American Cultural Studies (ACS)

1. BASIC INFO

Name: American Cultural Studies
Year/Semester: 2018/Fall Semester (First Semester)
Participating Instructors:
- Anthony Rauld (Lingüística, Facultad de FH)
- Celia Cussen (Ciencias Históricas, Facultad de FH)
- Francisco de Undurraga (Facultad de FH)
- Andrés Ferrada (Literatura, Facultad de FH)
- Pascale Bonnefoy (Periodismo, ICEI)
- Allison Ramay (Facultad de Letras, PUC)
- Juan Pablo Vilches (Facultad de Letras, PUC)
- Aaron Zuckermann (Pedagogía Inglés, Educación, UDP)
- Lionel Brossi (Periodismo, ICEI)
- Pilar Garcia (Literatura, Facultad de FH)

Total Number of Hours: 160
Duration: March 23 - August 12, 2018
Class Times: Friday 18:00 to 21:00 and Saturday 9:00 to 14:00
Minimum Assistance Required: 70%
Prerequisite: B2 Level English
Coordinators: Anthony Rauld and Angela Tironi
2. GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The comprehensive study of American society or history, especially from a cultural perspective, is quite rare in Chile. Understanding American culture is important and worthwhile not only because it is a fascinating culture in itself, and one that has—for better or worse—influenced Chile (and the world) in countless ways, but also because studying another society, through its history and its cultural practices (and meanings), can help us become more aware of how culture “works” in our own society—how culture influences our own behavior, our own ways of thinking and doing.

American Cultural Studies is also a discipline that has the potential to help students and observers of American cultural forms understand the role of US hegemony, arguably at its zenith today thanks to the transfer of American themes, values, and identities—which advances in digital media technology have made much more ubiquitous. In this sense, the American Cultural Studies program is an opportunity for participating students to develop a firm critical stance towards issues and themes dealing with American culture in particular, as well as towards their own culture—and to learn how to communicate the knowledge they produce to others.

The American Cultural Studies program hopes to become a new platform for the development of local knowledge about US culture, history and language.

3. OBJECTIVES

General Objective:

The main objective of the program is for students to acquire a general overview of US culture and history, and to broaden their capacity to engage critically, and theoretically, with American cultural texts. In the process of exploring and articulating US themes—participating in the analysis of films, texts, and engaging in classroom discussions—students will also improve their research and communication skills; and throughout the semester they will be able to produce an academic writing project.

Specific Goals:

1. Students will become familiar with and understand the major cultural epochs of the United States, and the major figures, movements, and events that have come to define them; they
will also be able to ask and answer questions concerning processes of cultural change and cultural control within the context of US history and society.

2. Students will become familiar with and understand some of the basic theoretical and conceptual (and methodological) frameworks found in the disciplines of anthropology, philosophy, literary studies, and cultural studies, and be able to apply them in thinking about, discussing, utilizing and producing knowledge in relation to US culture and history.

3. Students will learn how to approach American cultural texts, use them in their own professional contexts, and apply them in producing their own knowledge about American culture; they will also work to integrate that knowledge into their own local contexts.

4. Students will improve their English language skills; specifically, they will significantly advance their oral skills (through in-class discussions on a multitude of topics, themes, and phenomena related to American culture and history), and improve their writing skills (as they work throughout the semester on a final academic writing project).

5. Students will develop new skills in relation to the production of an academic writing project; this project will include several stages, integrating peer and faculty review systems, as well as step-by-step procedures for effective and persuasive writing.

6. Embracing and promoting cultural awareness is an overarching goal of the program. Cultural forms are often implicit, and often part of a “background familiarity” that can only be made explicit through the study of a different culture. To this effect, students are encouraged to apply this comparative approach in their engagement with US culture at a distance.

4. MODULES

I Introduction to Cultural Studies (CS).

The Introduction to Cultural Studies Module introduces students to the academic discipline of Cultural Studies. Cultural Studies is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of culture and power, drawing upon different academic disciplines to explore and analyze the cultural meanings that articulate society through time.

Students are introduced to the origins of cultural studies as a field of research, as well as to the concepts that have shaped its development—concepts such as power, representation, and cultural text. They also become familiar, and are able to recognize, the main theoretical trends
influencing cultural studies over the history of the discipline, including Marxism, structuralism, and post-structuralism. In terms of methodology, students are introduced to the tenets of feminist, postmodern, and postcolonial thought, and are shown how these ideas can be applied in the analysis of cultural texts.

