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## Starting university

Starting a study at university is a big step. How big, depends on what you did before. If you come from secondary school in the Netherlands, you will find many aspects that work differently than at secondary school, both in rules and school culture. If you moved to the Netherlands for your studies, you will potentially also find differences in national culture. For those who did another study before, the difference will probably be the smallest. Irrespective, for everyone it is valuable to be aware of the rules and culture and the potential differences with earlier experiences.

In this section, we will slowly zoom in: we start at the university level, then go to the program and end at the students and staff (see figure 1). We do realize this is a long read, but we think it is worth it: if you fully read it, you will have a better understanding of how a university works, which will help you become far more independent as a student.



Figure 2. The demolished main building at the Keizer Karel plein after the Second World War.

### Getting to know the university

Welcome at the Radboud University (RU)! Did you ever ask yourself why the university is called “Radboud” University? Might be handy to check when someone asks you. And why the university is located at this particular campus? Did you know the university actually used to be right in the city center, like many other universities? The main building was even at the Keizer Karel Plein (see Figure 2)! And that the university actually turned [100 years](https://www.ru.nl/en/about-us/radboud-100-years) last year? Many things happened in the meantime. To help you answer all these questions, optionally read the short history [here](https://www.ru.nl/en/about-us/history-and-identity/history-of-the-radboud-university) and an explanation of the name [here](https://www.ru.nl/en/about-us/history-and-identity/the-name-radboud).

Nowadays, the RU has over 24 thousand [students](https://www.ru.nl/en/about-us/organisation/facts-and-figures) and more than six thousand employees (counted in fulltime jobs), with a wide range of tasks. About half of those employees work in academic positions; that is, they perform research tasks and often also teach. That is also true for your staff: most teachers you have spend about half their time on research (and potentially some on management). Next to that, there is a lot of management and support personnel, to help the university run smoothly. The university is led by the [executive board](https://www.ru.nl/en/about-us/organisation/executive-board), including the Rector Magnificus.

The university consists of [seven](https://www.ru.nl/en/about-us/organisation/faculties) faculties, plus many support units (for an overview, see [here](https://www.ru.nl/en/about-us/organisation/organisation-chart)). The most well-known faculties for you are the Faculty of Social Sciences (the Maria Montessori building) and the Faculty of Science (the Huygens building). Faculties organize everything that is relevant for a combination of related study and research programs and are led by a Dean. In practice, you mostly have something to do with the university and faculty if it is related to the physical and digital facilities, like subscribing for courses, booking rooms. It also means that often scheduling, communication and rules are better streamlined *within* a faculty than *between* faculties, which might sometimes cause issues for you when you have a course at the Faculty of Science.

A close-up of a logo

Description automatically generated Each faculty in turn has both one or more research institutes and an educational institute. An example research institute is the [Donders Institute for Brain, Cognition and Behavior](https://www.ru.nl/donders/), of which you probably saw the recognizable red d (figure 3) on slides and in the building. Most AI staff affiliated with the AI program are part of the Donders Institute, next to their appointment at the educational institute. Each educational institute houses multiple study programs. At Social Sciences, for example also Psychology and Pedagogical Sciences are taught, among [others](https://www.ru.nl/en/about-us/organisation/faculties/social-sciences/education). At the faculty of Science, also Computer Science and Biology are taught, among [others](https://www.ru.nl/en/about-us/organisation/faculties/science/education). Programs are either a Bachelor or Master program, with some Bachelor programs having multiple Master programs. On top, there are some Master program which do not have their Bachelor program (yet), like the [Cognitive Neuroscience](https://www.ru.nl/en/education/masters/cognitive-neuroscience-research?gclid=Cj0KCQjwmICoBhDxARIsABXkXlKrMFJbUoyqPfHY7lkfv-pnqHU-nhQdRsKpqU_BvQ_ZTL2Vx_tqYp8aAtayEALw_wcB) master.

Did you consider the identity of the university and the program (part of Faculty of Social Sciences, emphasis on psychology/neuroscience) when you applied for the program? If so, how? If not, what do you think about it?

