

Being a University: a conversation through art

Explore the artwork "Being a University" together and reflect on and discuss what you see. The goal isn't to work towards a solution, but rather towards a joint exploration of the tapestry, its themes, and different perspectives on those.

Use the artwork to reflect on the university as an institution and part of society, or on themes such as academic freedom, activism, and funding. By doing so, practice dialogue skills, such as active listening, becoming aware of your own and others' perspectives, and coping with discomfort.

Background

At the end of 2025, artist Mart Veldhuis designed the tapestry based on three dialogue sessions with students and staff about who or what the university is, and what they believe it should be. Starting in the spring of 2026, the artwork will travel throughout and beyond UU to inspire follow-up conversations.

The artwork is part of the Comenius educational innovation project 'Fostering an Open Mind and Open Attitude in Higher Education' in which the following learning activities have also been developed:

- Open Minds: a digital game that stimulates perspective taking
- Playing Perspectives: a game design toolkit to explore different perspectives
- The Square: a creative dialogue methodology to practice dialogue skills and facilitate conversations on sensitive or complex issues.

Please contact Hiljanne van der Meer (h.j.vandermeer-9@umcutrecht.nl) to reserve the artwork.

On Campus

Supplies needed

- Artwork 'Being a University'
- A moderator (optional)

Please note:

This activity is based on the artwork "Being a University." This tapestry is mounted on a freestanding frame and can be loaned (free of charge) for use in educational settings and/or at UU events.

The teacher's guide includes suggestions for organizing and facilitating the dialogue based on the artwork. Alternatively, a trained moderator can be requested (subject to availability).

Set-up classroom

A classroom or hall approximately 3 meters wide, 1 meter deep, and 2.5 meters high for the artwork (including frame). There should also be sufficient space for the group of students to stand in front of the artwork. If necessary, move chairs and tables aside to create sufficient space.

Step 1- Preparation

Book a suitable room (allow for sufficient preparation and dismantling time) and the artwork. Arrange for a moderator or choose to facilitate the conversation yourself and prepare for this.

Step 2 - Preparation

Determine (in consultation with the moderator) the dialogue method and, if necessary, which theme/part of the artwork you want to focus on. You could also choose to view the artwork as a whole, and let the participants' observations and input guide the dialogue.

Step 3 - Preparation

Prepare the room: ensure there is sufficient space and assemble the frame and artwork according to the instructions.

Step 4- During class

Introduce the moderator and the learning objective of the session within the broader context of the course. The moderator then asks the participants to position themselves around the artwork, and starts and guides the 30-45 minute dialogue. See suggestions in the teacher's guide if you, as the teacher, would like to moderate the dialogue yourself.

Step 5- During class

After a short break the conversation will be followed up by a short reflective conversation, in which participants reflect on both the methodology – how did you experience having a conversation using this method? – and the content – did the conversation change your view or deepen your insight into the issue?

Step 6- Evaluation

A dialogue based on "Being a University" offers valuable opportunities to further integrate the insights and experiences gained into the students' learning process. In a follow-up activity, they could, for example, further develop their reflection, delve deeper into the topic discussed, or develop a different format for dialogue. See the teacher manual for suggestions.