Welcome!

The main objective of the course is to introduce you to political behavior and institutions in Latin America, paying attention to topics that include the status of democracy, political economy, race, ethnicity, and gender, and international relations, among many others. We will discuss and deliberate on questions such as the following:

- Will democracy ever thrive in Latin America? How can that happen?
- Can inequality and poverty be addressed successfully?
- How inclusive of women, indigenous groups, and individuals of African descent are Latin American societies? Is something that needs to be done to reverse exclusion?
- Why have revolutions, coups, and other forms of political instability been so prevalent in many parts of Latin America?
- What has been the role of the United States in Latin America? A positive one? A negative one?

No prior knowledge of Latin American history is required for this course, but it will be a helpful tool for you to examine those topics.

This syllabus can be modified in whole or in part during the course of the semester, but not without notification.

The method to the madness

The course will feature a combination of lecture and classroom activities. The lectures contextualize the assigned material and incorporate important terms and concepts that are not necessarily found in it. The classroom activities are designed in part to facilitate the comprehension of the aspects presented in the lectures and the main themes analyzed in the assigned material. They include, but are not limited to, multimedia (films, video, and sound files), in-class short essays, simulations, group activity, or a combination of all of them. Your full cooperation is required.

Most of the assigned readings are oriented to specialists in the subject matter of the course and will require that you possess enough intellectual sophistication to follow along. Although some time may be spent summarizing the readings, no class will be devoted to detailed explanations of them. Hence, I expect you to read all of the assigned material. It makes my job easier and your time in class more productive. Having said that, it is highly recommended that you take full advantage of class time to ask questions about the material.
In addition,

- You must attend all classes except whenever there is a powerful and justifiable reason to miss one. A specific policy on class attendance will be explained below, and I expect you to follow it.
- You must participate actively in class. You are not required to do so on every single class day, although doing so will increase your chances of earning an A in the course. I simply expect you to be willing and ready to share your ideas with others and do so often. I also expect you to fully utilize your knowledge of the assigned material in every instance of in-class discussion, to the largest extent possible.
- You must take the initiative in making up for lost work. It is your responsibility to inquire about the possibility of make-ups whenever necessary.

In short, the more effort you put into the course, the better your final grade will be.

My primary purpose as your instructor is not just to teach and share what I know, but to help you grow as a student and as an individual. My efforts are rewarded every time you unchain your intellectual curiosity, exchange ideas with others, take charge of your own learning, and excel in your efforts. I promise to treat you with respect, fairness, and compassion. I do not have all the answers to all your questions, but I do have knowledge to share and always do my best at that. I take pride in and thoroughly enjoy teaching this particular course. I look forward to share my enthusiasm with you.

Ground rules

Attendance: To accommodate for any late registrations and/or early drops, attendance will not be taken until February 11. All absences before that day will not be recorded.

Starting on February 11, an attendance sheet will be provided and all absences should be notified about by e-mail. Absence notifications will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis; once I receive your e-mail notification, if your stated reasons for missing a class are deemed justifiable, you will be excused for that day. Further substantiation from the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education will be requested at the discretion of the instructor. Failure to notify on a timely basis will result in an unexcused absence in your attendance record.

The UAlbany Health Center will provide excuse notes for medical conditions that prevent a student from attending a full week of classes and meet certain conditions. In general, illness verification after the fact and missing classes due to appointments at the Center do not warrant a medical excuse. More information on the University’s Medical Excuse Policy can be found at www.albany.edu/health_center/medicalexcuse.html. If you were seen by a medical professional outside the Health Center, please bring the appropriate documentation.

Late arrivals policy: Late arrivals will not be penalized. If the attendance sheet is available, please sign out when class ends to get credited for attending.

Academic integrity policy: For purposes of this course, unauthorized collaboration, multiple submissions, sabotage, falsification, bribery, and plagiarism will be treated as violations of academic integrity. Depending on the severity of the violation, one of the following penalties can be imposed at the discretion of the instructor, in addition to the filing of a Violation of Academic Integrity Report (VAIR):

- Warning without further penalty, or with the requirement that an assignment be redone and resubmitted
- Lowering of an assignment/exam grade
- Assigning a failing grade on a paper containing plagiarized material
- Assigning a failing grade on any examination in which cheating occurred
- Lowering a course grade
- Giving a failing grade in a course or other academic exercise

If the student admits to the violation or accepts the charges listed in the VAIR, the penalty will be imposed. In case a failing grade for either a component of the course of for the whole course is imposed, the student is neither allowed to request a change in the grading scheme from A-E to S/U nor to withdraw from the course.
A student can initiate a grievance process if there is reason to believe he/she has been erroneously penalized or that a penalty is inappropriate, beginning with the instances of the Political Science Department and Rockefeller College. If the grievance process clears the student of wrongdoing, no penalties will be imposed and the VAIR will be destroyed. However, if the grievance process confirms the violation, the penalty will be imposed.