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| No, when I made the decision, I made it based on the specific curriculum given on the website, which is mostly technical, but despite that it is marketed as a psychology/neuroscience program. I think that shows the disconnect between what the university want the program to be vs what AI mostly is in practice. Which results in the mess that is the AI program. |

Now you might ask why this is relevant for you. The first reason is to help you somewhat understand how a university works and broaden your perspective on your studies and student life. The second reason has more direct value. By becoming a member of our academic community, **you now have the right to make use of, and contribute to, almost all the facilities and courses of all faculties and the central university**. This can really enrich your [student life](https://www.ru.nl/en/students/student-life). The options include:

* Taking **courses in any other program**, as long as you fulfil the prerequisites. To see what other programs offer, see their [course guides](https://www.ru.nl/courseguides/). Note that you even can follow courses at [other universities](https://www.ru.nl/courseguides/socsci/master/artificial-intelligence/general-information/following-courses-other-universities/) in the Netherlands, or join programs in international [partner universities](https://www.ru.nl/radboudinternational/english/internationalisation/international-network/). Both those options do require more preparation.
* Enjoying and contributing to **student organizations** (sport, social, cultural, international, ideological, etc.) across the university. See for the full overview [here](https://www.ru.nl/en/students/student-life/student-organisations). There is something for close to everyone and regularly new our founded. Also, these organizations again organize themselves, with umbrella organizations, such as NSSR for sports, Kompanio for Study associations of Social Sciences and Olympus for Study associations of the Faculty of Science (see figure 1).
* Informing and contributing to **participatory bodies**. That is, at each level, students have an influence on policy in the respective participatory body. At the program level this is the [Degree Program Committee](https://www.ru.nl/socialsciences/stip/programme-information/artificial-intelligence/points-contact/degree-programme-committee/), at the faculty the [Faculty Student Council](https://www.ru.nl/socialsciences/stip/facilities-support/participational-bodies/faculty-student-council/) and at the university the [University Student Council](http://www.numedezeggenschap.nl/).
* Make use of **support facilities** at each level. For example, there is a lot of [student support](https://www.ru.nl/en/students/student-support) at the central level, including both individual support (including psychologists) and a wide range of workshops and courses. The topics range from directly supporting or expanding your study (e.g., writing support, honours & going abroad), supporting your well-being, helping you arrange practical matters and preparing for your further career. See also this [infographic](https://www.ru.nl/sites/default/files/2023-08/Infographic%20-%20overview%20of%20student%20support%20at%20Radboud%20University.pdf).

How do you feel about taking part / making use of the options described above? Do you think there are interesting/valuable for you? If no, why not? If so, why?

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| **Options** | **Interesting/valuable for you? Why?** |
| Courses in other (international) programs | Potentially doing a semester abroad in a better university, for a higher probability of internships, friends, connections, etc. |
| Student organisations | CognAC had a particular group for conferences presentation that might be of interest. |
| Participatory bodies | Nothing particularly valuable stands out as of now |
| Support facilities | Nothing particularly valuable stands out as of now |

### Getting to know the AI program

The Artificial Intelligence (AI) Program in Nijmegen was founded in the early eighties under the Dutch name “Cognitiewetenschap” or “Cognitive Science”. Its main focus back then was understanding cognition with mathematical and computational modelling. The program originally only started *after* the first year. That is, students first did one year of Psychology or Computer Science and then started the Cognitive Science program. In 2002, the program was renamed to the Dutch “Kunstmatige Intelligentie” and in 2016/17 became “Artificial Intelligence. The effects of our start as a cognitive science program can still be seen today. This includes our place in the faculty of social sciences , our relative emphasis on psychology and neuroscience and… the name of our [study association](https://svcognac.nl/association/about).

Nowadays we have a five year program: a three-year Bachelor of Science (BSc) program and a two-year Master of Science (MSc) program with two [specializations](https://www.ru.nl/opleidingen/masters/artificial-intelligence). The years are sometimes referred to as B1, B2, B3 and M1, M2. Each year is separated in two semesters (S1 and S2, sometimes Fall and Spring semester) and four Periods or Quarters (Q1-4). The first and second BSc year are filled with obligatory courses, while in the third BSc year you will get have both restricted and free elective courses.

The load of courses in the program, like in all programs in countries in Europe who signed the [Declaration of Bologna](https://www.ehea.info/page-ministerial-conference-bologna-1999), are calculated in European Credits (**ECs**), as described in the European Credit Transfer and accumulation System ([ECTS](https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/inclusive-and-connected-higher-education/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system)). Each year of study is planned to be 60 EC and you acquire ECs by successfully passing courses (in the [Dutch grading system](https://www.ru.nl/currentstudents/graduation-beyond/diploma-grades/dutch-grading-system/): >5.5). In AI, typically courses are three or six ECs for respectively a quarter or semester course (note: other programs use other or no conventions). Each EC corresponds to 28 hours of study time (including everything: lectures, workgroups, exam, homework, etc). This study time is estimated by the teacher beforehand and should target the average student. That means that for students a course might require more hours, while for another student it costs less hours. Note that this also means you can choose to do fewer EC, to lessen the load. It is important to be aware that in your first year you need to acquire 42 ECs to pass the [Binding Study Advice](https://www.ru.nl/en/regulations/binding-study-advice-bsa). You can also do more EC by doing courses in other programs, to broaden or deepen your scope.

