenburg, an alumni who works at Parnassos cultural centre.

Win this book!

Woolloomooloo – The first fifty years

How does one (remotely) celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Woolloomooloo student disco? Answer: with a book filled with wild stories about epic nights, some of which took place decades ago. And with hundreds of photographs that provide evidence of nights that would otherwise be nothing but fuzzy memories. Leaf through its pages and see and read how generations of students have danced, flirted, offered toasts and sang aloud at this iconic place on the Janskerkhof.

We will select three winners to receive books, drawn from among our readers who correctly answer the question: Which then-famous DJ performed on the opening night of the Woolloomooloo student disco? Answer: with a book wonloomooloo50.nl.

Don’t wait; go to bit.ly/woolloomooloo50 and register for a chance to win. The book is also available for sale for €29.95; it can be ordered via woolloomooloo50.nl.

EDUCATION FOR PROFESSIONALS

Last year, the Executive Board launched a competition for a new university anthem to be played during UU academic ceremonies. The jury received more than thirty submissions. The winning entry was written by Rosa Falkenburg, an alumnus who works at Parnassos cultural centre.

To listen to the new University Anthem and download the lyrics, visit uu.nl/universiteitslied.

Going ahead, we will celebrate the 385th anniversary of our university, the Dies Natalis. In the new year ahead, we will celebrate the 385th anniversary of our university. The Dies Natalis celebrations will kick off a festive anniversary year.
My father used to have a riddle that he liked to pose to children. ‘What’s the difference between a dead bird?’ ‘Between a dead bird and what?’ I’d ask despairingly. ‘No, I’m asking you: what’s the difference between a dead bird?’ It drove me crazy. The answer, if it were even possible, brought me still closer to my wits’ end: ‘One of his legs is the same length.’ In the joke, a word that can only function in relation to another — between — is used with no relationship in sight! It was a joke between me and my father — although I’m not at all sure how it got there, between us.

Anyway, the ‘between’ in the riddle does actually relate to something, namely all the ‘in-betweens’ found in the reality in which we live. My father’s nonsense is effective because it contains some sense as well. Absurdity can exist only by the grace of reality itself. But is the opposite also true? Do the two share a reciprocal relationship? Can the truth exist without falsehood? In mathematics, in any case, it cannot. That field even speaks of reductio ad absurdum, which is Latin for ‘reduction to absurdity’. It is a type of argument, which works as follows: you want to prove a certain statement is true, so you therefore assume that statement to be false. If you can identify a contradiction within that assumption, you’ve done it: because denying the statement yields a contradiction, the statement must be true.

Obviously, this only works in mathematics, where there are no shades of grey between true and false. In our world, by contrast, things are rarely so black and white.

Perhaps it would be better to think of the relationship between reality and absurdity as a kind of Stockholm syndrome in which the hostage develops sympathy for the person holding them captive. But who is the hostage and who the captor? From my perspective, it’s quite clear: I live in reality but with a tendency towards the absurdity which holds us all hostage. I seldom read works of non-fiction, for instance, because I often find more truth in fiction. A fantastic story that never actually happened can still touch your heart. The fact that such stories are often inspired by reality is beside the point: that is the strength of that relationship. And so I live in an in-between state, with these lines from Guillaume van der Graft as my motto:

> There is no rhyme or reason to anything except in a poem.

**Jan Beuving**

Jan studied at Utrecht University for nine years, completing a Bachelor’s programme in Mathematics (2008) and a Master’s programme in the History and Philosophy of Science (2009). After that, he became a comedian and cabaret artist. See janbeuving.nl for his performance schedule.