

Phelan US Centre Master's Students Essay Competition on America's role in the world

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Who can apply?** The essay competition is open to all current LSE Master's students across all disciplines and LSE Departments
2. **When do submissions close?** Submissions close on **Monday 23 February 2026**, at 23.59. Please note that essays submitted after this deadline will not be accepted.
3. **"What is the 'right' way to answer the prompt?"** This year's essay prompt is deliberately broad, aiming to allow students from all departments and disciplines to approach it from their own angle. Students are encouraged to interpret this prompt from a variety of perspectives, and an interdisciplinary focus is encouraged. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to answer the question, provided that your response engages with the prompt. For further guidance, please attend our essay competition information session in January 2026.
4. **Does my essay submission need to be about the United States?** The essay prompt is, "*What role can democratic citizenry play in shaping America's role in the world as it enters its 250th year?*", and students can interpret this however they wish to in their submission, while engaging with the prompt **and** the United States, in terms of its role in the world, domestic, and/or foreign policy in some way. Students should refer to [past essay competition](#) winning and runner-up [entries](#) on the Centre's USAPP blog for examples of how to engage with the US in their submission.
5. **How strict is the word limit?** Entries should be no more than 1000 words, and no fewer than 800. Any entries above this word limit will not be accepted. Please include the word count at the top of your submission.
6. **What is included in the word limit?** Only the body of your essay will be included in the word limit – not the title of the essay, your name, or the word count.
7. **Do I need to include citations/references?** Please use links embedded in the text instead of formal academic-style citations/references. Check out articles on the Phelan US Centre's [USAPP blog](#) for guidance.
8. **Should I include my name on the essay?** Yes, please add your name at the top of your submission.
9. **How do I submit my essay?** Please fill out the submission form on our website, attaching your essay as a Word document.

- 10. When will I hear back about my submission?** We are aiming to announce the competition winner and runners-up by the end of March 2026. We will contact winners and runners-up in due course. Any other updates will be posted on the Phelan US Centre website.
- 11. Am I able to use Generative AI tools in my essay submission?** Please see our [guidance on the use of Generative AI tools](#) in our Master's Students essay competition.
- 12. What is your policy on plagiarism?** LSE's processes on [academic integrity](#) apply in full to this essay competition. Any submissions found to be based in whole or in part on existing coursework or essays, copied from other resources, or AI generated, will be disqualified from the competition and the student's home Department informed.
- 13. Can I consult with someone else, such as another student, professor, or course instructor, for assistance or advice in developing my essay response?**
The submitted essay must be the student's original work. This includes the conceptual approach to the essay. While students can ask peers for their input on a draft - e.g. on whether their essay's ideas, concepts and arguments are explained clearly and cogently - more collaborative assistance such as soliciting ideas and advice prior to writing and/or during drafting the essay would not be considered to be the original work of the entrant.
- 14. Can I submit a piece of coursework?** No, your submission must be an original piece of work, written specifically for this competition.
- 15. How will my submission be judged?** All essay submissions will be judged according to the competition criteria. Please consult the criteria closely before submitting your essay. Essays will be shortlisted by members of the Phelan US Centre team. The winning submission and runners-up will be selected by a panel composed of LSE academics.
- 16. Am I able to appeal the judges' decision?** Unfortunately, you will not be able to appeal the judges' decision. The decision of the judging panel is final.