In case the violation either merits a failing grade in the course or is particularly egregious regardless of the penalty imposed, the instructor may also refer the violation to the Office of Conflict Resolution and Civic Responsibility (OCRCR) through the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education. Previous documented violations of academic integrity, whether in this course or any other course, will result in automatic referral. If OCRCR clears the student of wrongdoing, no penalties will be imposed and the VAIR will be destroyed. However, if the violation is confirmed, the penalty will be imposed and the student will be subject to further sanctions, which may include the refusal of a scholarship, fellowship, and teaching or research assistantship; disciplinary probation; and either suspension or expulsion from UAlbany.

Any student not cleared or wrongdoing either through the grievance process or by OCRCR will have a copy of his/her VAIR retained in the Office of Undergraduate Education in accordance with current student retention record policies, and the contents of the VAIR may be shared with schools or employers requesting such information.

*It is your responsibility to become familiar with and follow the UAlbany Standards of Academic Integrity. Claims of ignorance, unintentional error, or personal and/or academic pressures cannot be presented as valid excuses for academic misconduct. More information on the Standards can be found at www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html.*

**Incompletes policy:** *No Incompletes will be given, except under extenuating circumstances.* Any course requirement unfulfilled by our last class, except for attendance and participation, will receive a grade of F and cannot be made up.

**Other ground rules**
- You may bring your laptop, netbook or iPad to the classroom to access the readings, take notes, and register for summer and/or fall courses if you need to do so at a certain day and time. Any other use is prohibited. Infractions will result in suspension of usage for the remainder of the semester.
- **Texting in class is prohibited.** You may keep your cell phone on (set to vibrate) in order to receive emergency messages from the University, but in less urgent circumstances texting in class is distracting to you and disrespectful to me and your classmates. Please refrain from doing so. Infractions will result in a penalty to be specified later in this syllabus. This ground rule is also applicable to web surfing, tweeting, facebooking, or any other activity done through your smartphone (except audio recording of lectures). If it is absolutely imperative for you to respond to a text, please leave the classroom.

**Reasonable accommodation policy:** Reasonable accommodations will be provided to students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, cognitive, learning, and psychiatric disabilities. You are encouraged to request a letter from the Office for Disability Services listing suggestions for accommodation. Please bring that letter to my attention as soon as possible. Laptop, netbook, and iPad usage may be allowed under this policy, but any usage other than what is mentioned in the preceding subsection will result in a penalty to be specified later in this syllabus.

Arrangements will also be made for students with documented cases of depression and anxiety disorders. Please bring your situation to my attention as soon as possible, before it becomes a serious impediment to your performance in the course. Such arrangements will not supersede the academic integrity policy for this course.

**Learning outcomes**

Once you complete this course, you will:

- evaluate the performance of Latin American political institutions
- commentate on the successes and failures of Latin American governments
- provide informed opinions about political behavior in Latin America
• identify key characteristics of Latin American societies and their connection with Latin American political behavior
• cross-examine different opinions about certain aspects or subjects of Latin American politics and government
• enumerate important developments in Latin American history and, most importantly, theorize about their connection with government and politics in the region

To achieve those outcomes, this course will employ the following:

**Graded participation:** The most important function of the classroom activities is to facilitate in-class discussion of course topics and the assigned material. In-class discussion is an effective way to develop your critical and analytical thinking skills, and better understand the material. The point is not to win a shouting match, but to share ideas. I promise to do my best to provide a safe atmosphere for discussion, but you should be respectful to the ideas of others even if you may not necessarily agree with them. Any disrespectful or uncivil behavior during class discussion will not be tolerated.

**Reaction essays (four papers, 25 points each, 100 points total):** You will be asked to write four essays in which you will provide your personal reaction to an assigned reading of your own choosing. These essays will be between three and four pages long, written on black 12-point letter font (Arial, Courier New, or Times New Roman), double-spaced paragraphs with tabs; and will be graded on argumentation (10 points) and reading comprehension (15 points). Keep in mind that these essays are not meant to be summaries of the readings. The penalty for texting in class and for abusing your laptop, netbook, and iPad privileges under reasonable accommodation requests is a deduction of 10 points on this requirement.

**One roundtable report (25 points):** For this requirement, students will be divided into groups. Each group will be given one of the optional readings and asked to present a collective reaction to it in the form of an oral presentation that will not exceed 30 minutes, due on the day the reading is listed for. Those presentations will be assessed on the same criteria as the individual reaction papers. Each group member will be evaluated individually and the scores will be averaged.

**Capstone work (100 points):** There will not be an in-class final exam. Instead, you have two options:

• **One take-home exam:** You will be required to submit answers to three discussion questions of your own choosing on a paper written on black 12-point letter font (Arial, Courier New, or Times New Roman), double-spaced paragraphs with tabs. Your paper should be between 15 and 20 pages long. It will be graded on clarity, organization, critical and analytical thinking, and comprehension of the course material – all worth 25 points each. Your answers must include the assigned readings – as many as possible. You may also include any of the optional readings and any outside sources that you find, except for Wikipedia or similar sites. A bibliography page should be included (it will count as one of the required pages). The questions will be given on May 1st.