The Introduction to Cultural Studies Module also introduces students to the concepts and ideas related to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and identity in America. Students explore how geographical space has been used to construct nationhood—and, at the same time, how marginalized groups have contested, and rearticulated the meaning of those spaces.

The goal of this module is to give students a basic set of conceptual tools to be able to think about the cultural matrix of the United States critically, and as a site where meanings are produced, identities and subjectivities are formed and power consolidated and/or contested.

II Academic Writing Workshop (AWW).

The Academic Writing Workshop (AWW) is a module that focuses on improving the student’s writing and research skills, and accompanies him/her throughout the semester in the development of an academic writing project.

Throughout the semester, students will meet with two writing composition instructors, who will, beginning in the first week of the semester, introduce and guide them through the different stages of the writing process—a process that will culminate with the handing in of a finished, and polished, academic writing project.

The AWW module begins with a clear description of the guidelines, procedures, and parameters of the academic writing project. Then, it moves on to introduce the basic structures and functions of the essay, as well as its main components individually: the argument, the introduction, the body paragraphs, the topic sentences, the conclusion, etc. Specialized attention is paid to the thesis statement as a defining construction of the academic essay, as well as to the paragraph (and its inner structure). After a few classes designed to discuss with students their potential topics and directions for their final projects, the module then shifts to focus on the writing process itself, in order to accompany the student in the development of his/her own project: generating ideas, clustering, outlining, collecting and organizing information, summarizing sources, rough draft, and revising. A series of workshops are also contemplated, where students will be able to work individually on their writing, accompanied by instructors who will be ready to provide guidance when requested. A few case studies will be presented as well: students from the previous semester join the group to discuss
their experiences working on the same academic writing project. After a revised project is handed in (and reviewed by the academic writing committee), students will then work on the final process, which includes peer and group revisions, interviews with the academic writing committee, and the final student revision.

### III American Culture and Society Through Time (ACSTT)

The *American Culture and Society Through Time* module introduces students, broadly speaking, to the history of the United States, and examines historical events and experiences (and texts) from a cultural perspective—focusing on the dominant paradigms that have shaped each cultural epoch, from its protestant beginnings, and its republican “coming of age”, to the industrial, and post-industrial modern era. The module will also pay close attention to the philosophical concepts of world, understanding of being, work of art, cultural articulators, and cultural reconfigurers, and explore to what extent these concepts can help us understand the major processes, events and agencies that shape the American story.

In this module, students learn how American society, broadly speaking, was formed and transformed across space and time. For example, they become familiar with how early, colonial America was constructed by the Puritan sense of mission and virtue, which helped to give birth to a highly rigid and rational society concerned with the intricacies of nature and of being an example to the world. They learn that colonial America was also the site for a much more secular, violent, and unquenchable thirst for commercial success—dependant on African slave labor, and on American Indian dispossession.

Students also learn the process of how the US became a more secular, capitalist, and “modern” society—a society, and an economy, capable of transforming and subjugating an entire continent to the West. This “modernizing” and “civilizing” ethos, which influenced the founding of the republic in 1776, expanded into the realm of everyday life during the second half of the 19th century, as a society with markets—despite much resistance and civil disobedience—was transformed into a market society.

The module also explores American industrialization, and its technological revolutions, which eradicated distances and changed the nature of human relations. Voices of resistance soon surfaced to challenge the new structure of American power at home and abroad during the 20th century. This struggle came to a head in the latter half of the 20th century, as US society began to question itself, and its place in the world. This was a time of inflection that ultimately led to a radical reconfiguration of American culture and society, and as the US embarked on a
process of economic neoliberalization, deindustrialization, and globalization, a new post-modern America began to emerge.

**IV Controlling Processes (CP).**

The *Controlling Processes* module introduces students to the concepts of social control and cultural control, and encourages them to apply these concepts to American society in particular, and to industrialized societies in general. The identification and analysis of controlling processes are essential for understanding modern industrial societies like the United States, where citizens are increasingly vulnerable to a variety of cultural manipulations, thanks in part to the power of the mass media and other hegemonic discourses reproduced within different institutional contexts.

