



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

PSCI 3680 – Latin American Politics

Spring 2012

T 6:00 - 8:40

378 Arts and Sciences Hall

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1. Course Overview:

In the 20 plus years since the ending of the Cold War and the resulting dramatic changes, 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, 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 21st 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 first part of the course will be spent reading and discussing the content and ideas advanced by in the collection of essays by Peter Kingstone in his collection, *The Political Economy of Latin America*. The thrust of this collection presents a reflection on the neoliberal debate in Latin America and the institutional puzzle that underlies the region’s difficulties with democratization and development.

Simultaneously we will be utilizing Jan Black’s *Latin America: Its Problems and Its Promise* as the base of our multi-disciplinary and comparative inquiry, the book will focus on some of the contemporary issues facing Latin America 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 and Cuba as two states that already have, 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 the final three weeks of 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 you must use your own values, imagination and other material you have learned to draw conclusions. In that sense, your writing for research papers 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 argument.

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:

Jan Knippers Black, editor. *Latin America: Its Problems and Promise*, 5th Edition, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2010) 658 pages.

Peter R. Kingstone, editor. *The Political Economy of Latin America*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011) 177 pages.

All of the required supplemental readings for the course are available on the course website in PDF format.

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 via the Internet at www.nytimes.com. You will have to register a log-in and password in order to access this important source. Other important sources include the *Wall Street Journal*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Business Week*, *The Economist*, *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 *Lexis-Nexis* 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 5th week of the semester and a mid-term exam during the 10th week of the semester. 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.
- There is an in-class group exercise during the 14th and 15th weeks of the semester. The class will be divided into 8 groups, each representing one of the following countries: Argentina, Venezuela, Brazil, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia and Chile. Each group will respond to a set of questions related to topics introduced by the instructor, and prepare a presentation to the rest of the class.
- A research paper of 12 to 15 pages on an aspect of Latin American politics in the first decade of the 21st century. This will require the careful choice of a topic which 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 Spring Break. Paper topics must be selected by March 13th.
- Each student will prepare two "reaction" paper 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.
- 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
Participation	50 pts
Research Paper	150 pts
Group Project/Presentation	<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. 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. First, show up to class! Second, follow the instructions! Pay close attention to what is being said and what is being required of you. 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 (Jan. 10) – Introduction and Foundations

Readings: Black – Ch. 1-4, Kingstone – Ch. 1.

Week 2 (Jan. 17) – The Problem of Democracy

Readings: Kingstone – Ch. 2; Black – Ch. 5-6

Week 3 (Jan. 24) – The Neoliberal Economic Puzzle I

Readings: Black – Ch. 7-9

Week 4 (Jan. 31) – The Neoliberal Economic Puzzle II

Readings: Kingstone – Ch. 3

Film – *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004)

Week 5 (Feb. 7) – Political Processes

Readings: Black – Ch. 10-12

Feb 12th – Film Review Essay 1 Due

Week 6 (Feb. 14) – Political Actors

February 17th – Exam 1

Readings: Kingstone – Ch. 4

Week 7 (Feb. 21) – Wrestling with the American Giants

Readings: Kingstone – Ch. 5; Black – Ch. 13-14.

Film – *City of God* (2003)

Week 8 (Feb. 28) – Brazil

Readings: Kingstone – Ch. 7; Black – Ch. 25

Week 9 (Mar. 6) – Colombia

Readings: Kingstone – Ch. 9; Black – Ch. 20.

March 12 – Film Review Essay 2 Due, Paper Topics Due

Week 10 (Mar. 13) - Mexico: “So Far from God, So Close to the U.S.”

Readings: Kingstone – Ch. 11; Black – Ch. 15.

Spring Break – March 18-25

Week 11 (Mar. 27) – Mexico Continued

Week 12 (Apr. 3) – The Cuban Conundrum

Readings: Kingstone – Ch. 10; Black – Ch. 18.

April 9th - Exam 2

Week 13 (Apr. 10) – Chile and The Southern Cone

Readings: Kingstone – Ch. 6 and 8, Black – Ch. 26-27.

Film: *Las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo and the Search for Identity* (2011)

Week 14 (Apr.17) – Group Presentations

Week 15 (Apr. 24) – Prep Week/Group Presentations

Research Papers Due – May 1st