

**UNIVERSIDAD PONTIFICIA BOLIVARIANA
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND PEDAGOGY
B.A. IN ENGLISH-SPANISH EDUCATION**

**U.S. Literature and Culture
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**Schedule: Monday, 16:00 to 17:40, Room 6-302
Thursday 16:00 to 17:40, Room 6-504
Friday, 14:00 to 15:40, Room 6-302**

Attention to students: By appointment

Course Overview

The United States of America, for a myriad of reasons, has been a focal point of reference to the rest of the world. It is the country that holds the largest diasporas from almost every continent. The United States is a nation of contradictions: While being built by immigrants, it holds strong sentiments vis-à-vis minorities and immigrants; while it celebrates diversity, it also pervades people's diversity overseas; while it is a reference for the world, many social imaginaries about the U.S. are well reflected in Rammstein's song "Amerika":

*We're all living in America / America is wunderbar
We're all living in America / Amerika, Amerika.
We're all living in America / Coca-Cola, Wonderbra,
We're all living in America / Amerika, Amerika.*

Understanding the US at large would be as daunting a task as trying to understand Colombia. They are just as diverse as we are, only at a larger scale. That said, there is a beginning level of understanding about tidbits of *Americana* that a critical view of the literature and the media can offer us. That, in a sense, is the purpose of this course: To provide an introduction to elements of US culture using literature as an entry point (just as other scholars have tried to immerse themselves in Colombia through García Márquez, for instance). This course will try to offer as unbiased a

look as possible, letting the literature speak for itself at times and questioning the media when applicable.

It is also important to point out that this is not a traditional literature course and therefore there might be exposure to a lower amount of canonical text. That is by design, as I have worried for several years about the lack of exposure to alternative and multicultural genres in the curriculum. In addition, it is very difficult (nearly impossible even) to begin this understanding of the US from just the (as some call them) *dead white guys*. Therefore, this course will offer a blend of some well-known names in literature, both old and contemporary, and less traditional writers, such as female and minority writers. We will also look at traditional genres of literature, such as horror or poetry, and more unorthodox ones, such as graphic novels.

Course Objectives

1. To introduce students to some basic ideas about the culture of the United States, using literature and media as entry points.
2. To become acquainted with the diversity of genres in US literature and how these genres have shaped the way Americans see themselves.

Course Structure

This course contains six modules. Each module intends to offer a glimpse of a particular aspect of US literature and/or culture. Each course will include excerpts from literary works, the analysis and discussion of media, and in a few cases, presentations and video-conferences with guest speakers in Colombia and the U.S.

Module 1: Introduction to the course – This is the opening salvo of our course, where we will begin a scholarly discussion about what it means to talk about “American culture”. This will cover the first week of class

Module 2: A brief survey of US literature: Samples from major genres – US literature has a very particular flavor, once you look past the more traditional writers. Genres such as the dystopian novel or the graphic novel are contemporary staples of this literature, while authors from Poe to King have revitalized the horror genre in many ways. This module will look at five genres (horror, dystopian, science fiction, journalistic, and comics/graphic novels) through excerpts from recognized auteurs, such as Ernest Hemingway, Stan Lee, Stephen King, Tom Wolfe, Edgar Allan Poe, Hunter Thompson, Frank Miller, HP Lovecraft, and others.

Module 3: Six cities through the lenses of media and literature – Some iconic US cities have been the focal point of many a poem, TV show, and movie. In this module, all students in this class will have the chance to lead a lesson on one of these cities. This module will also be one big portion of the assessment for this course, so you should be very well prepared for this one.

Module 4: Sports in US Culture – Sports and US seem to go together just as peanut butter and jelly! Sports are a big part of life in the US and thus it is worth making that part of the discussion. We will look, through media and other information, how the big three sports (i.e. [American] football, baseball, and basketball) are woven as part of culture.

Module 5: The US: A melting pot, a salad bowl, or just a quilt? The United States is a place that many cultures have built over the years. To understand it, we need to look at the different people that have converged there and their cultural values, some of which reflect on their literature. This module will look at African Americans, Latina/os, Asians, Native Americans, and some European immigrants that have gained notoriety in the US, and how different forms of literature help us understand who they are.

Module 6: College – Although the university itself has been around for almost a thousand years, most US colleges are under 200 years old. The US remains the top destination for international students, so talking about what college means as part of US culture is warranted. This module will include a few presentations from guest speakers, as well as a critical analysis of media.

