



Photo taken in front of the Palacio Nacional, Mexico, D.F. (Summer 2004).

**PSCI 3680-001 – Latin American Politics  
(also LLS 3900-001 and INST 4140-005)**

Fall 2013

T TH 11:30-12:45

Roskens 010D

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**1. Course Overview:**

In the 20 plus years since the end of the Cold War and the resulting dramatic changes in the world, politicians, pundits and political analysts have been trying to sort out what impact these changes would have for the composition of political and economic life in Latin America. There have been plenty of predictions about the survivability and possible collapse of the Latin American regimes in the face of compelling evidence that strongly suggests that the present focus on economic integration into the global market, in reality, is stifling economic growth and creating the type

of political instability that could lead to the return of the authoritarian dictatorships of the past. In all of this there are issues regarding Latin America, both internal and external, that warrant closer study if we are to more fully illuminate and understand the successes and failures of the Latin American political development, past, present and future. Within this context, one can easily argue that Latin America is at a crucial nexus.

Utilizing a modified “seminar” format, the course will provide students with an in-depth understanding of the political, economic, and social issues confronting the Latin America at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The course will incorporate readings from leading scholars on Latin American politics, and comparative political and economic development and stability related to the Americas, and the impact of neo-liberal trade policies. This will include extensive reading, in-class discussions and accessing various media including film, music and the Internet.

The majority of the course will be spent reading and discussing the content and ideas advanced by in the text edited by Harry Vanden and Gary Prevost in their collection, *Politics of Latin America: The Power Game* as the base of our multi-disciplinary and comparative inquiry. The book will focus on some of the contemporary issues facing Latin America nations today, including but not limited to the impact of economic integration, regime stability, public policy concerns, human rights and immigration issues, civil-military relations and transition scenarios across the entire region. In addition, we will incorporate in-depth analysis of Mexico through Alfredo Corchado’s searing biography of his life as a reporter in a state that already has, and will continue to have, a profound impact on regional and hemispheric political dynamics.

Taken as a whole, it is the instructor’s hope that the inquiries into these topics will enable students to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the issues confronting Latin American political systems. Both of these texts will be supplemented by significant related readings.

We will use discussions throughout the semester to pull the course together. This will not be a review in the conventional sense. Rather it will be an opportunity to re-examine your own conceptions of globalization and democracy in Latin America and its future in the context of the course material. Moreover, this approach will also attempt to help you see the links between comparative politics, international relations, international political economy and political theory. Too often in courses such as this, the divisions among the other parts of the discipline are accentuated. The major goal of this course will be to break down these sometimes too rigid barriers and show how comparative approaches help in understanding other portions of the discipline of political science.

This is not a course that requires you to supply “correct” answers in your written assignments or in classroom discussions. Rather, a basic principle of this course is that learning must be a challenge and that you must pull material together on your own, and use your own values, imagination and other resources you have accessed to draw conclusions. In that sense, your writing for research papers and essays must concisely develop hypotheses, state clearly what you are trying to explain, develop a clear line of inquiry for your essays, and analyze as well as defend your arguments. In that vein, I am not here to teach you anything. I look at myself as a resource, as someone who is here to facilitate your learning. To that end I am committed.

## **2. Required Course Texts:**

Harry E. Vanden and Gary Prevost, editors. *Politics of Latin America: The Power Game*, Fourth Edition. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). 633 pages.

Alfredo Corchado, *Midnight in Mexico: A Reporter's Journey Through a Country's Descent Into Darkness*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 284 pages.

All of the required supplemental readings for the course will be available on the course Blackboard website.

