

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA – GREENSBORO
HISTORY OF MODERN LATIN AMERICA

HIS 240, Spring 2014

Prof. Peter B. Vilella

Lecture: T R 9:30-10:45, MHRA 1215

Instructor's office: MHRA 2108

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

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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 1759 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. We will focus in particular on the complex racial and cultural crucibles that comprise Latin American communities, their rocky quests for national identities, 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 seventy-five minute sessions per week, which will include lectures, group activities, and discussions.

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 Spanish-speaking; 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, and is critical to living and functioning in today's globalized and multicultural world.

The course counts for 3 credit-hours, and is intended for lower-level undergraduates of all majors. It fulfills the following General College (GEC) Requirements: GE core-**GHP**; GE marker-**GN**; College Additional Requirements-**GMO**. The course is also cross-listed with IGS (IGS-223). There are no prerequisites or co-requisites.

GENERAL EDUCATION (GEC) LEARNING GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Learning Goal 1. Foundational Skills: *Think critically, communicate effectively, and develop appropriate fundamental skills in quantitative and information literacies.*

LG3. Knowledge of Human Histories, Cultures, and the Self: *Describe, interpret, and evaluate the ideas, events, and expressive traditions that have shaped collective and individual human experience through inquiry and analysis in the diverse disciplines of the humanities, religions, languages, histories, and the arts.*

LG5. Personal, Civic, and Professional Development: *Develop a capacity for active citizenship, ethics, social responsibility, personal growth, and skills for lifelong learning in a global society. In so doing, students will engage in free and open inquiry that fosters mutual respect across multiple cultures and perspectives.*

As a General Historical Perspectives (GHP) course with a Global Non-western (GN) marker, this course emphasizes the following Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):

GHP:

1. Use a historical approach to analyze and contextualize primary and secondary sources representing divergent perspectives. **(LG1)**
2. Use evidence to interpret the past coherently, orally and/or in writing. **(LG3)**

GN:

1. Find, interpret, and evaluate information on diverse cultures. **(LG1)**
2. Describe interconnections among regions of the world, focusing on cultures, nations or sub-nationalities in the Caribbean, Latin America, Middle East/North Africa, Asia, Africa, Pacific Islands, or indigenous peoples around the world). **(LG3)**
3. Use diverse cultural frames of reference and perspectives to analyze issues. **(LG5)**

REQUIREMENTS FOR ACHIEVING LEARNING GOALS

Coursework includes: 1) a short map quiz, identifying the nations of modern Latin America; 2) attendance; 3) short written assignments and group activities; 4) a midterm exam; 5) two short essays addressing 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. Final grades are calculated according to the following scheme:

Map Quiz	5%
Attendance	10%
Short assignments and group activities	10%
Midterm	20%
Essays (2)	30%
Final Exam	25%

GRADE EVALUATION RUBRIC

A = fulfills assignment entirely while amply demonstrating **original insight and reflection**

B = fulfills assignment **entirely and thoughtfully**

C = mostly fulfills assignment, but without originality (e.g., echoes the instructor)

D = incomplete, or betrays non-comprehension of or non-engagement with theme or issue

F = severely incomplete, irrelevant, plagiarized, or never turned in

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 gathered into a course reader, posted in pdf format to the course website under the “Course Documents” tab on Blackboard. Students should print out the course reader, or purchase it from the FedEx/Kinko's on Tate St.

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. **I do not distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences.** Recognizing that life happens, students may miss **up to three** class meetings without penalty. Each additional absence will deduct 20 points off of the final attendance score (beginning from 100/A+). I reserve the right to drop students with more than six unexcused absences from the course. Since it is disruptive, I will also penalize 10 points for habitual or excessive lateness.

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 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.**

CRITERIA FOR WRITTEN WORK

All written coursework, whether short assignments or longer papers, is to be typed in Microsoft Word (or its equivalent), in 12-pt New Times Roman font, with all the standard 1-inch margins. (Do not mess with the margins.) I do not accept late papers.

As historians, your ability to communicate in **clear and articulate prose** is very important. In every written assignment, whether on paper or online, I expect you to meet basic university writing standards regarding spelling and grammar. Clarity and quality affect grades.

Take special care not to plagiarize. Plagiarism—quoting or paraphrasing the words or ideas of others without giving credit—is the academic equivalent of lying, cheating, or stealing. **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 will fail any student who has plagiarized on any assignment, however small, and will contact the dean.

CLASSROOM STANDARDS AND 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 encounter primary materials representing archaic and frankly offensive perspectives. As they are part of our history whether we like it or not, we will not censor or ignore them. 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, unlikely to be enlightening. We aim, therefore, to foster an atmosphere in which all students feel free to express and explore their thoughts, 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 of thumb: **when challenging one another, assume good faith**. Address the strongest aspects of the contrary position, not a cartoonish straw man version. This encourages us to reflect upon our own assumptions more critically, a central goal of liberal arts education.

Technology

The proliferation of laptops, tablets, and other gadgets is a mixed blessing in university classrooms. While they allow students to keep and organize notes and documents more easily, they are also distracting, and students' grades may suffer. My technology 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.** I respectfully ask students who use laptops to sit in the back of the class where flickering screens will not disrupt others. I may also ask students with gadgets to switch

seats **for any reason** or, when appropriate, to shut down their machines and never bring them again.

- **Texting is always prohibited.** I may ask students who are disengaged or not contributing positively to leave, counting as an unexcused absence.

Food and drink

You may have drinks in class. Food is not allowed, unless you bring enough for everybody, plus a double portion for the instructor. I prefer salty snacks and/or chocolate.

Have a great semester!



1 - The poverty and wealth of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil