

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. Current day, about a 1000 students are a member of LANX, the successor of this first student society. There are now also many other student associations and initiatives available, the ambitious and inclusive VU FAM being one of the latest. FAM co-founder and current vice-president give their reaction on this photo of their predecessors.

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).

F.A.M Family of Academic Minds: 2019 - ∞

By Danny Soekarnsingh

In 2019 [FAM](#) started at the Vrije Universiteit with just 5 students. The number of students, however humble and small, grew rapidly because of an unapologetic vision. The vision to manifest a platform in which the world could call FAM their home. Accordingly, the number of students grew and with that a consortium of perspectives, methods and lived experiences became a tight knit network of visionaries. To house the world for the betterment of academia, post academia and in macro the world requires a foundation that is based upon acceptance, respect, mutuality and transparency. Therefore starting from scratch gave us the opportunity to totally reimagine what a student organization can be in the now and the potential to become in the future. To realize young people are the seeds that will be the fruit bearing trees of the future, allows us to harness our diversity in order to provide the fertile ground which FAM pleads to offer students from all over the world. To become informed and formed by transcending borders is the adaptivity, resilience and excellence that FAM is synonymous with.

And in 2021

By Parwana Rezai

Two years later now, FAM is holding tight to the same vision that led to its growth. The community which started with just 5 students now is a fully functional established student association with a board, several committees and over one hundred members, of which students range from first generation students to students from bi-cultural backgrounds and more. While we pride ourselves with the level of diversity and inclusion we uphold in our representation and every step we take, we are aware that our work is not complete yet. Rather, we believe that this fertile ground is just starting to bloom with flowers of inspiration: it is the beginning of the necessary, fundamental change that will be brought. The image of VU's senate of the first student organization in 1902 depicts what was deemed to be seen as revolutionary for that time period. Looking back at this image now, it would alarm many of us, seeing the faces of only white men in formal attire upholding the patriarchal image. Therefore, the differences between the senate of 1902 and VU FAM is a reminder that although it is definitely good to appreciate progress made within the respective years, We should remember that no matter how revolutionary a certain image seems to be, progress should be the catalyst for more.

Danny Soekarnsingh is the co-founder of [FAM](#) and Parwana Rezai is the current vice president.