Assignments

This course will feature three assignments and one capstone project. Please check the Class Schedule for information about the due dates.

Assignment 1: Response paper on literary genres – After the first module, each student will write a response paper based on the discussions of the literary genres. You may choose to focus on one genre, discuss a few, or make your response an at-large discussion. You will have to make reference to the works we read in class, as well as any others you may think of. (15% of the final grade)

Assignment 2: Module 2 discussions – During the second module, students will work in groups to prepare the discussion regarding one of the six cities we will talk about. Students will have some initial sources to work with and they are expected to also share information as the result of their own findings. (25% of the final grade)

Assignment 3: Response paper about people in the United States – At the end of the fifth module, you will write a second response paper regarding your thoughts on the people we discussed. You can focus on one or all, using the readings and discussions to illustrate how your understanding of these people has shifted as a result of the class activities. (15% of the final grade)

CAPSTONE PROJECT: WebQuest – A WebQuest, as explained by Mora and colleagues (Mora, et al., 2012a, b, c) is an activity where you can use multiple online sources to explain or develop a particular topic in a more creating and engaging way. In groups, you will create a WebQuest, using all the information at your disposal from this course, to discuss or develop a particular aspect of US literature and culture. You will present your WebQuest at the end of the course in front of your peers and a panel of faculty experts on literature and WebQuests (WebQuest design: 35% of the final grade; Presentation: 10% of the final grade)

Expectations

Classwork. I expect all of you to be on time every class. If, for some reason, you cannot be in class, please notify me as soon as possible (I usually check my e-mail throughout the day, and always before class begins). Remember that a large number of absences will be grounds for failing this course. Make sure to talk to either your other classmates or me to make up for the work. No assignments will be accepted after the due date without a proper excuse. The deadlines are set well in advance so check your personal or work schedules to make sure there are no conflicts. If you foresee a conflict, talk to me immediately to make proper arrangements.

Participation. You should be ready and prepared to participate in every class. This includes reading the assigned documents and bringing all required resources at all times. All of you should be prepared to raise questions and issues as the result of your reading and the interactions the rest of us. As professionals-in-training, you should display a high degree of professionalism and ethical behavior. If you disagree with any ideas in class, feel free to say so in a proper manner. I believe that the

classroom is a community of learners and scholars. Respectful interactions are important for the success of the academic exercises in which we will engage.

Methodology. You will participate in class work for 6 hours every week. You should also plan to devote *at least* 4-6 hours a week to work on the readings and assignments for the course on your own. Since there is an option to use tutoring services to supplement the classes, **please be proactive** and ask me for help if needed. Remember that we have a Fulbright Teaching Assistant (Ms. Anna Garrison), who will be available to help this course throughout the semester, so take advantage of that opportunity. I may also suggest you to seek tutoring or extra practice if necessary, but the notion that you must be **responsible and proactive** is fundamental for your success in this course. After all, there is an expectation that you are all becoming more autonomous learners.

There is a good chance that I may be absent due to academic reasons twice this semester, to participate in academic events abroad. Those dates are already set in the schedule. During those weeks, you will have a blend of work with substitute professors and independent work. As the dates reach near, you will receive further instructions.

Ethical guidelines. All assignments are to be original work. As scholars, we should all abide by the highest standards of academic integrity. In this course, we operate under a very strong stance against cheating and plagiarism. Guidelines against cheating and plagiarism in this course will follow any internal guidelines that UPB has set in place for academic integrity, as well as existing Colombian copyright legislation, such as Ley 23 de 1986, specifically Article 31 (<http://www.cerlalc.org/documentos/colo23.htm>) and Ley 1032 de 2006 (http://www.unal.edu.co/dib/cip/pi_ley_1032_2006.html). Please get yourselves acquainted with these laws.

