Political Science 221, Latin American Politics

SYLLABUS

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Class Web Page

"[Latin] America is ungovernable!"

Simón Bolívar, on his deathbed in 1830.

Course Description

More than 150 years after the great liberator of Latin America, Simón Bolívar, uttered these immortal words, many scholars of the region opine that the caudillo's sentiments have proven prophetic. The 20th century history of Latin America has been plagued by some of the worst afflictions of the human condition: persistent poverty, authoritarianism, social violence, and economic chaos. The search for governability in this region is a struggle that has led many Latin American countries to an array of different economic and political "experiments." These experiments have evolved as pendulum swings between competing modes of governance. Latin American countries have tried democracy and authoritarianism; state interventionist development models and market-oriented programs; economic policies fostering income distribution and others deepening inequality; reformist and revolutionary change.

The purpose of this course is to train students to think critically about the Latin American reality. In general, the course serves as an introduction for those who are unfamiliar with the history, politics, and social structure of the region. Instruction in this class, however, will go beyond a mere introduction to Latin American political history. It will challenge students to analyze complex problems in Latin American politics and development and encourage them to provide informed arguments on these matters. In addition to reading and listening to lectures, this class will invite students to write and orally communicate their observations about the substantive questions in the course.

This course begins with an introduction to Latin American political history and some of the main theoretical approaches to understanding the region. After considering the colonial foundations and the modern development experience of the Latin American countries, students will examine particular country cases: Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, the Central American countries, Chile, Cuba, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela, and the Caribbean nations. The study of these countries will be embedded in a broader discussion of thematic questions: transitions from authoritarianism to democracy, the causes of inequality, the prevalence of political violence, and the failures of revolutionary change. In the final section of the course, students will analyze and discuss recent research on some of these persisting problems in Latin American politics and development.

Students who complete this course successfully are encouraged to pursue further study of Latin America by taking the following courses: in political science - Political Economy of Latin America; in sociology - Ethnography of Latin America and Comparative Study of Developing Societies; in history - Modern Latin America, Mexico in Historical Perspective, Brazil from Colonial to Modern Times, and Revolutionary Change in Latin America; in economics - Economics of Developing Countries, as well as other courses in the Latin American Studies Concentration.

What is Expected of Students

Students will be expected to read, think, criticize, and form arguments. That will require keeping up on reading assignments and attending class regularly. Students must be fully prepared at all times to discuss the readings and concepts from previous lectures. The best students will be critical but balanced in their assessments, and will develop coherent arguments that they can defend in their writing and their in-class discussion.
**Reading Materials**

The four required and one recommended book for this course have been ordered and are presently on sale at the college bookstore. All are paperbacks. The texts are:


In addition to these texts, this course requires your study of a number of other readings from diverse sources. In order to facilitate your access to these materials, I have placed multiple copies on closed reserve at the library. Also, in order to reduce your costs, I have placed the required books on closed reserve. Students are advised to make readable copies of these materials early during the course.

In addition to the readings, this course recommends your use of select audio and video materials. These items include assorted National Public Radio reports accessible through the class web page, videos in the Annenberg/CPB "Americas" Collection on closed reserve, and a couple of feature-length films and documentaries. Brief portions of these multimedia items will be presented during class as a part of the lectures, but you may view and listen to these materials in their entirety during off-class hours. In certain cases, I will offer showings of these multimedia items in a group setting and include a short discussion session afterwards (times and locations TBA).

I will occasionally distribute handouts and clippings from *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Economist*, the *Miami Herald*, the Minneapolis/St. Paul newspapers, and the internet at the beginning of class. Students are also invited to check out links to course relevant web pages on the professor's web page and the class page. Materials on the course's web page will be updated during the semester and will *supplement* rather than duplicate the substance of the lectures and the readings.

**Grading**

Assessment of the students in this course will be based on their performance on two short writing assignments, a single, long writing assignment, a comprehensive examination, and in-class participation. The grade breakdown follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper #1</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper #2</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Comprehensive Exam (each answer)</td>
<td>40% (20%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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**The Writing Assignments**
The purpose of the writing assignments is to provide the students with an opportunity to reflect more thoughtfully on both the theories and empirical cases of the course. These assignments must be turned in before or on the due date specified below. Late work will receive no credit.