Cultural meanings in industrial societies are hegemonic—they constitute, and are at the same time the means to achieve, power by influencing and persuading individuals and groups to participate in their own domination. In a society where individuals focus primarily on (and scrutinize) individual choices and practices, powerful elites and/or institutions have been able to manipulate cultural meanings in order to control citizens with a remarkable degree of success.

The *Controlling Processes* module (CP), then, explores the role that these cultural and social controlling processes have played, and still play, in specific areas of American society, including the institution of slavery and mass incarceration, the media, the economy, the law, the education system, science, technology, the political system, and in foreign policy—as well as the forms and strategies of counter-hegemonic resistance to them. Some specific attention will be paid to: plunder and the *rule of law* ideology (Laura Nader, 2010). The latter is often deployed to justify and/or make the latter less visible.

The role of individuals and groups who—as Americans (or American Indians)—have fought for justice, fair treatment, inclusion and a better life for themselves and others has been of paramount importance and constitutes a vehicle for counter-hegemonic resistance. Throughout American history, the dominant, hegemonic discourses have been contested and re-articulated by individuals and groups who, in the process, have achieved great things and effected real change.

As a result, however, these dominant discourses have sometimes shifted and new forms of control and exploitation have arisen, especially thanks to new technologies, and their ability to redefine the general consensus as to what is important and what is at stake.
The overall goal of this module is to identify some of these often-implicit processes and to understand what role they play in the production and reproduction of American culture.

**V Americans in Their Own Words (AITOW).**

The *Americans in their Own Words* (AITOW) module is designed to introduce students to a variety of American experiences, and American individuals, or groups, who have, using their own words (or literary expressions, images, films, or music, etc), contributed to American culture in a general sense—as part of their struggle to resist oppression, or as part of an intellectual or artistic necessity to make sense of a changing world.

This module will focus on visions that express, from distinctive points of view, what it means to be an American. From the literary, music, film, or intellectual world, we will explore several authors, directors or songwriters (and the contexts of their work), including Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Harriet Jacobs, Margaret Fuller, Edgar Allen Poe, Frederick Douglass, Tomás Rivero, Gloria Anzaldúa, Laura Tohe, Simon Ortiz, John Updike, James Baldwin, Phil Ochs, Thomas Frank, Noam Chomsky, and David Foster Wallace, among others. From the world of film, we will explore many directors, including Terrence Malick, Ken Burns, Oliver Stone, Errol Morris, and Mark Kitchell, among others. As part of this module, we will also explore several social movements that have redefined American culture, like transcendentalism, the civil rights movement, the Berkeley free speech movement, and the Vietnam War movement, among others.

**VI American Hegemony Across the Globe (AHAG).**

The *American Hegemony Across the Globe* module (AHAG) explores how American culture has helped to shape and influence the entire globe: militarily, politically, economically and culturally.

The module examines the role of the early American empire at the end of the 19th century and early 20th century, as well as of the American globalism that came to dominate the post World War II era. Students are also introduced to the role played by American-led processes of economic development and modernization, and its impact on Latin America. US Political and military interventions are also discussed, primarily concerning Latin American nations, including Chile.
Through films and readings, the Cold War is also explored as part of this module: the cold war lens facilitated the acceptance and promotion (within and without American society) of catastrophic and devastating wars that had little to no real rationale behind them.

Economic globalization (along with its major institutions, like the World Bank, the WTO, the IMF, the international credit-rating agencies, global finance, trans-national corporations, etc.) and the forced neoliberalization of national economies around the world are other examples of the instruments of American power in the world, as local and national state interests are often sacrificed, in the name of “free trade” and the “rule of law”, for the sake of a dogmatic conception of economic growth and, ultimately, for the sake of plunder.

As part of this module, we will also explore ways in which American culture has been negotiated and interpreted around the world, and focus on a few specific examples of how American cultural texts, when analyzed critically, can reveal hegemonic narratives and ideas that help to bring peoples and cultures from around the world into the sphere of influence of the United States.

The goal of this module is to help develop a critical stance towards the ideological and historical processes that are at the root of American military, economic, and cultural hegemony in the world—a stance that can lead to a more nuanced understanding of how American culture influences the actions of individuals or groups outside the US.

VII Film and Discussion (FD).

