

# Studying community engagement of internationals to develop a new university layout that helps internationals connect to local communities

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## Design brief

The Public Building graduation studio's task is to design a hybrid building for higher education in The Hague. This design project aims to not only meet the educational needs of universities like Leiden University and TU Delft, which are expanding into urban hubs like The Hague and Rotterdam, but also encourages public engagement and interaction among residents, businesses, governmental institutions, and university programs. The vicinity surrounding The Hague's central station is particularly advantageous in terms of its proximity and accessibility, but in high demand due to the increasing need for governmental offices.

To address these space limitations, the studio has called for the development of a hybrid building design. This approach aims to efficiently condense program components within a limited site footprint by using a vertical architectural configuration, allowing diverse functions to seamlessly coexist and improve space efficiency. Apart from its architectural and functional significance, the hybrid building design will have a positive transformative impact on the nearby urban landscape. It will create new possibilities for education and living in the city, ultimately contributing to revitalizing and enhancing the urban fabric (Public Building Graduation Studio, 2023).

## Design problem

Many people from abroad come to a new country or city for numerous reasons such as pursuing their education. The number of international students choosing Dutch universities has more than doubled in the last 10 years. In 2021-2022, forty percent of first-year students at Dutch universities were international students (CBS, 2022). International students that go abroad to study in a different country often face challenges in adapting to their new environment. Several studies have been done on this topic. For example, a study of Rienties et al. (2022) shows that international students score significantly lower on social, personal, and emotional adjustment than domestic students. Also, international students often find themselves feeling excluded and longing for more contact with Dutch students (Landelijke Studentenvakbond et al., 2022). This shows that students do not necessarily want to be understood, but rather want to emerge in the new culture. In addition to these studies, own experience has shown that when having a conversation at university in a group of students both local and international, local students tend to shift to native language when interacting with each other even with internationals are still around. Even though this is not intentional, international students might still get a feeling of detachment.

Combining this design brief, design problem, and done studies on the topic leads to the following research question: *How could social programs and activities be integrated in a university layout so that engagement of internationals in local communities will be enhanced?*

To answer this question thoroughly, the following sub-questions will be answered within a university campus context:

1. *What are the overarching social needs of international students as they seek to integrate into a new community?*
2. *How can the identification of these needs inform the development of social programs and activities that enhance engagement with the local community?*
3. *How can the spatial layout of a university campus be designed in such a way that it facilitates the integration of these social programs and activities?*

## Research goal and relevance

By answering these questions, this research aims to identify the recurring social needs of international students on their journey of engaging in a local community within a university context. By doing so, it aims to leverage this understanding to design and implement social programs and activities that enhance their engagement with the local community. Furthermore, the research aims to examine how the spatial layout of a university campus can be designed to facilitate the integration of these social initiatives, ultimately creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for international students.

This research contributes to the profession in a way that it can lead as an innovative model for other multinational universities facing challenges in bridging the gap between local communities and international students. By reimagining and enhancing the standard spatial layout of a university campus, it provides valuable insights and has the potential to spark positive transformation within the profession.

## Method

First, this research will initiate with a **review of existing literature** on social needs of international students, focusing on recurring themes and patterns on the topic. This review will inform the development of a **survey** that will be sent out to a diverse sample of international students. Second, an examination of **case studies** on successful social programs, such as the Fulbright Program, will be conducted to draw inspiration for potential social initiatives. The results obtained from the survey will serve as a reference point when reflecting on the case studies, helping to identify relevant and effective social programs. The process of **reviewing and combining information from the survey and case studies** will provide guidance in **selecting** the most fitting social programs to be incorporated into the university campus layout. Third, the chosen social programs and activities will be integrated into the layout. For this, a **review of existing literature** on fundamental principles of campus spatial layout, including themes such as circulation, accessibility, program placement, and exchange, will be conducted. By considering these design principles, the chosen social programs and activities can be placed effectively within the design.

## Bibliography

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