**Paper #1:** Students will be asked to prepare a short critical essay of five-six pages in length (typed, double-spaced, 12cpi, one-inch margins, paginated) on a particular author's approach, a concept, theory, or the interpretation of an empirical case on any of the comprehensive themes discussed in this first section of the course (e.g., political culture, development, ethnic identity, dependency, etc.). The short essay must evaluate the consistency and usefulness of the author's main argument(s), pointing out strengths and weaknesses, and concluding with at least a one-page alternative approach, concept, theory or interpretation that would minimize the weaknesses of the author's main argument(s). The purpose of this exercise is to encourage the students to apply critical analysis rather than descriptive skills to the conceptual materials in the course. A brief handout will provide details on this assignment at least one week before the paper is due.

**Paper #2:** Students will choose two of the following eight countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela, Peru, and Bolivia. In a short critical essay of five-six pages in length (typed, double-spaced, 12cpi, one-inch margins, paginated), students will compare the selected countries to test at least one of the analytical approaches/theories discussed in the first section of the course. As with the first paper assignment, a brief handout will provide details at least one week before the paper is due.

**The Comprehensive Exam**

Format: take-home essay exam. Beginning with session 4 and ending with session 7, students will be presented with a set of questions and may choose one per session and compose a 5-6 page answer. The comprehensive exam will "float" until we conclude our study of particular countries. Students will have two weeks after the session outline containing the exam questions is distributed in class to complete the assignment. **The difficulty level of the questions will increase over time.**

The comprehensive exam will test the ability of the student to (1) become familiar with particular empirical cases, (2) build and apply simple causal arguments about issues and problems specific to these cases, and (3) identify similarities and differences in the politics of addressing these questions across national cases. The format of the exam provides students with the opportunity to divide their workload so as to accommodate their assignment schedules in other courses. A handout will answer frequently asked questions regarding the floating exam at the top of session 2.

**Class Participation**

Communicating your insight into the subjects analyzed in this course is an integral part of the learning experience. In no way do I consider class participation a residual category for subjectively determining the final grade. In this course, I will evaluate your performance in both formal, scheduled presentations and informal class discussion. All oral arguments and presentations will be assessed on structure, relevance, insight, and style. The following are structured presentation formats that will be used in this course:

1. Debates on neoliberal reform and Chiapas.
2. Simulations on "delegative democracy" and U.S. intervention.
3. Small group discussions on numerous topics.
4. Q&A of a guest speaker on Chilean democracy.

**The Grading Scale**

I will be using the following grading scale in this course:

98-100 A+

https://acad.carleton.edu/curricular/POSC/classes/POSC221/S01/index.html
Academic Misconduct

Given the fact that academe relies upon the ethical conduct of scholars, students are held to the same standards in their own work. Any act of academic dishonesty or misconduct will be referred to the Office of the Associate Dean. For further information, see Carleton College's *Academic Honesty in the Writing of Essays and Other Papers* and the section on "academic honesty" in *Academic Regulations and Procedures, 2000-01*. Both are available in Laird 140.

Special Needs

Students requiring access to learning tools/special schedules approved by Student Support Services should contact me at the beginning of the course.

*NOTE: Readings must be completed for the dates assigned below.*

**PART ONE:**

**CONCEPTS AND APPROACHES**

**Session 1: Breaking Stereotypes: In Search of the "Real" Latin America**

What are America's stereotypes of Latin America and its people? (March 26, Monday.)


"South of the Border," by Gene Autry, sung by Frank Sinatra.

What are the political sources of American stereotypes of Latin America and its people? Must these stereotypes be broken? If so, how? (March 28, Wed.)


Skidmore and Smith, Prologue (*Recommended*).

Assessing Latin America from the U.S.: The problem of objectivity and ethnocentrism. (March 30, Fri).


**Session 2: Colonial History and the Cultural Foundations of Latin American Politics**

https://acad.carleton.edu/curricular/POSC/classes/POSC221/S01/index.html
Are Latin American politics shaped by a path dependent legacy from the colonial past? (April 2, Mon.)

Diamond et al., pp. 1-43.

Skidmore and Smith, Chapter 1 (Recommended).

What are the cultural (ascriptive) foundations of Latin American politics? (April 4, Wed.)


How strong are historical and cultural path dependencies? Can they be broken? (April 6, Fri.)


Ernesto Che Guevara, The Motorcycle Diaries (All).


Session 3: Development and Crisis in the 20th Century

How did patterns of development shape Latin American politics in the 20th century? (April 9, Mon.)

