

American Studies in Advanced English



- Blok research minor offered for 15th year by the English team of Institute Archimedes, Hogeschool Utrecht.
- Student evaluation of the minor as a whole 2009 to 2026: 7.6-8.4 of 10.
- Open to all Dutch and international students via kiesopmaat.nl.

Overview

With more than 342 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 the US 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.

Given the assumptions challenged by the second Trump administration, some courses will reflect on how past consensus was formed. Some actions will be studied to see if they may be overreach, calculated risks, media

events, and/or rare but justifiable moves seen previously in US history. The aim will be to place Trump's acts in different lights and to reflect on the state of US and global institutions.

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 2026 to January 2027**. All courses and tests have been on two days in the past, and the aim is to keep it that way.

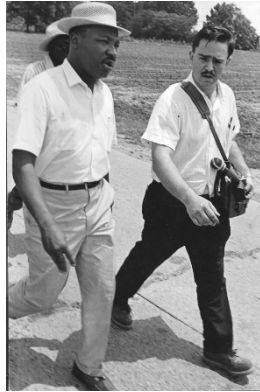
Parttime Students Welcome!

Due to their work schedule, **parttime (deeltijd) 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 on four Mondays during test and retake weeks.

Methods of Learning

- **Speaking:** presentations, discussions on contemporary issues, debates, drama, and role play.
- **Writing:** timed tests and assignments in portfolios.
- **Reading:** nonfiction works, histories, and cultural studies.

- **Online:** At home students often prepare using mini-lectures and other materials posted on the learning environment Canvas.
- **Class:** lectures and workshops are usually combined, and teachers have added learning-by-doing tasks and active learning to most lessons.
- **Guest speaker:** Harcourt Klinifelter, assistant PR director for Martin Luther King for 3 years and peace worker will be invited to meet with students. He is in his 80s, so he may join us online.



Teachers

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

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



Optional social calendar: Students and teachers usually like to go to Boom Chicago in A'dam and to celebrate Thanksgiving at the HU. Other events will be sought this year like meeting after the midterm election.

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. Two teachers speak 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 can be taken by phone or in person. Please email the coordinator to request testing or with questions.



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

Rough List of Books for American Minor 2025-2026

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 will be copies of all the books in the HU library. Some books will be added soon, and a final book list will be emailed to students by June 30.

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

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.

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

A few books may be added.

You will select a book from a list for the book club in period B.

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 to do 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. I returned to the United States in 2018. 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. My love for the country grew, and I 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 the course People.”

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 a broader perspective 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 travelled, 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 Dutch army for a while, I decided to become an English teacher. I still conduct research for the army as a reserve officer, and I try to bridge the gap between theory and practice at the HU. For my master’s thesis, I won a national prize for this approach. I completed my minor in World War II 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.”

Rudo Kupeta – “I was born in Zimbabwe but raised with Western pop culture. I am a big American culture enthusiast. I find the variance in American culture fascinating! I’ve spent the majority of my teaching career so far teaching ESL in China and travelling around Southeast Asia. Settling in the Netherlands and teaching the next generation of English teachers is so fulfilling. I find teaching things that I am passionate about--literature, culture, methodology among others--to be a dream come true.”

Tomas Pollard – “I grew up in Tyler, 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 also lived briefly in Austin, Texas; St. Louis, Missouri and Washington, DC where I was an intern in the US House of Representatives. As a child from the US Bible Belt and the only teacher in the minor with a church background, by default I was the one to put together the course Beliefs so non-churched and churched Dutch students can learn to use academic sources to study how religious groups influence communities and politics in measurable ways. Since my teens I have been attracted to cultural and sociological studies that try to make sense of how the US has become as it is, so I am excited to teach Major Stories. I also greatly enjoy teaching debating, creative writing and literature at the HU.”

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 main interests: history, culture, and people. Each course has two two-hour sessions given by two teachers to diversify the viewpoints on this multifaceted, complex country.

Period 1		
History	Culture	People
<p>Historical Backgrounds: US History to 1900</p> <p>Part a. Go West Young Man Part b. Civil War</p> <p>Tests: 2-hour test; assignment.</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 next page.</p>	<p>Spirit: Cultural Identity in US Arts and Writing</p> <p>Part a. Arts 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 cultural identity? • How many identities does the US have? <p>Learning Goal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to appreciate and analyze American art and writing in their historical and cultural context. • To inquire if the US creates stable identities with unchangeable characteristics. 	<p>Habits of the Heart: Core Values in US Life and Government</p> <p>Part a. Beliefs Part b. Government</p> <p>Tests: 2-hour test; journal based on a presentation.</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 US Society after 1900</p> <p>Part a. Modern Times Part b. Civil Rights Movement</p> <p>Tests: portfolio; timed test</p> <p>Main Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has changed in US society due to political movements? • What are the most important roots of change in the US: politics, religion, education, business, or the labor movement? • Why was the Civil Rights Movement effective? <p>Learning Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To actively engage in discussions and debates on a variety of topics, providing commentary on sources, and emulating processes through role play. • To study what sets major shifts in law and thinking in US society into motion. 	<p>Postcards from America: US Political Geography</p> <p>Part a. Major Stories Part b. US Foreign Policy</p> <p>Tests: Book club project ending in a presentation; new testing form.</p> <p>Main Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What major stories do Americans tell about their past and future? Why are some ways of storytelling dominant in a diverse cultural landscape? • How does the US policy influence other parts of the world? What influences US foreign policy? <p>Learning Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To study ways of thinking influenced by media conglomerates and partisan groups. • To analyze claims with data. • To debate about the future. 	<p>Culture Survey: Survey of Contemporary Culture</p> <p>Part a. Travel Part b. People</p> <p>Tests: cultural, virtual tour of a region; timed test</p> <p>Main Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have immigrants made and remade the US? • What are the senses of place in America? • How uniform or unique are its public spaces and landscapes? <p>Learning Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To research immigration and the contribution of ethnic groups, especially immigrants. • To study how immigration routes influence the sense of place and community across the US. • To learn how the US has ended up with varying senses of place.