**Introduction to American Studies**

(Az Egyesült Államok társadalmi és politikai kérdései – BBLAN09000)

Preliminary Syllabus\_Beatrix Balogh Fall 2021 PPCU Part-Time Program

*Lecturer:* Beatrix Balogh

*Place and Time:* Sophianum, October 16 13.15-17.15 Rm 412, November 13 13.15-17.15 Rm412, December 11. 8.30-12-30 Rm 312.

*Course type:* Seminar

*Evaluation:* Seminar grade (gyakorlati jegy)

*Office hours:* Before or after the class sessions.

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 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 touch upon several key American social and cultural ideas and their manifestations and reflections in various cultural products. We are going to discuss the significance of immigration, the Western frontier heritage, the idea of freedom and the American Dream, slavery and race, American attitudes to government, the political parties, culture war issues and concepts of the American nation. Beyond introductory texts, specific cultural source materials are going to be examined ranging from literature, film, journalism, political communication, visual art and music.

Requirements and Practices:

**Discussion-based** seminar course

* broaching intriguing questions and controversies; Scrutinizing narratives, practices and culture products
* pitting ideals against reality; Discussing the cause of controversies—and how these are rooted in or run counter to myths
* Learning and gaining new insights takes place through these discussions

**Focus Class (discussion leading presentation)**

* 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
* Raise discussion questions that would help class learn about US institutions (social, political, cultural), understand recurring debates and their root causes,
* Offer some minimal background information if necessary

**Assignments and Home Paper**

* Arrive at discoveries at home
* Apply new insights to analysis of institutions/products

**End Term Quiz** (Short-essay questions)

Prove understanding of core ideals and inherent controversies

Preliminary schedule of discussion topics:

Session 1, Oct 16 Introduction: What is American Studies? Explaining America. The meaning of critical culture studies: myth-awareness or myth-busting?

What’s trending? Current critical question.

Taking a critical view at American institutions.

Topic 1. What makes you American? Natives, settlers, immigrants

Topic 2. The frontier, The “Conquest of the West” and the rugged individualist; Manifest Destiny

Topic 3. Immigration and the American Dream

**Myths: A Nation of Immigrants, Frontier, Manifest Destiny, The American Dream**

Session 2, Nov 13 The founding myths, the nation and US Foreign Policies: Beacon or Crusader? Exceptionalism v strategic interests?

“We the People” and “All Men Are Created Equal”: Concepts of Democracy and Government

Culture Wars 1: Perspectives on rights and liberties; Religious values in American public life: moral issues, abortion, same-sex marriage

**Myths: We the People, Exceptionalism** including Manifest Destiny and **Myth: City on a Hill**

**/ Focus Class: student talks and discussion leading**

Session 3, Dec 11 **The Color Line:** The heritage of slavery in America: statues, segregation, civil rights movement; Race in post-civil rights America: Do Black Lives Matter equally? Revisiting Myth: All Men Are Created Equal; Democracy and Equality II: Presidential Elections; **Culture Wars** II. Gun rights or gun control? Liberties v the common good.

**By November 1:** Propose a specific cultural product that you plan to analyze by the end of the semester. A list of optional topics will be furnished.

*Attendance and Assessment:*

* Your final grade is based on the following elements: Your regular preparation and active participation at class, especially at your “focus class” (30 %); Your written reflections (20 %); End-term quiz (a series of short essay questions based on class discussions) (20%); Your critical reflection on and analysis of a chosen American cultural product (Research report and the summary of findings, can be same as the one delivered as “focus class” (30%)
* Wearing a mask is compulsory at all times while on PPCU premises. You can only enter the classroom with your mask on (and hands sanitized); if the size (distanced seating arrangements) and ventilation of the room permits, you may remove your mask when not speaking. Make sure your mask provides safe covering when engaged in small-group discussions (masks with folds are more likely to remain in place while speaking).
* Please make your priority to attend in person discussions while we can. If you are bound to miss classes due to illness (or symptoms make you cautious), let the instructor know immediately. Reflections or other assignments should be turned in notwithstanding. The TVSZ allows you to miss only one of the in-person teaching days.