POLS 3270
LATIN AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS
UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to Latin American politics. In it, we will cover the region’s major political processes since the 1960s. We will discuss the democratic breakdowns that swept Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, and the return of democracy in the 1980s and 1990s. We will then examine the challenges that the region faces today. We will touch upon topics like populism, democracy, dictatorship, economic development, and drug violence. By participating in this course you will become familiar with the major issues in Latin American politics and the main concepts and theories political scientists use to explain political phenomena in the region and elsewhere.

The goals of this course are:

1. Identify the most important issues in Latin American politics today.
2. Identify and compare regimes and processes of regime change in Latin America.
3. Distinguish basic concepts and theories used to analyze Latin American politics.

By participating in this course you will:

1. Enhance your understanding of some of the major political issues facing Latin America today.
2. Develop your ability to think critically and creatively about those issues.

REQUIREMENTS

Readings

All readings will be available in Canvas. You are responsible for material covered in the lecture and the reading.
Take-Home Exams

Over the course of the semester you will have two take-home exams (a midterm and a final.) In each exam, you will have to answer one of three essay questions. These questions will be issue oriented. They will ask you to articulate concepts, theories, and facts learned in class, in a single argument. A good essay should show not only that you understand basic concepts and theories, but also that you are able to use them effectively in your own analysis. You are not expected to do research outside of what we have read, seen or talked about in class. Your essays will be evaluated on your ability to provide a thoughtful, well-supported analysis using class material.

I will distribute the questions one week before the deadline. I will not read early drafts, but I am happy to discuss essay outlines and/or ideas with you during office hours. The essays are meant to give you a chance to practice writing skills and assess your understanding of class material. Each take-home exam will account for 15% of your grade.

Movie Reports

During the semester we will watch three films:

- “Machuca” directed by Andrés Wood
- “No” directed by Pablo Larraín
- “Our Brand is Crisis” directed by Rachel Boynton

You will have to choose two of these films and write a movie report connecting the audiovisual piece with the political science concepts and cases we are discussing in class. I will provide a handout highlighting some of the points/questions you should think about when you are watching the movies, in order to help you with that assignment. We will devote a class to discuss some of these questions.

The first movie will be available to screen at your convenience via Kanopy. We will watch the second and third movies in class. The movie reports will be due a week after the movie discussion. They will account for 20% of your grade (10% each.)

A note on religious objections

The films were carefully chosen. They are appropriate for a college setting and fit the class very nicely. They have won several awards and are used in Latin American courses across the country.

Even though they have no gratuitous sex or violence, two of the films are R-Rated and use foul language. These are, after all, movies about coups and dictatorships. Events that, albeit violent and disruptive, have shaped the region’s politics for decades.

I strongly encourage you to watch the movies. They will not only entertain you, but will enhance your knowledge of Latin America. That being said, I am willing to change the assignment for those students that have religious objections. Keep in mind:

1. It is your responsibility to let me know if you do not wish to watch the movie three weeks before the assignment is due. I will not accept religious objections any later than that.
2. There may not be an alternative movie to replace the one in the syllabus. If that is the case, I will assign you a reading instead.

In-Class OAS Debate

During the course we will prepare an in-class simulation of a meeting of the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States. It will work pretty much like a Model Organization of American States (MOAS) or a Model United Nations (MUN), but in a smaller scale. I will assign you a country. You will represent that country in a fake OAS Permanent Council meeting, addressing a problem that I will provide you ahead of time. As with a MUN or a MOAS the delegates will represent their assigned country, according to its ideological orientation, foreign and domestic policies. This exercise will not only increase your knowledge of Latin America and the OAS, but it will help you practice writing and oral skills, and allow you to think about Latin American politics from a perspective other than your own.

The final debate will take place in the last three sessions of class. It will follow a modified version of the official MOAS protocol and rules of procedure found at the MOAS website (http://www.oas.org/en/asg/moas/). The debate will account for 10% of your grade. In order to get an A in this part of the assignment, each student must participate at least three times, with a substantive contribution.

Before the debate, each student should submit a Position Paper. This paper should express their country’s position on the problems addressed in the meeting. It should provide support for such a position using the OAS Charter, facts and/or precedent. This paper will serve as a guideline for each delegate’s opening speech the first day of the meeting.