How many ECs do you plan to acquire this year? What do you think is realistically possible? Do you think you need more or fewer hours than an average student?

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| 120 ECs, For me the only constraint would be the sheer amount of homework and mandatory groups I need to attend to, otherwise if the only requirement is just exams and I could probably do 180 ECs or more. As far as studying I generally need far less time than the average student to understand a concept as I have probably had a decent amount of experience with at least half of the bachelors curriculum and a couple of masters courses combined with quite a bit more experience self-studying than the average student. |

The courses that constitute each of the years are described in the [**Course Guide**](https://ru.osiris-student.nl/onderwijscatalogus/extern/opleiding). The contents of the Course Guide are typically used to prepare for a course or choose courses. There you will find for example the distribution of courses over the first year (Figure 4):

The complicated codes (SOW-BKI\* & NWI IPK\*) are **course codes**: SOW-BKI is an abbreviation of the Dutch words “Sociale Wetenschappen” (Social Sciences) and “Bachelor Kunstmatige Intelligentie” (BSc Artificial Intelligence). Similarly, the NWI course code refers to Dutch name for the Faculty of Science. So, in the first year, you have two courses at the faculty of Science, the rest all at the faculty of Science. The course codes are unique identifiers for courses, also after courses for example changes in the curriculum, and it can be helpful to mention the course code when communicating about courses to staff.   
A grey and white list of scientific research

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

Figure 3. Overview of the courses in the first year, as found in the [course guide on Osiris](https://ru.osiris-student.nl/onderwijscatalogus/extern/opleiding).

In addition, the Course Guide also informs you about the requirements and contents of courses, including the planned form of examination. There you can also find the contact information of staff involved in a course, for any time you need to contact them in advance of a course. All the information in the Course Guide is expected to remain unchanged over the year: the contents are filled prior to the start of an academic year and then remain static.

To participate in a course, you first need to register in **Osiris**. As you already successfully did that, there is little more to say about that. Do know that in Osiris you will also see the results for your exams and see how many ECs you currently have.

When registered for the course, you can also access the **Brightspace** of a course. This shows all the dynamic information about the course you need to actually participate. In there, typically under the Overview button, you also find the **Course Manual**, which contains all the crucial information to participate in a course. Hence it is highly relevant to read the course manual, preferably early in the course. Also be aware that:

* The frontpage of Brightspace holds a calendar view on the right, with all the deadlines for your courses, assuming the teachers set them.
* There is a mobile app for Brightspace called “Pulse”, which really helps to stay up-to-date with your Brightspace announcements and deadlines. You can download it for [Andriod](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.d2l.brightspace.student.android&hl=nl&gl=US&pli=1) and [Apple](https://apps.apple.com/nl/app/brightspace-pulse/id1001688546).

Note that on top of Brightspace courses, there is also a Brightspace space for the Bachelor program, where you will find general information and news about the program (called “Programme Space – B Artificial Intelligence”.

On top, (courses in the) program use multiple direct communication channels. First and foremost this is **e-mail**. It is important to make sure you regularly check your university e-mail, to make sure you are up-to-date. You can also set e-mail notifications in for example Brightspace. Next to that, there are multiple collaboration suites in use. The officially supported platform for the university is **Teams**, which is regarded a safe environment to share files and collaborate. Other tools, like Discord, should not be used to share personal information, but can sometimes be used in courses for more direct communication. Do try to have an identifiable name if you use Discord and other external platforms for study purposes.

Lastly, one note on your digital identity in the program. You can, if you want, set your profile picture in many of the platforms, to make it more personal and make it easier for fellow students and staff to recognize you online. For Brightspace, this is done in the top-right corner, click your icon and then “Profile” to add your image. In Teams, similarly, you can find the option in the top-right corner, on your status icon and then “Manage account”. If you do the latter, the image will also be shown in Outlook next to your e-mails. This is all of course fully optional.

Can you find your way in the Course Guide, Osiris, and Brightspace? Did you read the course manual at the start of your current courses? If not: why not?