## **Periodical Readings:**

There are powerful and fast-moving changes underway in Latin America. Massive political changes in countries such as Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia, Cuba and Mexico have been profound. Consequently, relying on just the texts will not be sufficient. You are required to keep up with contemporary political developments in Latin America if you are to get the most out of this course. Perhaps, the single most important periodical source is the *New York Times*. It is available and free here on the UNO campus to all students. Other important sources include the *Wall Street Journal*, *The Economist*, *Business Week*, *The New Republic*, *The American Prospect*, and *The Nation*. There are also numerous scholarly journals that will be of great assistance to you in developing your research papers. Among those most highly recommended are the: *Latin American Perspectives*, *Latin American Research Review*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *Journal of Democracy*. Additionally, avail yourselves of the numerous UNO library on-line electronic databases such as *J-STOR*, *Project Muse* and others for collecting articles and information for your research assignments.

## **3. Course Assignments:**

Each student will complete the following assignments:

- There will be an examination after the 6<sup>th</sup> week of the semester (October 3<sup>rd</sup>) and a mid-term exam during the 12<sup>th</sup> week of the

semester (November 15<sup>th</sup>). Both examinations will cover all reading material and lectures from the beginning of the course. The exams are short answer and essay format. There is **no** final exam for this course.

- All students will complete one critical review essay on an academic journal article assigned by the professor. I will also provide guidance on the writing of a critical review essay. This assignment is due October 10<sup>th</sup>.
- A research paper of 12 to 15 pages on an aspect of Latin American politics in the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This will require the careful choice of a topic that can be drawn from a number of different areas including politics, economics, social policy, regime transition and foreign policy. We will go over the instructor's expectations before the Fall Break. Paper topics statements are due October 15<sup>th</sup>. The final paper is due December 17<sup>th</sup>.
- Each student will prepare two "reaction" papers to films that we will be viewing during the semester. The instructor will handout a set of questions related to the film to assist the student's reaction. These reaction papers should be between 3 to 5 pages in length. The first reaction essay is due on September 18<sup>th</sup>, the second is due on October 24<sup>th</sup>.
- Additionally, I will conduct this course in a modified "seminar" format, meaning that I will expect that all students be prepared to provide an overview of that day's reading and be able to discuss the most relevant points of the reading with the instructor and the rest of the class.

Grading for the course (on a scale of 500 grade points) is broken down as follows:

|                                       |               |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| Exam 1 (Short Answer and Essay)       | 100 pts       |
| Midterm Exam (Short Answer and Essay) | 100 pts       |
| Film Reaction Papers (2)              | 50 pts        |
| Research Paper                        | 150 pts       |
| Critical Review Essay                 | 50 pts        |
| Participation                         | <u>50 pts</u> |
| Total                                 | 500 pts       |

Exams: Letter grades are set by taking the actual top student score as 100%; 90% of that score is an A; 80 %...etc.

Research Paper- Papers are evaluated using the following criteria:

*Intellectual Content* (4 points possible)

*Scholarship* (4 points possible)

*Organization* (4 points possible)

*Style* (4 points possible)

*Format and Documentation* (4 points possible)

Translation to letter grades:

20-18 points = A

17-15 points = B

14-11 points = C

10-8 points = D

7-5 points = F

#### **4. Course Ground Rules:**

- Late papers and assignments are not acceptable. They are a burden to me and are unfair to your colleagues who do their work on time. Therefore, I will deduct a whole letter grade for each day an assignment is late. Extensions may be given but only if they are requested well in advance of the deadline, and there is a compelling reason.
- It is not my practice to give incompletes. If work is not handed in on time, the student will lose credit for each day it is late. However, if there is a suitable reason - subject to my approval and supported with appropriate documentation - an exception to the “no” incompletes rule may be possible. With respect to these first two ground rules, if you have problems in completing your assigned work, please let me know about it sooner than later.
- Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Any student turning in a written assignment which is not your own work will receive a failing grade for the assignment and is subject to the further penalties as detailed in the “General Information Section on Registrations and Procedures” of the *UNO Undergraduate Catalog*.
- The use of scholarly sources is essential in your research papers, you must make reference to the sources from which you drew your information. It must be documented using, the American Political Science Association, *Style Manual For Political Science* or Kate L. Turabian *A Manual for Writers*. The research paper must reflect consultation on *at least 9* substantial (academic books or referred journal articles) sources.
- Participation is a significant portion of your grade for this course (10 percent). Therefore you must actually be in class - prepared and verbally participating - in order to be eligible to receive full credit for this portion of the course’s grade.
- I do not expect that the views and perceptions of Latin American politics (or for any contentious matter) by me or by all of you to be identical, either now, or at the completion of the course. The course is a place for the free and perhaps heated exchange of ideas. Thus I expect you to challenge viewpoints that differ from your own, but I also expect you to substantiate your arguments from the readings, lectures and discussions. In other words, you will be penalized if you simply agree with my lectures or the readings for no apparent reason other than the fact that I am your professor, or if you insist on merely spouting opinions.

