

English Conversation Club – Semester Outline

Brief Description: A conversation club with structured content about the culture and history of the United States.

Potential meeting time: Weekly, during the lunch hour (14-15:00)

Objectives:

Primary Objectives

- Create a space for students to speak English in an academic setting
 - Encourage student-led discussion about the week’s topic
 - Encourage students to bring in their own questions and topics
- Share information about the history and culture of the United States

Secondary Objectives

- Media Literacy (The U.S. State Department’s & Fulbright’s current educational mission)
 - Model to students how to apply critical thinking to their media consumption
 - In a world with increasing technological connectivity, there is also an increase in misinformation. By applying critical thinking to what the students hear and see about the U.S., they can then take these skills into their daily lives.
- If possible, organize opportunities for other Fulbrighters to visit. Potential people/topics:
 - Kimber Guinn: Higher Education in the U.S.
 - Flora Kirk: Differences Between the U.S. & U.K.
 - Catherine Andre & Trevor Sanders: Theatrical Arts in the U.S.

Classroom Culture

- “Open door” policy: Students can join at any time during the semester
- The weekly topics are a guide/suggestion
 - The discussion can always deviate with the students’ interests and comments
- When being critical, be respectful
 - It is fine to be critical of aspects of a culture that we discuss, but do so with good intent and respect

Example Meeting Timetable (with 1 hour timeslot)

[10 min] Students coming into class, discuss any loose ends from last week, icebreakers, etc.

[10 min] I lead a brief “lesson” (presentation, video, article, activity relating to topic to provide background information)

[30 min]

Proposed Weekly Agenda:

(N.B. since a day of the week has not been established, the stand-in date is the Monday of that week)

- (Jan 14) First Meeting
 - Introductions, discussion about the idea of this club
 - Ask for suggestions and comments from the students:
 - What are some questions that students have about the U.S.?
 - What are some opinions/topics that they know they would like to discuss?
 - What kind of activities do they prefer?
- (Jan 21)—Exam Week
 - This is Martin Luther King’s Day. If possible (if students do want to come during exam week), it would be nice to recognize this. The topic would be about the different ethnic and cultural identities of the U.S.
- (Jan 28)—Exam Week
- (Feb 4)—Exam Week
- (Feb 11)—Winter Break
- (Feb 18)— The English Speaking World
 - Where English is spoken
 - Different types/dialects/accents of English
 - Prescriptivism vs. Descriptivism: Which is the better point of view of take?
- (Feb 25)—U.S. Stereotypes I
 - Portrayal of U.S. in the media
 - Introduction to Media Literacy & “Fake News”
 - Use activities and resources from Barbara McCormack, “Newseum”
 - What are your honest thoughts?
- (Mar 4)—U.S. Stereotypes II
 - How the U.S. sees itself
 - Activities from Barbara McCormack, “Newseum”
 - Rising nationalism vs. Rising U.S.-Apologists
 - Do you think the U.S. sees itself clearly? What about the rest of the world?
- (Mar 11)—Women that Helped Build the U.S.
 - In celebration of International Women’s Day (Mar 8)
 - Showcase some women who history doesn’t mention as often
 - Feminism in the U.S.
 - Encourage students to compare/contrast between U.S. and Romania
 - Feminism is a very polarizing issue in U.S. politics. What do you think of the movement? What are your thoughts of this regarding Romania?
- (Mar 18)—Hyphenated Identities in the U.S.
 - St. Patrick’s Day (Mar 17), is a widely celebrated holiday in the U.S. Some statistics say that there are more Americans that claim Irish ancestry than there are people in Ireland!
 - Explain American’s concept of “Hyphenated Identity” (i.e. African-American, Irish-American, Asian-American, Native American, etc.)
 - Is American a “melting pot” or a “chopped salad”? (i.e. Are these hyphenated identities intermingled or is there still division between these identities?)

- (Mar 25)—Regions of the U.S.
 - immigration & the U.S.
 - Regional identities formed by immigration patterns
 - Cultural differences across the regions of the U.S.
- (Apr 1)—U.S. Media & Entertainment
 - April’s Fools Day (Apr 1)
 - Casual day of jokes, U.S. comedy, and discussion of U.S. popular media
 - The rise of political comedy and commentary in the U.S.
 - Media: The “Fourth” Branch of the U.S. Government”
- (Apr 8)
- (Apr 15)
- (Apr 22)
- (Apr 29)—Easter
- (May 6)—Cinco de Mayo Celebration
 - Discussion about the Latino-American history and culture within the U.S.
 - Cultural appropriation vs. appreciation
 - What are your thoughts about cultural appropriation? Is there anything comparable in the Romanian context? (i.e. Monica Cure’s article about the Romanian le being culturally appropriated by fashion designers)
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- (May 13)
- (May 20)
- (May 27) The U.S. Abroad
 - Memorial Day (May 27)
 - The U.S. has a long history of being involved with and influencing other countries abroad
 - Globalization—What are the pros and cons? Our spheres of influence are becoming larger and larger as the world becomes smaller and smaller.
- (Jun 3)—Final Meeting

Other notes:

- I have left a few weeks “open” or unscheduled to account for movement in the schedule. Majority of them are towards the end of the semester. If all goes well and the students are interested, I think it would be wonderful if students could sign up to bring in a topic and relevant material for us to discuss. If not, other potential topics that could be explore are:

- Fulbright Guests
- Introduction to U.S. Politics
- Sports & Entertainment in the U.S. (i.e. Superbowl on Feb. 3)