

VU Amsterdam objects and their stories

140 years of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

1890-1895: Student associations

In 1880 the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam started with just five students. This number grew in the next few years, but it stayed a very select group throughout the 19th century. The students however wasted no time starting a student society, Oratorische Vereniging Da Costa [oratorical society Da Costa], soon renamed as Soli Deo Gloria. This picture from 1902 is one of the first in our collection of the student association. It is also the start of a long standing tradition: the senate photographed in front of their flag.

The Senate of 1902

By [Maarten Aalders](#) (church historian)



The senate of 1902, Photocollection Protestant Heritage | HDC, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Young people are often the starting point for change processes or even revolutions. The same applied to some followers of Abraham Kuyper. This picture of Senate Hall dates to 1902. The [VU-Corps](#) student society had emerged from years of turbulence. Since 1896, there had been two student societies: the more conservative Gereformeerde Studentenbond [Reformed Student Union] and the more progressive Corps van Studenten aan de VU [Society of Students at VU Amsterdam]. The core divide was to what extent membership of a student society meant that students observed 'Reformed principles'. A compromise was reached in 1901 and the student schism was mended. Close observation of this picture reveals new fault lines appearing, however.

[Jan Geelkerken](#) (I.V.M.B.O.) is seated to the far left. He had explicit opinions, was financially independent and entered into a dispute with the Reformed Synod on the nature of Scriptural authority in the 1920s. Being suspended as a minister in 1926, he was subsequently deposed. He appears next to his close friend [Jan Netelenbos](#) (1879–1934, Demosthenes), who also had a conflict with the church. Because of his equally deviant view of Scriptural authority, he was deposed as a minister in 1920. Third to the left is the good-humoured [J.A. de Wilde](#) (1879–1956, Forum).

Throughout his life, he was a loyal member of the Reformed Churches and the Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP), which he served as a Minister twice. He is adjacent to [Herman Rutgers](#) (I.V.M.B.O.), who dedicated his life to the [Nederlandsche Christen Studenten Vereniging](#) [Dutch Christian Student Association]. While the Reformed Synod would later disapprove of such membership, it did not do so at this time. Another factor is that Herman Rutgers preferred harmony to conflict, unlike Geelkerken and Netelenbos. To the far right is [Aart van Schelven](#) (1880–1954). He renounced his membership of the ARP in the 1930s and joined the National Front for some of the war years. As a result, VU Amsterdam dismissed him as Professor of History after the war. The flag-bearer is his brother Arnout J. van Schelven (1882–1932), who is not known to have committed any 'atrocities' (and who has not merited an entry in the Dutch Biography Portal).