Hi again!

For this post, I thought I would talk to you guys about something that I am sure you are all very curious about when thinking of studying abroad in Amsterdam: Dutch culture!

When I was first applying to this program, I was drawn in by the fact that, at face value, the Netherlands does not seem all that different from the United States. I did a lot of research about this little country before coming and I was very much attracted to the fact that it seemed both different enough from home to get me out of my comfort zone and similar enough to ensure that I do not experience a huge culture shock. Just like at home in Colorado, Dutch people like to spend time outdoors, walk their dogs in the park, go on runs around the lake, and spend cold days in a cozy café. However, I soon learned that there are also many, many dissimilarities! (Not surprising, I guess, considering this is an entirely different country…)

Some of my main cultural takeaways are the famous Dutch directness (no beating around the bush here!), informal and casual greetings – not only with friends but even with professors, three kisses on the cheek as a greeting, a cookie with every tea or coffee you order, fries and bitterballen at every pub borrel you attend, huuuumuge soccer (or, rather, voetbal) culture, and, last but certainly not least, biking, biking, biking everywhere!

In addition to this, a very big difference is, of course, the monarchy! Both at home in the States and back in Poland where I am originally from, we do not have kings, queens, and royal families. The Netherlands, however, is a constitutional monarchy, meaning that it is essentially a combination of a monarchy and a democracy. (Someone please confirm this as I am not a political science major!) This means that here in the Netherlands, there is a royal family: King Willem-Alexander, Queen Máxima, and their daughters Catharina-Amalia, Alexia, and Ariane! As someone who has always been rather obsessed with the idea of living under a monarchy, this is very exciting for me. If you are also as excited about the royal family as I am, I suggest you come to Amsterdam for the spring semester, though, because that way you get to be in the country for King’s Day (King Willem-Alexander’s birthday!) unlike me… :

Oh, and just to drive home my claim that the Netherlands is very informal and casual, here is a fun fact for you. Since the country is under a constitutional monarchy, they also have a prime minister: Mark Rutte. Despite his position of importance in the country, he bikes to work. He bikes! Just like any other Dutch person! This revelation was very exciting to me, as in the States, it is unheard of for the president, or any other member of the government, to arrive at work in anything other than a luxury car. This fact about the Netherlands, however, shows just how equal everyone in the country is; whether you are the prime minister or an international student, you get around this beautiful country just like everyone else. I think that is awesome.

Until next time,

Julia :)

P.S. Here is a photo of the prime minister getting to work on his bike. I wasn’t lying!