

American Studies in Advanced English



- Blok research minor offered for 14th year by HU, English staff.
- Student evaluation of the minor as a whole 2009 to 2024: 7.6-8.4 of 10.
- Open to all Dutch and international students via kiesopmaat.nl.

Overview

With more than 331 million inhabitants, the United States has a diverse culture that is sometimes difficult to comprehend. The aim of this minor is to broaden your understanding of US history and to expose you to a cultural studies approach. Given the fact that all classes and materials will be in English, you will have a chance to improve your proficiency in one of the world languages as well.

Days of Courses

All efforts will be made to offer the courses on just two days, **Mondays and Thursdays between 8:30 and 18:00, in periods AB, September 2025 to January 2026**. All courses and tests

have been on two days in the past, and we will work to keep it that way.

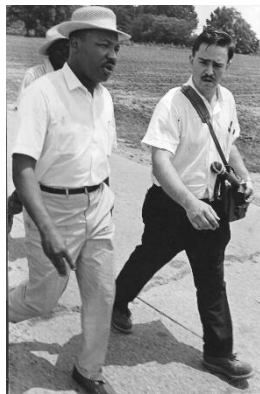
DT Students Welcome!

Due to their work schedule, **parttime (DT) students** can take the minor by attending on Thursdays and preparing for Monday classes with Canvas and a coach on Thursdays. DT students do need to be free to take tests on four Mondays during test and retake weeks.

Methods of Learning

- **Speaking:** presentations, discussions on contemporary issues, political debates, drama, and role play.
- **Writing:** essays, journals, analysis of government effectiveness, tests, and a research project taught in steps.
- **Reading:** nonfiction works, histories, cultural studies, and fiction.
- **Online:** At home students often prepare using mini-lectures and other materials posted on the learning environment.
- **Class:** lectures and workshops are usually combined, and teachers have added learning-by-doing tasks and active learning to most lessons.

- **Guest speakers:**
During Civil Rights, Harcourt Klinifelter, assistant PR director of Martin Luther King and peace activist, will be invited to meet with students.



Teachers

The English section feels lucky to have people on staff who know the culture intimately enough to be able to name its charms and shortcomings, its virtues and vices—in the same breath. See the teacher profiles for more info on the teachers.

See the course overview for more info on the course goals and tests.

Social calendar: In the past students and teachers went out to eat and celebrated Thanksgiving. Other events will be sought this year like going to Boom Chicago in Amsterdam.



Student Responses from 2018-19 evaluation

Wat vind je goed aan deze minor?

-Ik vind de inhoud van de minor heel interessant. Alle docenten hebben verstand van de stof die ze aan ons leerden. Ook vind ik het fijn dat je voor de minor maar 2 dagen in de week naar school moest en dat er, vergeleken met mijn andere opleiding, relatief weinig verslagen in zitten en meer presentaties. -De presentaties zorgden ervoor dat ik veel al in de eerste weken kon doen om zo werkdruk aan het einde van de

periode te verminderen.

-There are a lot of different subjects, which makes it really interesting.

-Interesting subjects. Some things about the U.S. are easily looked over if you aren't American. Courses which provided a broader view were for example Beliefs, Postcards, and Civil War

-De onderwerpen en opdrachten zijn leuk, gevarieerd en interessant.

-Goede variatie aan opdrachten en onderwerpen.

-Generally, it gave me insight as to how the U.S.' history influenced the way it is now. I understand why certain regions have different views than others, and can place them in a historical context. I particularly enjoyed the Government class, as it focused on more recent developments as well as historical ones.

-Very skilled teachers

-De cursussen binnen de minor zijn goed op elkaar afgestemd en het onderwerp "Amerika" is erg interessant.

-I have really enjoyed the minor.

Most assignments and courses were fun to take. Overall I really enjoyed this minor

-Alle docenten binnen de minor stijgen duidelijk ver boven de cursusinhoud uit. Dat heeft mij erg geïnspireerd en daar heb ik veel respect voor.

Free Language Testing

All work will be in English, so your written proficiency should be at a high B2 level and your speaking at a C1 level on the CEF scale. In other words, you should already be able to write a 500-word essay with clear paragraphs and a thesis, and you should also have enough active vocabulary to carry on a conversation on many subjects. Speaking or writing in British or other varieties of English is perfectly acceptable. At least one teacher speaks British English.

Students in an English Teacher Training Program, International Business and Languages (English), International Communication Management,

International Communication and Media, Journalism, and other studies in English should feel confident that their English is proficient enough.

All interested students can ask for a **free diagnostic test** to see if they are proficient enough. It is **not required**. Testing is used to determine if you are well prepared for the coursework, and advice will be offered on areas and ways to improve over the summer, if necessary. A one-hour written test can be done at home and a speaking test is taken by phone. Please email the

coordinator to request testing or with questions.