- There are three basic rules of success in this and any class in which I am the instructor. Follow the rules and you more than likely be happy with the product of your labor.
  1. First, show up to class!
  2. Second, follow the instructions! Pay close attention to what is being said and what is being required of you.
  3. Third, turn your work in on time. Rather than schedule school around your life, the successful student is mindful of scheduling life around school.

Following these three rules usually equates with the successful completion of assignments. In reality, this is what any prospective employer, partner or suitor wants to know about you. Can you show up? Can you pay attention? And can you finish the job?

## **5. Course Readings and Assignments Schedule:**

### **Week 1 (Aug. 26) – Introduction and Foundations**

Readings: Vanden/Prevost – Ch. 1-2; Corchado – Introduction and Ch. 1.

### **Week 2 (Sep. 2) – The Problem of Democracy**

Readings: Vanden/Prevost – Ch. 3-4; Corchado – Ch. 2-3  
 Film – *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004)

### **Week 3 (Sep. 9) – The Neoliberal Economic Puzzle I**

Readings: Vanden/Prevost – Ch. 5-6; Corchado – Ch. 4-5

### **Week 4 (Sep. 16) – The Neoliberal Economic Puzzle II**

Readings: Vanden/Prevost – Ch. 7-8; Corchado – Ch. 6-7  
 Sept. 18th – Film Review Essay 1 Due

### **Week 5 (Sep. 23) – Political Processes**

Readings: Vanden/Prevost – Ch. 9-10; Corchado – Ch. 8-9  
 Lecture: Writing a Critical Review Essay

### **Week 6 (Sep. 30) – Political Actors**

Oct. 3rd – Exam 1  
 Discussion – Corchado Part 1

### **Week 7 (Oct. 7) – Wrestling with the American Giants**

Readings: Vanden/Prevost – Ch. 11; Corchado – Ch. 10-11.  
 Film – *City of God* (2003)  
 October 10<sup>th</sup> – Critical Review Essay Due

### **Week 8 (Oct. 14) – Brazil**

Readings: Vanden/Prevost – Ch. 15; Corchado – Ch. 12-14  
 October 15: Paper Topics Due

**Week 9 (Oct. 21) – Colombia**

Readings: Vanden/Prevost – Ch. 19; Corchado – Ch. 15-18.  
October 24 – Film Review Essay 2 Due,

**Week 10 (Oct. 28) - The Cuban Conundrum**

Readings: Vanden/Prevost – Ch. 14; Corchado – Ch. 19-21.

**Week 11 (Nov. 4) – Mexico: “So Far from God, So Close to the U.S.”**

Readings: Vanden/Prevost – Ch. 18; Corchado Ch. 22-24.

**Week 12 (Nov 11) – Mexico Continued**

Corchado Discussion II  
November 15th - Exam 2

**Week 13 (Nov. 18) – Chile and The Southern Cone**

Readings: Vanden/Prevost – Ch. 16-17.

**Week 14 (Nov. 25) – Central America**

Readings: Vanden/Prevost - Ch. 12 and 20.  
Nov. 28<sup>th</sup> – Thanksgiving Holiday

**Week 15 (Dec. 2) – Venezuela and the Bolivarian Alternative**

Readings: Vanden/Prevost - Ch. 18.

**Week 16 (Dec.9) - Prep Week**

**Research Papers Due – Dec. 17th**