

Dutch Culture: Society and Current Issues

Course syllabus 2026



summerschool
UTRECHT



Universiteit Utrecht

Dutch Culture: Society and Current Issues

About

This intensive two-week programme offers an overview of the main characteristics and historical backgrounds of present-day Dutch culture and society. Scholars from Utrecht University will provide introductions to a broad variety of topics, ranging from the lay-out of the country and its political system to contentious issues around migration and integration, the environment and climate change, and social and political stratification and polarisation. Lectures, interactive seminar sessions and group assignments are complemented by excursions and on-site discussions, including visits to The Hague, where the Dutch government is based, and the port city of Rotterdam. The goal of this course is to provide a concise overview and first insights in Dutch politics, culture and society, as a solid basis of understanding for anyone interested in these issues or in the Netherlands in general.

Period

4 – 14 August 2026

Credits

4.0 ECTS + Certificate of Attendance

Materials

Emmeline Besamusca & Jaap Verheul (eds.), *Discovering the Dutch: On Culture and Society of the Netherlands* (Amsterdam 2014)

Faculty

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Format

This course is designed for face-to-face students-instructors interaction.

The course adopts different teaching methods: lectures and workshops, fieldtrips, self-study, and collaborative work. This course is interactive, so participants are invited to ask relevant historical questions, collaborate on assignments and participate in discussions about the literature and the lectures. Student participation is crucial both in terms of individual preparation (e.g. readings) and reflection, engagement in sessions' Q&As, and creating a successful basis for preparing for the written exam.

You will receive more information and a finalised and more detailed schedule on the first day of the course. For information about the Social Program, please have a look at the Utrecht Summer School website!

On-site Education

During the course, you can use several of Utrecht University's computer and printing facilities. You have received your computer login code (SOLIS ID) from the Summer School administration. If this is not the case, send them an e-mail at summerschool@uu.nl or contact them by phone: +31 (0)302534400.

You are recommended to use one of the main computer rooms of the Faculty of Humanities in Kromme Nieuwegracht 80 (KNG 80). The computer rooms are opened from Mondays through Fridays from 08h45 to 17h00. The computer rooms are closed on Saturdays and Sundays.

Another option is to use the computers at the University Library (UB) Innercity (Drift 27). Again, use your login code (SOLIS ID) to log in at any of the library computers. You can also use the computers on the standing desks to search catalogues without having to log in. You cannot work on these computers and there are no printing facilities.

Beware: the University Library (UB) Innercity (Drift 27) will be closed in the weekends.

Location

Lectures and seminar sessions will take place in the building **TBA**

Utrecht's ancient city centre features many buildings and structures several dating as far back as the High Middle Ages. It has been the religious centre of the Netherlands since the 8th century. It lost the status of prince-bishopric but remains the main religious centre in the country. Utrecht was the most important city in the Netherlands until the Dutch "Golden Age" in the seventeenth century, when it was surpassed by Amsterdam as the country's cultural centre and most populous city.

Utrecht is host to Utrecht University, the largest university in the Netherlands, as well as several other institutions of higher education. Due to its central position within the country, it is an important transport hub for both rail and road transport. It has the second-highest number of cultural events in the Netherlands, after Amsterdam.

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Day-to-day academic programme

3-14 August 2026

WEEK 1

Monday, 3 August

Readings for today *Discovering the Dutch*, Introduction and chapter 24 (pp. 13-18 and 311-321).

11:00-11:45 | Welcome and Introduction to the course

12:00-13:00 | Lecture #1, Wietse de Jonge (UU): *Introduction to the Netherlands* Lunch

14:00-17:00 | Group assignment 1: *Visit a Dutch neighbourhood*

Instructions: see below, pp. 10-11.

Hand-in deadline: **Sunday, 10 August, 23:59h** via e-mail to w.w.dejonge@uu.nl

Tuesday, 4 August

Readings for today *Discovering the Dutch*, chapters 1, 8 and 9 (pp. 21-31 and 109-132)

11:00-13:00 | Lecture #2, *The Netherlands in the world: past, present and future*

Lunch

14:00-16:00 | Film Screening

Wednesday, 5 August

Readings for today *Discovering the Dutch*, chapters 4, 6 and 23 (pp. 57-68, 83-94 and 299-310)

11:00-13:00 | Lecture #3, *Dutch neoliberalism*

Lunch

14:00-16:00 | Seminar #2: *A divided society: Dutch populism and polarization*

Thursday, 6 August

Readings for today *Discovering the Dutch*, chapters 10 and 21 (pp. 133-145, 275-287).