Coordinator: Tomas Pollard
Tomas.pollard@hu.nl
030 254 7786. Questions are welcome

Final List of Books for American Minor, 2024-2025

Ordering all the books at once can save on shipping costs, and checking local second-hand bookstores or buying ebooks can also lower your total price. There are copies of all the books in the HU library.

History.

Reynolds, David. America, Empire of Liberty: A New History of the United States. 2021 edition. ISBN13: 9781541675698.

Ward, Geoffrey C, Ken Burns and Ric Burns. The Civil War. ISBN13: 9780679755432.

People.

Ragone, Nick. The Everything American Government Book: From the Constitution to Present-Day Elections, All You Need to Understand Our Democratic System. ISBN13: 9781593370558.

Takaki, Ronald T. A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America. ISBN13: 978-9781609804169.

Woodward, Colin. American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America. ISBN13: 9780143122029.

Culture.

Vonnegut, Kurt. Slaughterhouse-Five. ISBN13: 9780440180296.

Profiles of the Teachers in the American Studies Minor

Four teachers are native speakers of American English who have lived from 6 months to several years in the U.S. Two teachers speak British English. Here are teachers in their own words:

Emma Wiegman - "I was born in the Netherlands and started off at the HU because I wanted to go to university and study English Language and Culture. Though I enjoyed the courses at university, it was too fast paced for me. After a year I went back to the HU to become a teacher. I didn't want to become one until I saw my mentor at my internship teach; I got so inspired. Now, I have a Masters degree in education and here I am! Chelmsford, England has a special place in my heart. I lived there for about three months; it is where I picked up my British accent and made friends for life. I go back there almost every year. Why American culture you ask? Well, as someone who's taken the American Minor myself, I exclaimed "yes" almost before I'd finished reading the question regarding me teaching some of the courses! America is such a fascinating (and relatively young) country, and I aim to show students the link between historical events and modern-day American culture and attitudes."

Jeanine van Luijn - "I was born and raised in the beautiful city of Utrecht, the Netherlands. I never had much with the United States and always thought of it as an odd country. That changed after my first trip to the United States back in 2008. I traveled to New York and New England and fell in love with the people and scenery. It wasn't until 2018 when I get back to the United States. That year I traveled from Chicago to New Orleans because I wanted to relive the roots of the jazz & blues and wanted to learn more about the history of slavery and the Civil War. That's where my love for the country grew and became a United States enthusiast. My favorite states are Vermont, Mississippi & Louisiana and my favorite city is New Orleans, mostly because of their rich and diverse cultural heritage. I teach a course on the people of the USA."

Kristina Goodnight - "Born to Texan parents, I lived in Northern California until immigrating to The Netherlands in 2008. I received my Bachelor of Arts in English and Dramatic Art at the University of California, Davis, followed by a Masters of Fine Arts in Playwriting from Saint Mary's College. I have worked as an actor, writer and teacher. As an expatriate sometimes a bit troubled by my role as an American, I have been able to develop the perspective and insight on the U.S. and its cultural influence on the world at large."

Luuk van Loon - "Even though I was born in the Netherlands, I have lived a large chunk of my life in the US. I played semi-professional baseball in the Netherlands as well as local leagues in NY State. I have also traveled, lived and worked in multiple European countries. I studied for both a Bachelor and a Masters degree in education as well as a Bachelor degree in psychology. During my studies I was interested in literature and wrote multiple papers on Native American literature. This last part is the main reason why I was interested in teaching the Go West module of the American minor as it looks at Native American culture and history as well as the expansion west and nation building."

Liz Thijssen - "Being half-British and a speaker of British English, I was asked to teach in the minor as I have a Masters degree in International Politics and Human Rights from Utrecht University. My multicultural roots have always fed a deep interest in foreign countries, cultures and politics. I ended up in education by accident, but discovered how much fun it is while teaching at a bilingual secondary school in Nijmegen where I also had the opportunity to create and teach a Masterclass in American History. After acquiring my Bachelor degree in Education, I taught at a Buddhist monk's countryside school in Cambodia. I have travelled through Laos, Indonesia, Japan and India as well as other

countries in Southeast Asia and the rest of the world. I very much enjoy teaching and discussing American politics and how its inner workings reflect, and are reflected by, society.”

Martijn Prins – “After working in the army for a while I decided to become an English teacher. I still conduct research for the army as a reserve officer and here I try to bridge the gap between theory and practice. For my master’s thesis, I won a national prize for this approach. I completed my minor in World War 2 Education, and I have always been interested in politics, history, and culture. The United States is a country I’ve been to several times and is a weak spot in my list of interests. Besides modern history, you can always talk to me about any period or civilization in history.”

