

VU Amsterdam objects and their stories:

1915-1920: lecture notes taken during Jacob Wille's Dutch lectures.

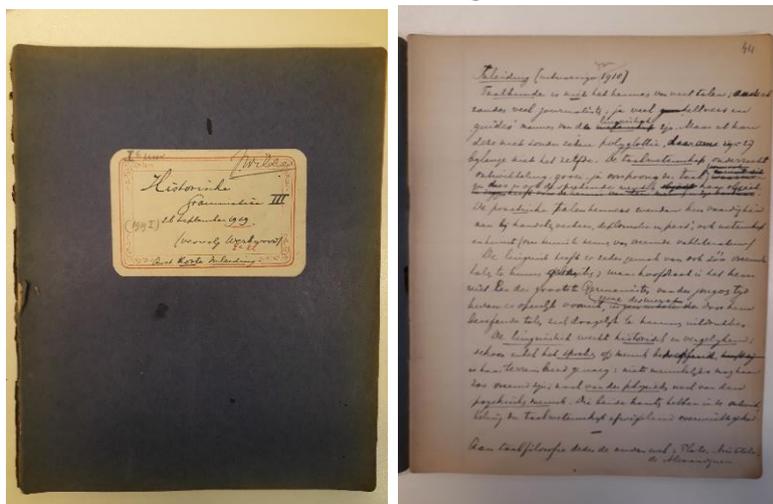


image of lecture notes taken during a 1919 lecture by the Dutch language scholar Jacob Wille on 'historical grammar'

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam's archive collection includes a number of lecture notes taken by students. These hand-written lecture notes are often word-for-word records of the lectures, meaning they can offer a glimpse into what education was like in the past.

by Ab Flipse

For a long time, Theology was the largest faculty at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, with Law as a close second. The third faculty that had existed since the university's founding, the Faculty of Arts & Philosophy, provided mainly courses for the general first-year education and lectures that were useful for the theology students. During the first decade, the most important figure in this faculty was the classical scholar [Jan Woltjer](#). [Abraham Kuyper](#), who was a professor not only of Theology but of Arts as well, gave the lectures on the Dutch language for those first ten years. These lectures were also part of the general first-year programme for arts. Lecture notes saved in the archive make it clear that Kuyper covered a multitude of topics in his lectures and was well informed on current developments (a few scanned examples can be found [here](#)).

1918: the new degree programmes in History and Dutch

In 1918, two new degree programmes – History and Dutch – were introduced, with the primary goal of preparing students for a career in teaching. The Faculty of Arts gradually expanded from that point on as well. In 1918, two professors of [History](#) were appointed: [Aart Arnout van Schelven](#) and [Adriaan Goslinga](#). Their tasks were divided chronologically: Van Schelven focused on historical events up to 1648 ([The Treaty of Munster](#)), and Goslinga dealt with the period after that. The Dutch language programme began with the appointment of [Jacob Wille](#), who had until then been a lecturer at the Christelijke Gymnasium secondary school in The Hague. Wille immediately began work on his doctoral research project and, after earning his PhD, was named full professor in 1924. The theme of his professorship was 'Dutch language and literature, general linguistics and Old High German'. For many years, Wille taught the entire degree programme on his own; he himself joked about his 'one-man programme'. Only the course in [Middle Dutch](#) was taught by the historian Goslinga. Wille taught classes on the history of literature, textual interpretation, literary theory, historical grammar, semantics, Gothic, Old Norse and general linguistics.

Taking college notes

In those days, taking 'college notes' during lectures usually meant transcribing the lesson content word-for-word as it was presented by the professor at dictation speed. Little use was made of books, and the first step in preparing for the exam (which would always be an oral exam) was always reviewing the lesson content from your lecture notes. Some lecturers naturally presented their material in a more exciting way than others. For

example, taking dictation from Abraham Kuyper, a most convincing rhetorician, was anything but dull. Student Taeke Ferwerda later reflected on Kuyper's lecture on 'Aesthetics':

'Whenever this lecture was given, the room [...] was too small, and no wonder! While Kuyper's language, even when he was improvising, was always quite cultivated and of an opulent richness, the words during this lecture were especially well attuned to the ever-so-demanding nature of the material. The desire often arose to lay down one's pen and instead only listen and enjoy. It was indeed such a torturous contrast: to be obliged to record a speech that made one's heart soar in the lowly form of hastily-written lecture notes. Something in us was set aquiver as Kuyper's eloquence brought us closer to the soul of sculpture and architecture, of music and poetry.' (T. Ferwerda, ['Kuyper als hoogleraar' \[Kuyper as professor\] 1937](#))

Jacob Wille apparently delivered his lectures in a more traditional fashion, reading aloud from his own notes. The thesis in particular demanded creativity from the students. When the time came, Wille would present the examinee with a piece of paper on which he had indicated a topic such as 'the linguistic standpoints of Willem Bilderdijk', on which the student would be expected to write and hand in an article within 14 days' time.

Series Lectionum

At the start of the year, students would receive the *Series Lectionum*, a course schedule compiled in Latin, which would list all lectures to be given anywhere at the university that academic year. Looking at the 1920-1921 *Series Lectionum* (pictured here), we can see that the Faculty of Arts had already grown quite large by that point. In other words, many of its courses were also attended by students of other faculties. As the university continued to grow, the *Series Lectionum* became larger as well.

After the war, [the Dutch degree programme began to grow](#), a trend that became particularly apparent in the 1970s, when nearly 100 new students enrolled each year. The Faculty of Arts as a whole grew as well, and a large number of new fields of study emerged. Today, the Faculty of Humanities, as it is currently known, offers [a wide range](#) of Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes. The dictation lectures of the past were definitively abandoned in the 1960s, to be replaced by a multitude of activating teaching methods.

The image shows a page from the 'Series Lectionum' (course schedule) of the University of Amsterdam for the academic year 1920-1921. The title is 'SERIES LECTIONUM' and it is issued by the 'UNIVERSITATE LIBERA QUAE AMSTELODAMI EST HABENDARUM' (Free University of Amsterdam) under the Rector 'ANNE ANEMA'. The document is organized into four main sections: 'FACULTAS IURIDICA', 'FACULTAS LITTERARUM ET PHILOSOPHIAE', 'FACULTAS THEOLOGICA', and 'FACULTAS MEDICA'. Each section lists various courses with their respective lecturers and dates. The text is in Latin and is presented in a formal, printed layout.

[The Jacob Wille archive](#) can be found in the HDC | Protestants Erfgoed [Reformed Heritage] collection.

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To see the entire online exhibition, visit: [VU Amsterdam objects and their stories | 140 years of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam](#)