Good position papers cannot be written in a day. For this reason, I will ask that you turn in two position paper drafts. The first draft will account for 10% of your grade, the second draft will account for 15%. For the first draft we will have an in-class peer-review workshop. I will provide a guide outlining the most important questions that you, as a reviewer, should answer and, at the end of the class, I will collect both, the draft and the reviewer’s guide to grade this activity. The workshop will account for 5% of your grade.

Participation

This is an interactive course. In order to learn, you need to participate in class. This means, first, asking questions. It is VERY important that you ask when you don’t understand. In my experience, it is very likely that if you have a question others in the class have similar doubts as well. Therefore, when you ask questions you help yourself and your classmates. Active participation also means contributing and engaging in class discussions, peer-review exercises, and other in-class activities. In order to do that, you need to come to class prepared. You are expected to read the assigned materials before the class.

Participation counts for 10% of your grade. Your participation will be assessed in two ways. Every session there will be an in-class short quiz. This assignment will account for 5% of your grade. You need to correctly answer 20 out of the 24 questions that will be handed out throughout the semester (i.e. you can miss or get wrong four without penalty.) If you answer all twenty, I will count the last four as bonus points that you can use to increase your final grade.
The remaining 5% of the participation grade will account for in-class participation. It will be assessed in terms of your contribution to group discussions, peer-review exercise, and other class-related activities, using a self-assessment participation form.

HONOR CODE

Academic Integrity

You are expected to abide by USU’s Student Code. Group study is encouraged but, all class assignments are individual. I expect each one of you to present your own work. Plagiarism or cheating will not be tolerated. Any violation to academic integrity will be punished according to USU’s policies.

Civility

Learning requires an open and inclusive environment. Having a diverse group of students with different life experiences, backgrounds and points of view enrich us all. It is important that we engage with one another with respect and sensitivity. This means framing our comments and opinions in a respectful and courteous manner, as well as carefully listening to what others say. For more information see USU’s Student Code.

POLICIES

Attendance

Attendance is very important for your learning process. **You are expected to attend and participate in class.** I will take attendance for record keeping purposes, but ultimately, it is your responsibility to attend class. If you cannot attend, it is also your responsibility to catch up on the material, information or announcements you might have missed. For exams and assignments, I will only excuse absences outlined as excused or allowable absences in the University Catalog (2018-2019).

Email

You are welcome to email me with questions and comments. Please allow me 24 hours to respond. During weekends or holidays it might take me longer to write you back.

It is extremely important to know how to write professional emails. What you write and how you write it reflects how serious and professional you are. When you email professors, you are writing a professional email. As such, please make sure you use the appropriate email etiquette: address me by title and name, end your email with a closing and a signature, etc.

Before you write me, you should also make sure you cannot find the information you are asking for elsewhere. Information like my office hours, the readings assigned, the assignments deadlines etc. is information that you can easily find in the syllabus and Canvas. If you want more information about how to write professional emails refer to this guideline: Email Etiquette: Guidelines for Writing Your Professors.
Electronic Devices

You can use your laptop and tablet in class to access the readings and/or take notes, but please refrain from using it for any other activity (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, email, messenger etc.). Doing so distracts you and everybody around you (including me!) For that same reason, I will ask you to keep your cellphone inside your backpack during class.

Disabilities

Students with ADA-documented physical, sensory, emotional or medical impairments may be eligible for reasonable accommodations. Veterans may also be eligible for services. All accommodations are coordinated through the Disability Resource Center (DRC) in Room 101 of the University Inn, (435)797-2444, https://www.usu.edu/drc/. Please contact the DRC as early in the semester as possible. Alternate format materials (Braille, large print, digital, or audio) are available with advance notice.