Nanda van der Stap – “I was born in the Netherlands and raised in the UK where I studied law. After I graduated I moved to the US (New York) where I worked for an African charity whose aim it was to set up a school in Liberia. In the process of finalizing the various contracts I travelled to Liberia where I was forced to stay for two and a half years due to a war that broke out. Whilst teachers left the country - my idealism stayed, hence I found myself teaching. Subsequently I fell in love with teaching, which is why I enrolled for a teaching degree in the Netherlands at the end of the Liberian War. Since then I have acquired my Masters degree in teaching, a Masters degree in English literature at the Radboud University in Nijmegen, a Masters degree in Philosophy at the same university, and am currently doing a PhD in Philosophy.”

Tomas Pollard – “I grew up in East Texas with politically active parents, lived in Texas for 29 years before moving to the Netherlands, and have a PhD in English from Texas A&M University, College Station. I have worked at Texas A&M University, Blinn College (Bryan), Universiteit van Amsterdam, Radboud Universiteit, the HAN, and Utrecht Universiteit. I have lived briefly in Austin, Texas; St. Louis, Missouri and Washington, DC where I was an intern in the US House of Representatives. I greatly enjoy teaching literature, debating, creative writing and cultural analysis.”

Courses in the American Minor

The minor provides a thematic cultural studies approach to the study of the contemporary United States. Six courses, all of which are 5 ECs each, are organized into three areas: history, culture, and people. Each course has two two-hour sessions given by two teachers to diversify the viewpoints on this large and complex culture. Blended courses provide online materials to support part-time and other students who are unable to attend all courses. Inform the coordinator if you have special needs.

Period 1		
History	Culture	People
<p>Historical Backgrounds: American History to 1900</p> <p>Part a. Go West Young Man Part b. Civil War: blended course</p> <p>Tests: 2-hour test; History Fair with timeline.</p> <p>Main Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the US learn from its mistakes? • Why do so many Americans hate or distrust government? • How did the Civil War make lasting changes to American life? <p>Learning Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to treat the essential place of the Wild West and the Civil War in American history and the formation of American identity. • to interpret events and objects from the nineteenth century. <p>See the courses in period 2 on the back</p>	<p>Spirit: Cultural Identity in American Arts and Literature</p> <p>Part a. Arts: blended course Part b. Writing</p> <p>Tests: Arts portfolio; presentation on literature.</p> <p>Main Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is unique in its literature and poetry? • What arts, films, and music are seen as the ultimate expression of the American spirit? <p>Learning Goal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to appreciate and analyze American literature and art forms in their historical and cultural context. 	<p>Habits of the Heart: Core Values in American Life and Government</p> <p>Part a. Beliefs: blended course Part b. Government: blended course</p> <p>Tests: Government analysis and 2-hour test; beliefs journal.</p> <p>Main Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are core American values? • Why is the role of religion so different and dynamic? • How do the government and legal system work? How can effectiveness be measured? <p>Learning Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to study the persistent values that seem permanent in the culture or enshrined in the government and law. • to understand belief's influence on political and cultural life

Period 2		
History	Culture	People
<p>Change: Changes in the History of the United States after 1900</p> <p>Part a. Modern Times Part b. Civil Rights Movement</p> <p>Tests: journal; portfolio.</p> <p>Main Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the most important roots of change in the US: politics, religion, education, business, or the labor movement? What forces combined to make the Civil Rights Movement effective? <p>Learning Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To actively engage in discussions on a variety of topics, providing commentary on sources, and emulating processes through role play. To acquire knowledge of a number of periods of ground-breaking change in American history and culture - both by engaging with selected sources and by doing independent research. 	<p>Culture Survey: Major Stories in Twentieth-Century Culture</p> <p>Part a. Major Stories: blended course Part b. People: blended course</p> <p>Tests: Test on literature; Masterclass with a logbook on immigrants.</p> <p>Main Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How have immigrants made, and remade the culture? What major stories do Americans tell about themselves? What is the role of literature in American culture? <p>Learning Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To research the influence and roles of ethnic groups, especially immigrants, in the culture. To study a few representative stories by important authors in the US. 	<p>American Political Geography: Postcards Research Project</p> <p>Part a. Travel Part b. Research: blended course</p> <p>Tests: Research project in steps; cultural, virtual tour of a region.</p> <p>Main Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the senses of place in America? How uniform or unique are its cities and landscapes? <p>Learning Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To analyze what the roles of the sense of place are in the US. To practice applying cultural and media analysis to important contemporary subjects. To research a topic chosen by the student and approved of by the teacher.

Honours option: Let the minor coordinator know if you are interested in doing other independent Honours projects.