11:00-13:00 | Lecture #4, Wietse de Jonge (UU): *Dutch colonialism*

Lunch

14:00-16:00 | Seminar #1: *Traces of slavery*

Friday, 7 August

Excursion to Rotterdam

One day in the Rotterdam harbour, famous for being the largest port in Europe: a gateway to Dutch, German and European industries for products and commodities from all over the world.

You can bring your own lunch or buy lunch during the day in Rotterdam.

WEEK 2

No lectures or seminars during the weekend, but please do not forget to hand in the written assignment 1 via e-mail, **Sunday, 9 August, 23:59h** at the latest.

Monday, 10 August

Readings for today *Discovering the Dutch*, chapters 2, 10 and 21 (pp. 33-43, 133-143 and 275-286)

11:00-13:00 | Lecture #5: *The Dutch political system*

Lunch

14:00-16:00 | Seminar #3: *Dutch politics and current issues of public debate*

Tuesday, 11 August

Excursion to The Hague

One day in The Hague, the political center of the Netherlands, location of the Dutch government and of multiple international organizations.

Wednesday, 12 August

Readings for today *Discovering the Dutch*, chapters 12 and 15 (157-168 and 199-210) 11:00-13:00

| Lecture #6, *Looking back: Religion, secularization, and Dutch popular culture*

Lunch

14:00-17:00 | Self-study: prepare for final test

Thursday, 13 August

09:00-12:00 | Self-study: prepare for final test

13:00-15:00 | Final Test (at **Janskerkhof 15A, room 003**)

Friday, 14 August

Excursion: Climbing the Utrecht Dom Tower

Lunch

14:30-16:00 | Presentation of Certificates 16:00- 18:00 | Drinks (at **Café**

Hofman, Janskerkhof 17A)

Assignments

Assignment 1: Visit a Dutch neighbourhood

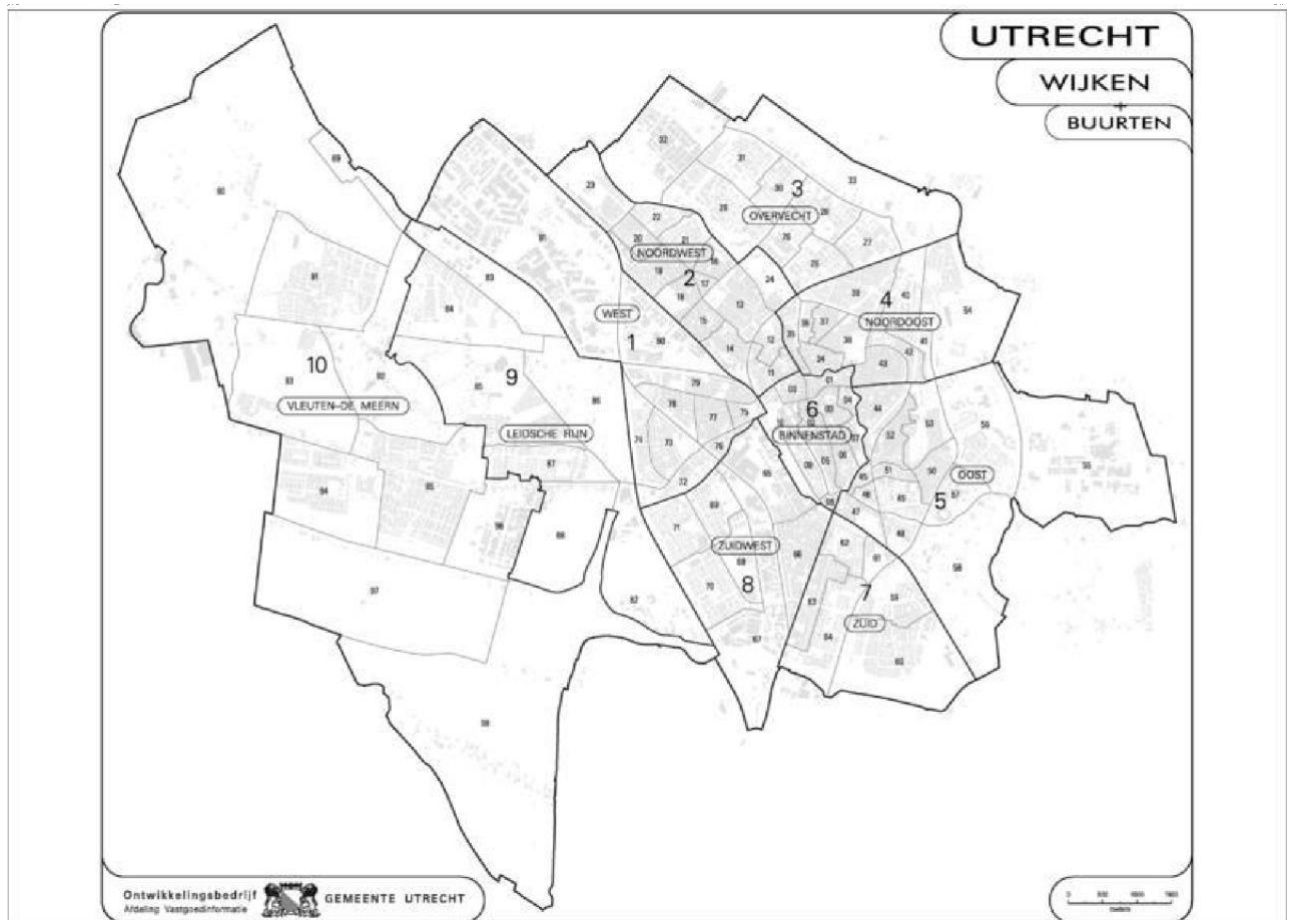
Date of visit: Monday, 4 August (afternoon)

