

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA – GREENSBORO
HISTORY OF MODERN LATIN AMERICA

HIS 240, Spring 2011

Prof. Peter B. Vilella

Lecture: M W 10-10:50am, FERG 100

Discussions: F 10-10:50am or 11-11:50am

Instructor's office: MHRA 2108

Office hours: M W 3:30-4:30

Instructor's email: vilella@uncg.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Welcome! This course traces the political, economic, and social histories of the diverse nations of Latin America – the region encompassing Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America – from 1750 to the present day. Along the way, we will highlight the most prevalent institutional and structural features of Latin American civilization, their origins, and their historical trajectories. For example, we will examine the complex racial and cultural crucibles that comprise Latin American communities, their difficult quest for national identity, unity, and harmony, the messy interactions between precapitalist, capitalist, and anticapitalist modes of social organization, the pendulum between revolution and counter-revolution, and the historical role of the United States and other foreign powers and aggressors. Our readings will include a textbook and a variety of primary sources. The class will consist of two fifty-minute lecture sessions per week, plus one 50-minute discussion section led by a teaching assistant.

Knowledge about and understanding of Latin America is especially important today. The United States is one of the world's largest Spanish-speaking nations, hosting the northernmost "Latin American" society. Catholicism in the US is increasingly practiced in Spanish; Univision regularly outdraws the three major English-language networks, a Mexican media tycoon is part owner of the New York Times, and a million elderly US citizens live in expatriate retirement communities across Mexico and Central America. Indeed, majority Hispanophone cities such as Los Angeles and Miami – as well as segments within North Carolina – are tightly integrated into the Latin American cultural sphere, with deep and ongoing historical, demographic, and economic ties to the rest of the hemisphere. This course is not about a distant and exotic land; it is *our* history, a history of us.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students who complete this course will be able to:

1. *Identify* the major events and issues of Latin American history;
2. *Perceive* the historical structures behind those events and issues;
3. *Explain* the origins of those structures, and their expressions today; and
4. *Understand* the constant interplay between continuity and change over time in history.

TEXTS

This class requires heavy – but interesting! – reading. **All readings are mandatory.** In order to comprehend and participate in classroom activities, students will need to complete each week’s reading assignments *before* the corresponding lectures, as indicated in the course schedule.

Our textbook is *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America*, by John Charles Chasteen (3rd edition, W.W. Norton, 2011). In addition, we will also consider a variety of primary sources – that is, textual and visual materials produced by and about the people who lived during the era we are studying. Students should purchase *Child of the Dark* by Carolina María de Jesus (New York: Signet, 2003); the rest of the texts will be posted in pdf format to the course website under the “Course Documents” tab on Blackboard.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Coursework includes: 1) a short map quiz, identifying the nations of modern Latin America; 2) attendance; 3) participation in discussion sections; 4) a midterm exam; 5) two short essays addressing the primary sources; and 6) a final exam (cumulative) consisting of both multiple-choice and short responses. Students will need red bubble sheets and #2 pencils for the two exams, as well as blue books for the final exam.

Grades follow a “point system,” with each grade segment consisting of 100 points total.

Map Quiz	5%
Attendance	10%
Midterm	20%
Essays (2)	20%
Discussion sections	20%
Final Exam	25%

ATTENDANCE POLICY

The reading assignments supplement rather than replace classroom activities, and the midterm and most of the final exam will be derived primarily from my lectures. Therefore, **attendance at lectures is mandatory**, and essential to performing well in the course.

Understanding that illnesses and life events sometimes get in the way, rather than chase doctors’ notes and distinguish “excused” from “unexcused” absences, all students will simply start with a “perfect” attendance score (that is, 100 points) and are allowed three absences for any reason. After that, I will subtract 20 points per missed class, regardless of the reason. I reserve the right to drop any student with more than six absences. In addition, since lateness is disruptive, I will also penalize excessive or habitual tardiness 5-10pts.

Students are expected to be attentive at all times. **Disruptive individuals may be asked to leave**, counting as an unexcused absence. This includes (but is not limited to): talking loudly, texting, surfing websites unrelated to class, and sleeping. If you cannot or do not wish to abide these rules, please consider dropping the course.