DEADLINES

Exams
Mid-Term .................................................. Oct 29
Final ......................................................... TBD

Movie Reports
# 1 ......................................................... Sept 17
# 2 ......................................................... Oct 8
# 3 ......................................................... Nov 5

In-Class MOAS
Position Paper #1 ......................... Oct 15
Peer-Review Workshop ...................... Oct 17
Position Paper #2 ......................... Nov 26
Final Debate ............................. Dec 3-7

Late assignments will get a deduction of 10 points (out of 100) per day.
GRADING

Exams
Mid-Term .............................................. 15%
Final ..................................................... 15%

Participation
Class Quizzes .......................................... 5%
In-class Participation ................................. 5%

Movie Reports (2/3)
# 1 ....................................................... 10%
# 2 ....................................................... 10%
# 3 ....................................................... 10%

MOAS
Position Paper #1 .................................... 10%
Peer-Review Workshop .............................. 5%
Position Paper #2 .................................... 15%
Debate ................................................... 10%

ESSAY RULES

All writing assignments (exams, movie reports, position paper) will follow the same rules.

• **Deadline:** Before 2:30, on the day they are due

• **Medium:** Canvas (Word File)

• **Format:**
  – Times New Roman
  – Font Size 12
  – 1 inch margins
  – 1.5 spacing

• **Length:** 500-700 words (approximately two pages)
CLASS SCHEDULE

NOTE: We may discover that we want to spend more/less time on certain topics. I may consider making changes to the class schedule if such a change would benefit most students’ learning in this course.

INTRODUCTION

August 27: Course Overview
August 29-31: No Class

ISI & Populism

September 5: ISI

September 7: Populism

Democratic Breakdowns and Authoritarian Regimes

September 10: Movie Discussion
- Machuca

September 12: Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism

September 14: Patrimonial Regimes
September 17: Competitive Authoritarian Regimes (Single Party Regimes)

September 19: Consequences of Authoritarianism in Latin America

TRANSITIONS TO DEMOCRACY

September 21: Pacted Transitions

September 24-28: Movie “No”

October 1: Discussion

October 3: Transitions via Institutions - Mexico

October 5: Democratization from Below - El Salvador

October 8: More Guerrilla Warfare - Nicaragua

October 10: Authoritarian Stability - Cuba

CRISIS OF REPRESENTATION

October 12: Market Reform
October 15: Crisis of Representation


November 17: Peer-Review

October 19: Fall Break

October 22-28: Movie “Our Brand is Crisis”


October 29: Discussion

October 31: Erosion of Democracy


November 2: Bolivia, erosion or not erosion?


November 5: Venezuela, the slow death of democracy


November 7: Venezuela, getting worse


November 9: Nicaragua, on a similar path

• Rogers, Tim “Why should we care that Nicaragua is becoming a dictatorship (again).” Fusion, July 30, 2016. Inter-American Dialogue, June 24, 2016.


• Cruz, Jose Miguel. “Bloody uprising in Nicaragua could trigger the next Central American refugee crisis”, July 17, 2018.

CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY

November 12: Drugs and Violence in Colombia

• Thoumi, Francisco. “Illegal Drugs in Colombia: From Illegal Economic Boom to Social Crisis” Journal of the European Economic Association The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 582 (1) pp. 102-116

• Gillin, Joel. “Understanding Colombia’s armed conflict: The role of drugs.” Colombia Reports, January 14, 2015


November 14: Colombian peace, faraway so close

• “Peace at Last.” The Economist, June 25, 2016.

• Botero, Sandra “Colombians Divided over Peace Accords”, LLILAS Benson, October 7, 2016.


November 16: Drugs and Violence - Mexico


• Fredrick, James. “Mexico’s new president has a radical plan to end the drug war.” Vox, August 15, 2018.

November 19: Violence in Central America

• Cruz, Jose Miguel. “Central American gangs like MS-13 were born out of failed anti-crime policies”, May 8, 2017

• Cruz, Jose Miguel. “In Central-America, gangs like MS-13 are bad - but corrupt politicians may be worse”, October 23, 2017.


November 26: Violence in Brazil


November 28: Corruption in Brazil...and elsewhere


• Greenwald, Glen, Andrew Fishman and David Miranda, Brazil is Engulfed by Ruling Class Corruption –and a Dangerous Subversion of Democracy, *The Intercept*, March 18, 2016.


In-Class Model Organization of American States

November 30: MOAS Practice Debate

December 3-7: MOAS Debate