Diamond et al., pp. 44-53.


Bolívar Lamounier, "Brazil: Inequality Against Democracy," in Diamond et al.

Skidmore and Smith, Chapter 2. (Recommended).

How was Latin American society incorporated into development models? (April 11, Wed.)


Is the neoliberal development model an improvement on the past? (April 13, Fri.)


Debate #1: Neoliberalism.

PAPER #1 DUE (April 16, Monday)

PART TWO:

COUNTRY EXPERIENCES

Session 4: Transitioning To and Deepening Democracy: Argentina, Brazil, and Chile

Why did democracies collapse into authoritarianism in Brazil and the Southern Cone during the 1960's and 1970's? (April 16, Monday)


How was authoritarianism organized in these countries? (April 18, Wednesday)

Carlos H. Waisman, "Argentina: Capitalism and Democracy," in Diamond et al., 76-103.


Film: "Missing" (Showing time and place TBA).

How were transitions from authoritarianism to democracy possible in the 1980's? (April 20, Friday)


Guest Speaker: J. Samuel Valenzuela, University of Notre Dame.

How can Brazil and the Southern Cone cope with the legacy left by authoritarianism? (April 23, Monday)
Articles on "el caso Pinochet" and the hunt for the Argentine generals.


Recommended: Video #5: The Annenberg/CPB "Americas" Collection: "In Women's Hands" (This tape is approximately 1 hour long).

**Film:** "The Official Story" (Argentina) (Showing time and place TBA).

**Session 5: Neoliberal Reform and Its Discontents: Mexico**

* How did the institutionalization of the Mexican Revolution unravel in the Lost Decade of the 1980's? (April 25, Wed.)


* Economist articles on Vicente Fox.

* Why did the Mexican state fail to deal with these persisting problems? (April 27, Fri.)


**Mid-term Break (April 30, Monday)**

* Are Mexico's problems too deep for the state to matter? The causes and meaning of the Chiapas revolt. (May 2, Wednesday)


Film: "Zapatista" (Showing time and place TBA).

**Debate #2: Chiapas.**

* Reconsidering the Neoliberal Reform Agenda (May 4, Friday)


María Lorena Cook, "Regional Integration and Transnational Politics: Popular Sector Strategies in the NAFTA Era," in Chalmers et al.

**Session 6: Democratization and The Problem of Governability: Venezuela, Colombia, and The Central Andean Countries (Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador)**

* What are the threats to sovereignty in Venezuela, Colombia, and the Central Andean states? (May 7, Monday)


**Film:** "Colombia's Guerilla War: A Sundered Nation" (Showing time and place TBA).

**What are the causes and consequences of the internal crisis of Latin American states? (May 9, Wednesday)**


**Handout:** articles on Hugo Chavez and Alberto Fujimori.

**Do the failures of these states open the way to alternative systems of governance? (May 11, Friday)**


Monique Segarra, "Redefining the Public/Private Mix: NGOs and the Emergency Social Investment Fund in Ecuador," in Chalmers et al.


**Can democracy survive attacks on the sovereignty of these states? (May 14, Monday)**


**Simulation #1:** Delegative Democracy

**Session 7: Dealing with the U.S.: Cuba, the Caribbean, and Central America**

**Are the small states of Latin America hopelessly dependent? (May 16, Wednesday)**


Skidmore and Smith, Chapters 8, 9, or 10. *(Recommended).*

**No class. (May 18, Friday). "Brazil Conference in New York City."

**Is revolution a way out of dependency? (May 21, Monday)**


**Film:** Oliver Stone's "Salvador" (Showing time and place TBA).


**Can the U.S. play a productive role in the Latin American small states? (May 23, Wednesday)**

**Film:** Frontline: "The Drug War."

**Simulation #2:** U.S. Intervention in Latin American Revolutions

**PART THREE:**

**A CLOSER LOOK AT A CONSOLIDATING DEMOCRACY: BRAZIL**

**Session 8: The Fragility of Democracy and Institutional Responses (May 25, Friday)**


**Session 9: Democratic Actors and Regime 'Consolidation' (May 28, Monday)**


**Film:** "Central Station" (Brazil) (Showing time and place TBA).

**Session 10: Economic and Social Change in the New Brazilian Democracy (May 30, Wednesday)**


**PAPER #2 DUE (May 30, Wednesday)**