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| Yes |

Teachers who are responsible for their courses do their utmost best to give you a great course. Within the constraints offered by the program and rules, teachers often have a lot of autonomy in how they setup their courses. In addition to guidance from the program coordinators and colleagues, there are three main official sources of constraints/guidance for teachers.

Firstly, the [**Education and Examination Regulations**](https://www.ru.nl/socialsciences/stip/faculty-study-information/arrangements/education-examination-regulations/) **(EER)**. This document describes all the official rules the program and courses should adhere to. This includes for example how much time staff has to correct exams, how much time there should be between interim exams and that you should receive an example exam prior to the actual exam. But also the fraud regulations, exemptions, current program, and transition regulations (if the program changes) are in there. Hence, it is helpful to at least open the EER ones at the start of your studies, such that you know where you can find the rules when you ever need them.

*Please open the EER for the AI BSc program, which you can find* [here](https://www.ru.nl/socialsciences/stip/faculty-study-information/arrangements/education-examination-regulations/)*. See for example:*

* Article 3.13 for the RADAr test you will soon take.
* Article 4.1.7 for the regulations about example questions.
* Article 4.9 for the regulations or publishing exam results.
* Article 4.10 for your right on inspection.
* Appendix 1 for the regulations on Fraud.

What do you think about the contents of the EER? Do you think knowing about this document and its contents is relevant? Is the text accessible enough to understand?

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| The text is relatively readable and maybe slightly useful. |

Secondly, the [**Examination Board**](https://www.ru.nl/socialsciences/stip/facilities-support/support/examination-board/) (sometimes abbreviated to EB), consisting of several AI staff members, monitors compliance with the EER. That is: they check whether the program and courses adhere to the rules outlined in the EER. This includes handling requests of students concerning for example exemptions and alternative courses, plus handling complaints about exams and exam results. Also suspected cases of plagiarism are judged by the exam committee. For any such cases, it is really helpful to know the Examination Board is there to hear your case and make a ruling based on the rules and the presented facts.

Thirdly, the [**Degree Programme Committee**](https://www.ru.nl/socialsciences/stip/programme-information/artificial-intelligence/points-contact/degree-programme-committee/) **(DPC)** (see Figure 1), comprised of both AI Staff and Students, monitor the quality of the programme and offer advice to the program director on educational matters. This includes, importantly:

* Converting the outcomes of course evaluations into advice to the director and teachers, such that courses improve over the years. Previous outcomes of course evaluations can be found at the Brightspace program space.
* Handling complaints about the contents and setup of courses.
* Adapting the EER to better promote educational quality. The EERs are then, in turn, officially at the faculty level by the faculty student council, together with their staff equivalent.

The DPC is highly depended for its functioning on the input of students, both by filling in course evaluations and by contacting the DPC in case of complaints. Note: if you contact the DPC at the student e-mail address ([olc.ai@student.ru.nl](mailto:olc.ai@student.ru.nl)), the e-mail is only read by the students in the DPC.

Are you planning to fill in the course evaluation? Why (not)? And would you feel comfortable to contact an Examination Board or Degree Program Committee? Why (not)?

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| Most likely not as it would cost time and not result in anything. |

Lastly, there is direct support for you as student, namely your peer coaches, senior coaches and student advisor. The peer coaches are your closest form of support and are for the smaller questions and concerns. They will also refer you if it is too big for them. Senior coaches, who are sometimes also student advisors, can handle bigger topics and support you in your personal and professional development. Lastly and most importantly, the **student advisors** have the official role to advise you on anything related to your studies, ranging from considering to do extra courses to support on which courses to drop and from personal support to referrals to the student psychologist. When in doubt, just plan a meeting with the student advisor.

Would you ask a question to the coaches or student advisor if needed? How easy do you find it to ask questions and ask for help? Why?

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| I have already had a session with a student advisor regarding the viability of taking 120 ECs so yes. |

### Getting to know more?

This first part of this block tried to introduce you to the most important practical aspects of your life here at university: how the university works, including all the options for extra activities and how the program is organized and where you can find information. Next meeting we will go into more personal and social topics. One final question, to close off this block:

Was this information you needed? Is there anything you feel is missing and you would still like to know? It is hard to imagine you are without questions at this point in your study. Tell us your questions below and we will try to remedy any remaining gaps, starting in the peer coach meeting.

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| Does the university have any ways that it can facilitate internships? Am I able to setup a semester abroad in a US university? |