Instructions: Visit one of the selected five city districts in Utrecht (see below). Each district has a distinct atmosphere, or, better yet, *various* atmospheres. Take notes of things that strike you, thoughts and impressions. Ideally, you will chat with locals too. Try to find out what they think of their neighbourhood.

The five districts are:

1. **West.** Visit Lombok and Oog in Al and stroll through the Kanaalstraat.
2. **North-West.** Go to Ondiep, walk down the Amsterdamsestraatweg, explore Zuilen.
3. **North-East.** Walk through the Griftpark, check out Tuindorp and Tuinwijk.
4. **South.** Visit Tolsteeg and 'Old' and 'New' Hoograven.
5. **East.** Visit the Wilhelminapark and go to Galgenwaard (and check the football stadium). Make a detour to the Uithof, to Utrecht Science Park.

For an overview of all districts (in Dutch: *wijken*) in Utrecht, see <https://www.utrecht.nl/wonenen-leven/wijken/>



- The visit can be done alone or in small groups (max. 3).
- To get a better feel for the neighbourhood, visit stores, markets and/or cafés.

After the visit, write an essay on your impressions (individually). The essay should be around **500 - 600 words**. In the essay, compare your impressions of the neighbourhood with your experiences in your home country. What strikes you as similar, and what as different? Feel free to explain what you prefer, and how things could possibly be improved – whether it is back home, or here in the Netherlands.

Hand in the essay via e-mail to c.m.aretakis@uu.nl

Deadline: **Sunday, 9 August, 23:59h** **Assessment**

There will be two assessments that test the acquisition of knowledge and your ability to reflect individually and in group.

Assignment: 20 %

Final Exam: 80 %

You need an average grade of at least 5,5 to pass the course.

Credits: 4 ECTS

Attendance and Grading Criteria

Note that full attendance is expected in all lectures, seminar sessions, and excursions.

Your grades will be numerical grades according to the Dutch grading system. Dutch grades range from 0 (very bad) to 10 (excellent). At Utrecht University, a 5,5 is the lowest passing grade, though note that this might be different at other (Dutch) institutions. Also note that grade inflation has not affected the Dutch grading system as much as it has some American institutions. Grades of 9 and higher are rarely given, the most common grades are between 6 and 8.

Note that conversion of grades that you have received in the Netherlands to grades at your home institution is the responsibility of your home institution, not Utrecht University.