The Film and Discussion module consists of Saturday morning film screenings and discussions, where, besides the films themselves, the themes and issues related to the other modules, are analyzed and discussed. The module is designed to create a space for students to reflect, analyze, share opinions and defend arguments. Different themes, concepts, and experiences can coalesce around these discussion sessions as the semester unfolds. There will also be periodic lesson tasks assigned during these FD sessions, tasks that invite students to engage in the themes and issues raised in the films, and which students will need to work in groups. The films to be screened (see below) were chosen on the basis of how well they reflect specific issues and/or experiences that link them to each of the other modules.
Films to be Screened


5. METHODOLOGY

The American Cultural Studies Program is designed in such a way so as to help students visualize, analyze, understand, and engage in the complexities of culture in general, and American cultural expressions and practices in particular. The program considers content important, but also how it is arranged, and how it is presented.

The ACS program explores American Culture primarily through historical events and practices; the current paradigms, discourses, ideological systems, social structures, marginal and background practices, and, ultimately the fundamental understanding(s) of being of any given cultural formation are necessarily linked to its past. In lieu of this, the American Culture and Society Through Time module serves as the main axis for the entire program, while the other lectures and discussions—from the other modules—are embedded within that structure. The analysis of American cultural forms and practices in their historical dimension also facilitates the utilization of the comparative method (from Anthropology), where students are able to explore the relationships between cultural epochs (as well as consider the causal and/or developmental connections between them).
Since culture and power are linked, the program borrows substantially from the theoretical and methodological palette of Cultural Studies (Introduction to Cultural Studies), which is a discipline that has been interested in issues of power, and its relationship to culture, since its inception. The program also explores the anthropological sub-discipline of controlling processes, which analyzes processes of social and cultural control that influence human behavior in modern societies like the United States. And since processes of control, as well as a culture’s dominant paradigms, are often contested and resisted, the program also focuses on the role individuals and/or groups play in the renegotiation and re-articulation of the meanings that structure their societies.

The role of individual voices and struggles, then, is also quite important in understanding American culture, which is why the Americans in Their Own Words module introduces students to a variety of literary authors, filmmakers, musicians, activists, comedians, politicians, workers, and other Americans—from all walks of life—to contextualize how it is that agency, at different points in time and always in dialogue with dominant discourses, has contributed to the formation and reformulation of American Culture at large.

Each module is made up of a series of lectures, as well as film and discussion sessions (which seek to highlight the issues and perspectives of each module). Lectures are given by a variety of different professors from different disciplines, departments, and universities. Lectures are composed of various topics, themes, theoretical concepts, cultural texts, films, music, literature, current events and photography and invite students to engage and participate actively in discussing the different expressions of American culture and history. For each week, there will be two or three obligatory readings assigned, and sometimes films, which are designed to prepare students for each lecture, and to stimulate discussion. During the film and discussion sessions, students will also be given the opportunity to participate actively in the discussion, and on occasion work in groups on specific lesson tasks.

6. EVALUATION.

Academic Writing Project: 70%

Students will complete their Academic Writing Project throughout the semester (in stages, which will be established in the AWW module), beginning with their choice of topic and focus, and ending with the final presentation of the project to the academic committee. Students will need to turn in at least one, revised, rough draft. The committee will review both the rough draft and the final draft.
Quizzes: 30%

There will be two types of tests during the semester. There will be 2 basic quizzes (15%) throughout the semester. These quizzes, made up of multiple choice and matching items, will test whether or not the student has understood the major themes and content of readings up to that point, and will take place during the ACSTT module. Study questions will be provided.

There will also be 2 short writing quizzes (15%) that will be based on one or two questions or tasks related to the content of the course up to that point, and they will test the writing skills learned in the AWW module. These will take place either during the Academic Writing Workshop module, or the Introduction to Cultural Studies module, and they will be assigned either in class, as a take-home assignment, or both.

Evaluation Norms:

Students are required to earn an evaluation of 60% (4.0) or more in order to pass the program. This is based on a scale from 1.0 to 7.0, where 7.0 is equivalent to 100%. In order to pass the program and earn the diploma, the average of all evaluations must be equal to or above a 4.0.

Attendance:

Students are required to attend 70% of all classes and discussions. If you cannot make it to any of the classes, please contact the coordinators so that special arrangements can be made, in terms of materials and content. If you need to miss several classes, please let us know in advance.