DISCUSSIONS SECTIONS AND TEACHING ASSISTANTS

On Fridays students will meet in small discussion sections led by a teaching assistant (TA). These sections are an opportunity for students to engage course themes more deeply with quizzes, short writing assignments, discussions, debates, and other group activities. **Discussion sections account for one-fourth of the overall grade.** Grading is based on attendance, participation, and performance.

The TAs who lead the discussion sections will also grade the essays and most other written work, so students should be respectful. They are also there to aid students who are experiencing difficulties. In general, if you have questions, doubts, or concerns about the course, you should approach your TA first. (The exception is when your concerns have to do with the TA himself or herself; in such cases, you should contact the instructor.)

CLASS WEBSITE AND EMAIL

You must have a working email address, and check it regularly, as it is the main means of communication out of class. I will send out reminders, assignments, and other announcements regularly. Students are responsible for any information sent out via email, as it has the same force as if it were announced in class.

The website on Blackboard will also play a major role. I will post the mandatory readings, topics for short assignments, study questions, links, and other materials necessary to perform well. Occasionally, I will also use the website to follow up on themes covered in lectures and discussions, and respond to student questions. **You should check the website regularly for updates.**

STANDARDS AND COURSE POLICIES

As historians, your ability to write in clear and articulate prose is very important. In every written assignment I expect you to meet basic university writing standards, especially regarding spelling and grammar. Proofread and spell-check everything, as clarity and quality will affect your grade.

Take special care not to plagiarize. Plagiarism – that is, when you quote or paraphrase somebody else’s words or ideas without crediting him or her – is the “cardinal sin” of the university, the academic equivalent of lying, cheating, or stealing. It is both fraud and theft, simultaneously. **Every word you write in this class must be your own, not copied from any other source, whether in print or online,** unless clearly indicated. If in doubt, ask!

The UNCG Academic Integrity Policy is online at <http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu>. I reserve the right to fail and press for disciplinary action against any student who has plagiarized on any assignment, no matter how minor.

All written coursework is to be typed in Microsoft Word (or its equivalent), double-spaced, in 12-pt New Times Roman font, with all the standard 1-inch margins. (Do not mess with the margins.)

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

- *Civility and respect*

In this course we will discuss sensitive and emotionally charged topics, such as race, class, gender, and imperialism. We will also study primary materials representing archaic and offensive perspectives. As they are part of our history, we will not censor or ignore them, and students should be prepared to address them directly and in a mature, academic fashion.

In discussions, we will not always agree with one another, yet we welcome diverse interpretations, as a discussion where everyone agrees is more of a pep rally than a classroom, and unlikely to be enlightening. We aim, therefore, to foster an atmosphere in which all students feel free to express their ideas, and in which we can disagree and challenge one another openly without feeling threatened or disrespected. Thus, **personal attacks and offensive language will not be tolerated**, since they obstruct honest debate.

A good rule to keep in mind: **when challenging another's arguments, try to do so in a way that assumes good faith on his or her part.** Address the strongest aspects of his or her ideas, not a cartoonish, simplistic, and easily dismissed version of them. This rule has the added benefit of requiring each of us to consider our own assumptions more critically.

- *Pride in our work*

If you are spending the time, energy, and resources – both yours and those of others – to pursue a university education, you should take it seriously. Students should remember that they are adults, and nobody is forcing them to be here. UNCG is not an extension of high school or childhood and it should not be approached as if it were. So have some pride in your work and studies; turn in work that is clean and polished, adhere to deadlines, and follow instructions. Otherwise, why be here? Students who disrupt class or who are otherwise not contributing positively may be asked to leave, counting as an unexcused absence. I may refuse to accept written work that is tattered, torn, or excessively messy.

- *Technology*

The proliferation of laptops, tablets, and other gadgets is a mixed blessing in universities. While it can allow students to create and organize notes and documents more easily, it can also be the ultimate distraction, and their grades may suffer. Therefore, my policy is as follows:

- **Students are adults**, and can decide for themselves whether to bring technology into the classroom, or if it would damage their class performance.
- **However, it is unacceptable to distract other students.** Students who wish to use a laptop or tablet in class must sit in the back row.
- I reserve the right to ask students whose laptop/tablet activities are disruptive to others, **for any reason**, to shut down their machines.
- **Cell phone use – including texting – is always prohibited.**

- *Food and drink*

You may have drinks – but not food – in class, unless you bring enough for everybody, plus a double portion for the instructor.

Have a great semester!