

Support Dutch Studies in the United States

(October 2013)

Every year around 900 American students study Dutch at their home universities. Their reasons for choosing Dutch are as diverse as the students themselves: origin and family ties, interest in the shared history with and the art and cultural history of the Low Countries, and a wide range of other academic interests.



Despite broad and diverse interest in the Dutch language and culture in the United States, Dutch remains one of the Less Commonly Taught Languages at US universities. Due to the financial crisis, departments of Dutch even face financial restraints or serious budget cuts. The Nederlandse Taalunie is working to change this by solidifying the position of Dutch Studies as an independent academic endeavor at universities in the US. Campaigns by US universities to promote their Dutch departments such as at [Columbia University](#) and [UC Berkeley](#) can provide a tremendous boost to these efforts. The Taalunie stands behind these campaigns with a case for support, an Advisory Council, and a network of people and organizations who are also eager to lend their expertise and experience to promoting Dutch Studies.

The project 'Support Dutch Studies in the United States' has its own [Advisory Council](#), that held its very first meeting in New York City early October 2013. The council is made up of specialists and representatives of associations who aim to maintain warm relations between the Low Countries and the United States. They provide recommendations on cooperating with Dutch departments at US universities, and they assist in finding people who are willing to support these programs.



Pictured from left to right: Jan Joosten, Donald Westervelt (standing in for Ken Winans), Liesbet Vannyvel (Nederlandse Taalunie) and Walter Prevenier.

Please meet:

1. [Walter Prevenier, Professor Emeritus University Ghent](#)
2. Emile Boulpaep, Belgian American Education Foundation
3. [Rita Bral, former Honorary Consul of Belgium in San Francisco](#)
4. [Ken Winans, Pacific Southwest Representative of the Holland Society of New York](#)
5. [Jan Joosten, Netherland America Foundation, New York](#)
6. [Thomas Lambert, Belgian Embassy in Washington](#)
7. [David Baeckelandt, Gazette van Detroit](#)

New insights on the origins of New Netherland

Walter Prevenier, member of the Advisory Council, is Professor Emeritus of Historical Criticism at Ghent University. In early October he attended a seminar hosted by the [New Netherland Institute](#) which focused on new insights of the origins of New Netherland.

Walter Prevenier, member of the Advisory Council on Dutch Studies in the USA, is Professor Emeritus of Historical Criticism at Ghent University. In early October he represented the Taalunie at a two-day seminar hosted by the New Netherland Institute where he gained new insights on the origins of New Netherland.



Walter Prevenier says: “The seminar convinced me that the city of New Amsterdam and the colony of New Netherland were multicultural and cosmopolitan habitats in the 17th century, much like New York City and New England are today. This was primarily because the merchants of the Dutch West India Company (WIC) were highly interested in trading in a much wider area, encouraging colonial activities in the Caribbean and Brazil. In fact, all nations were eager to engage in trade throughout the Dutch Atlantic World of the 17th century. Furthermore, the English and French were also busy building their own colonies in the same region. The world of New Netherland looked different than historians thought until recently.”

On Friday, October 4th, eight Emerging Scholars presented their new work in the field of New Netherland studies to Established Scholars, including Walter Prevenier.

“One of these Emerging Scholars, Deborah Hamer, has discovered that the loss of Brazil to the Portuguese in 1654 was the impetus for the spread of the Brazilian Dutch, who left with their wives and children to settle elsewhere in the Atlantic world, in particular in New Netherland, various Caribbean islands and Suriname.

Her colleague Elizabeth Sutton showed us that 17th-century maps of the New World produced in Amsterdam served as crucial propaganda instruments. Historians have long realized that they tend to look at the past as contemporaries wish them to look at it. The prints produced by Claes Jansz Visscher in 1651-1652 show the skyline of New Amsterdam as an oasis of peace and prosperity, designed to lure new immigrants and of course to benefit the Dutch economy. They faithfully reflect the rhetoric of the WIC, but reality was obviously less cheerful.

Kenneth Shefsiek looked at the colony of New Netherland from a fresh angle. From 1677 onwards, French-speaking Protestants left the Spanish Netherlands by way of the German Palatinate (‘Pfaltz’) to emigrate to the New World. To the north of the city of New York, they founded the village of New Paltz. To emphasize the religious persecution they had endured, the community began calling themselves Huguenots rather than Walloons in the early 19th century. A nice example of ‘invented history’, that is deserving of further research.”

On Saturday, October 5th, academics and researchers took a closer look at the connection between the Dutch Revolt and the founding of the colony of New Netherland.

“Using fascinating statistics, Guido Marnef and Maarten Prak shed light on the migration from Antwerp to Amsterdam after 1585 as a significant step towards the economic developments in the New World. Maarten Prak also mentioned Sarah Rapelje, the first child of Southern Dutch origins born in the New World. The year was 1625. She was the daughter of a poor textile worker from Valenciennes, a Protestant who fled to Amsterdam and from there to New Netherland. It has been calculated that about one million Americans are descended from her.

Wim Vanraes spoke on the 17th-century correspondence of Govert Loockermans, a Southern Dutch settler in the New World, and David Baeckelandt emphasized the role played by the Southern Dutch in the colonization of New Netherland. The connection between North and South was just as prominent in Kees Zandvliet's presentation on Samuel Blommaert, a successful merchant born in Antwerp. He became the director of the WIC, though he never set foot in New Amsterdam. This did not prevent him from producing exquisite maps of New Netherland, which of course must be viewed with a certain critical reserve.

Cartographer Adriaen Block was the first to use the name 'Nie Nederlandt' for the area between the French territories to the north (in today's Canada) and the English colony of Virginia to the south. That was in 1613-1614. The name 'Nova Belgica' often adorns early maps. This was the contemporary Latin term for the whole of the Low Countries. The Netherlands and Belgium were closely linked in the New World of the 17th century, and that is still the case today.

Interest in the Dutch-speaking world is alive and well in the United States. The study of the history of New Netherland certainly has a bright future."

A Belgian-Dutch Matinee in Manhattan

In early October the Taalunie organized a matinee performance in New York City to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the school for Dutch language and culture 't Klokhuis in New Jersey. The program included a hilarious performance of Hi Ha! for the kids, while adults were encouraged to contemplate their vision of America together with Michiel Vos, Dutch-born commentator and expert on the US.