Communication etiquette. Learning how to communicate in writing is an important and necessary skill that all academics must develop in order to network effectively with other professionals. For the context of this course, developing this etiquette is also an important part of understanding the academic culture in the U.S. In many cases, a well-crafted e-mail is the difference between receiving a reply from faculty and researchers in other institutions and having your message deleted right

away. Check the following websites with information about e-mail etiquette, and make sure to practice these rules in any and all class-related communications:

- <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/636/01/>
- <http://science.kennesaw.edu/~hmattord/email.htm>
- <http://www.101emailtippettips.com/>
- <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/outlook-help/12-tips-for-better-e-mail-etiquette-HA001205410.aspx>
- <http://www.emailreplies.com/>

Resources

At present, the Moodle site for this course is under construction. While it is fully operational, I will share the readings and assignments either via e-mail or through my own website if necessary. You can also ask the instructor for the readings to add to your laptops and have them available at all times. In addition to online resources, you are supposed to have a notebook/journal with you at all times. We will do extensive note-taking during the course.

Technology

If you have a laptop/tablet, feel free to bring it to class (I do bring both). Make sure to download the resources to your hard drives before coming to the class, in case the WiFi is not working properly. If you cannot bring your own laptop or tablet, please make sure to print the resources if applicable (In that event, **please remember the trees**: print on both sides of the sheet, print two pages per side of the sheet, or use scrap paper). Please refrain from using other online applications (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, e-mail, etc.) during class (**if you were a teacher, would you like your students to be Tweeting while you are talking?**). Finally, regarding the use of cell phones and smartphones, this class has a **no-phoning, no-texting** policy (**would you feel comfortable if you came to ask me a question and I did not listen to you because I was texting?**).

Class Schedule

Date	Topic	Readings/Media/Activities
Module 1: Introduction to the course		
Jan 21:	Introduction to Course	Course Syllabus
Jan 24 & 25:	What does it mean to talk about “American culture”?	Reading: Emerson, Chapter 6
Module 2: A brief survey of US literature: Samples from major genres		
Jan 28 & 31	Horror	Readings by: Stephen King, Edgar Allan Poe and HP Lovecraft
Feb 1 & 4	Dystopian Novel	Readings by: George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, and Suzanne Collins
Feb 7	Monsters, a combination of horror and dystopia?	Presentation by Dr. Polina Golovátina-Mora
Feb 8 & 11	Science Fiction	Readings by: Arthur C. Clarke, Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov and Philip K. Dick
Feb 14 & 15	Journalism as story-telling	Readings by: Ernest Hemingway, Tom Wolfe and (Dr.) Hunter S. Thompson
Feb 18 & 21	Comics and Graphic Novels	Readings TBD
Module 3: Six cities through the lenses of media and literature (Student-led sessions)		
Feb 22	Preparation session	
Feb 25 & 28	Gotham and Sin City	Readings TBD
Mar 1 & 4	The City of Angels and Little Cuba	Readings TBD
Mar 7 & 8	The Second City and Beantown	Readings TBD

Module 4: Sports in US Culture		
Mar 11 & 14	[American] Football	Readings TBD
Mar 15 & 18	Baseball: America's Pastime	Readings TBD
Mar 21 & 22	The Madness of Basketball	Readings TBD
March 25-29: Easter Break – NO CLASS		
Module 5: The US: A melting pot, a salad bowl, or just a quilt?		
Apr 1, 4 & 5	African-Americans	Readings by: Frederick Douglass, WEB DuBois, Booker T Washington, Maya Angelou, Tony Morrison, and Cornel West Media: Stand-up comedy from Chris Rock, Dave Chappelle, and Richard Pryor
Apr 8, 11 & 12	Latina/os	Readings by: Sandra Cisneros, Gary Soto, Julia Alvarez, others TBD Media: Stand-up comedy by John Leguizamo Skype Video Conference (TBD)
Apr 15, 18 & 19	Asians and Native Americans	Readings by: Ai, Amy Tan, others TBD
(NOTE: You will work independently during the week, as Dr. Mora will most likely be abroad at this time)		
Apr 22, 25 & 26	European Immigrants: Italians, Irish, Eastern Europeans	Readings TBD
April 29 to May 10 Module 5: College		
April 29	College life in the US: Media myths and facts	Critical Media Analysis of movie excerpts.
May 2	College life in the US: Real-life accounts	Panel session (Speakers TBD)

May 3	What does it mean to be a college student in the U.S.?	Skype Conference: (Details TBD)
May 6, 9 & 10	Guided, on-site work on Capstone Project	
May 16 & 17	Autonomous work on Capstone Project (NOTE: You will work independently during the week, as Dr. Mora will most likely be abroad at this time)	
May 20- 31	FINAL PRESENTATIONS	

References

Coming soon