

## Introduction to American Studies

(Az Egyesült Államok társadalmi és politikai kérdései – BBLAN09000)  
Preliminary Syllabus\_Beatrice Balogh Fall 2026 PPCU Part-Time Program

*Lecturer:* Beatrix Balogh, balogh.beatrix@btk.ppke.hu

*Time and Place:* September 11, October 9, November 6 (need to reschedule the last session), Fridays 14.30-18.30 D 316

*Course type:* Seminar; *Evaluation:* Seminar grade (gyakorlati jegy)

**Objective:** Building on the material of the *Introduction to the United States* lecture series, this course is meant to enhance awareness and understanding of current and perennial social, political, and cultural patterns in the United States and to provide an introduction to American studies as an academic discipline. Starting from such crucial concepts as “culture” and “criticism”, the course is going to examine key American social and cultural ideas and their manifestations in various cultural products. We will briefly discuss the significance of immigration, what it means to belong in America, the Western frontier heritage, the idea of freedom and the American Dream, race, American attitudes to government, the political parties, culture war issues and concepts of the American nation. In addition to introductory texts, specific cultural source materials—ranging from literature, film, journalism, political communication, visual art, and music—are examined.

### Requirements and Practices

#### **Discussion-based** seminar course to

- Broach intriguing questions and controversies; Scrutinize narratives, practices and culture products
- Discuss the cause of controversies—and how these are rooted in or run counter to myths
- Learning and gaining new insights take place through these discussions

#### **Focus Class (discussion leading ppt-aided presentation) and Research report**

- Bring to class a culture product (movie, docu, commercial, poster, cartoon, advert, news report, debate, artwork, literature) that encapsulates or demonstrates a critical question in US society
- Offer some background information if necessary; Connect the case to recurring debates and their root causes
- 3-5-slide ppt-presentation; additional slide displaying your sources (multiple source research required)
- Run additional research to identify relevant academic discussions about your chosen topic and summarize findings

#### **Feedback on set texts**

- Write short reflections on assigned texts (articles, movie clips)—assignments and deadlines will be posted to teams

**Deadlines:** **By September 13:** Propose a specific cultural product (we will define culture product in class) that you plan to “bring to focus” (**presentation on either October 9 or November 6/replacement date**) and further research/analyze by the end of the semester. Deadline for this will be set in class. You will also complete smaller written assignments/task sheets that will be posted to our Teams. Deadline will be stipulated on the task sheet.

Preliminary schedule of discussion topics:

Session 1      Introduction: What is American Studies? Explaining America. The meaning of critical culture studies: myth-awareness or myth-busting? What is a culture product? Current critical questions. Taking a critical view at American institutions.

What makes you American? Melting Pot or Mosaic? Natives, settlers, immigrants. **Immigration** and the **American Dream**. The American West: Manifest Destiny, Frontier, and the “Rugged Individualist.” Perspectives on **Rights and Liberties**

Session 2      **!!! / Focus Class 1: student talks and discussion leading**

**Culture Wars I:** Religious values in American public life: moral issues, abortion, same-sex marriage; Freedom of Speech and Press; Social media, misinformation, surveillance and the transformation of American public discourse; algorithms and new campaign hacks;

**Gerrymandered America:** Polarization and parties; Elephant v Donkey perspectives on critical issues; ideological fault lines, party realignment, populism. Project 2025; States vs Federal Government

Session 3      **!!! / Focus Class 2: student talks and discussion leading**

**Culture Wars II.** Gun rights or gun control? Liberties v the common good. **The Color Line:** Race in post-civil rights America **US Foreign Policies:** Beacon or Crusader? Exceptionalism v strategic interests?

Attendance and Assessment (How to earn the 10 credits for the course):

- Your final grade is based on your regular preparation and active participation at class, written reflections; Focus Brief and Report: Your critical reflection on and analysis of a chosen American cultural product (Research report and the summary of findings). The Focus Brief must be delivered in person.
- Please make your priority to attend in-person discussions. Writtem reflections or other assignments should be turned in notwithstanding. The TVSZ allows you to miss no more than one in-person teaching day.
- Paper-based writing tasks (ie you actually have to bring your notes to class and submit the hard copy) must be submitted even if you cannot attend. Late submissions (48 hours grace period) are downgraded.
- Excess absence or not presenting you Brief results in an "incomplete".