• **Two reading reviews:** You will be asked to write reviews for two optional readings of your own choosing. These reviews are worth 50 points each. These reviews are not meant to merely summarize the readings, although some attention must be paid to the topics addressed, theses, and content. Your reviews must offer an evaluation – both positive and negative – of the arguments presented, the evidence provided, and the conclusions proposed. I will assess your reviews on comprehension of your chosen reading and clarity (25 points each). Your reviews should be no more than 1,500 words (approximately six pages) in length, written on black 12-point letter font (Arial, Courier New, or Times New Roman), double-spaced paragraphs with tabs. A review template will be given on May 1st.

All capstone work is due on **Saturday, May 10 at 12:30 pm** (the scheduled day and end time of the in-class final exam for this course), but you are allowed to submit it earlier. Only e-mail submissions will be accepted; the subject line should read “Capstone work” and next to it you should specify your chosen option. The time indicated in the e-mail will be used to determine whether your work was submitted on time. **Late work will not be accepted except under extenuating circumstances.**
Grading policy

This course will be graded under the A-E grading scheme. The final grade for the course is based on four requirements: attendance and class participation (a combined 10% of the final grade), the group report (20%), the reaction essays (30%), and the final exam (40%). Extra credit assignments will be given on a case-by-case basis, at the discretion of the instructor. The final grade will be calculated from your letter grades on each requirement. Refer to the table below for more information.

Class participation will be measured by counting every time you speak in class. The weights obtained for attendance and class participation will be converted into a single average with its corresponding letter grade.

Example: 4 (A in attendance) + 1 (D in class participation) = 5
5 / 2 (two letter grades) = 2.5
= B minus

The procedure for calculating your final course grade is the following:

- **Step 1:** The letter grades obtained for each requirement will be weighted as shown in the table, based on their corresponding rubrics
- **Step 2:** Those weights will be multiplied by a decimal number equivalent to the percentage of the final grade assigned for that requirement (the 10% for attendance and class participation will equal 0.10, the 20% for the oral presentations will equal 0.20, the 30% for the reaction essays will equal 0.30, and the 40% for the capstone work will equal 0.40)
  Example: Attendance and class participation (10%): 3.7 (A minus) x 0.10 = 0.37
  Oral presentations (20%): 3.3 (B plus) x 0.20 = 0.66
  Reaction papers (30%): 3.7 x 0.30 = 1.11
  Capstone (40%): 2.3 (C plus) x 0.40 = 0.92
- **Step 3:** The products obtained in Step 2 will be added and the sum will equal an average that will be translated to a letter grade as per the table below
  Example: 0.37 + 0.66 + 1.11 + 0.92 = 3.06
  = B plus

Class and reading schedule

All readings will be posted on Blackboard. Additional readings may be added at the discretion of the instructor. All reading assignments should be completed by the following Thursday.

Week 1 (January 23) – Introduction to the course

Week 2 (January 28 and 30) – Latin America: A Place and A Subject (no readings assigned)
Week 3 (February 4 and 6) – Latin America’s Cultural Foundations / Baggage

- Reading assignments

Week 4 (February 11 and 13) - The Paradox of Latin American Democracy

- Reading assignments
  - Inter-American Democratic Charter
  - Optional readings

- Attendance will be taken starting on February 11
Week 5

- February 18
  - Free topic
  - Reaction paper # 1 due
- February 20: No class

Week 6 (February 25 and 27) – Race, Ethnicity, and Gender

- Reading assignments

- Optional readings
  - Rafael de la Dehesa, “The Road to Same-Sex Marriage in Mexico City.” *LASA Forum* 42 (Winter 2011), 2-4.

Week 7 (March 4 and 6) – Political Economy

- Reading assignments

- Optional readings
  - Sidney Weintraub, “An Economic Storm Hits Latin America.” *Current History* 108 (February 2009), 58-64.

- March 6: Reaction paper # 2 due
Week 8 (March 11 and 13) – The Problem of Inequality

- **Reading assignments**
  - Alejandro Portes and Kelly Hoffmann, “Latin American Class Structures: Their Composition and Change During the Neoliberal Era.” *Latin American Research Review* 38 (February 2003), 41-82.

- **Optional readings**

- **March 11: Midterm point**

March 18 and 20 – No class

Week 9 (March 25 and 27) – Populism and Neopopulism

- **Reading assignments**

- **Optional readings**

Week 10 (April 1 and 3) – Political Parties and Party Systems

- **Reading assignments**

- **Optional readings**
Week 11 (April 8 and 10) – Social Movements

- Reading assignments

- Optional readings

- April 10: Reaction paper # 3 due

Week 12

- April 15 – No class
- April 17 – Afternoon at the Movies: *Fidel Castro*

Week 13 (April 22 and 24) – Political Insurgency and Revolution

  - “After Fidel, Under Raúl” (207-256)
  - “A Changing Cuba under Raúl Castro’s Presidency” (257-280)

- Optional readings
Week 14 (April 29 and May 1) – Citizen Security

- **Reading assignments**

- **Optional readings**

- **May 1**
  - Review templates and questions for take-home exam will be handed out
  - Reaction paper # 4 due

Week 15 (May 6 and 8) – Latin America and the United States

- **Reading assignments**
  - President Obama’s Remarks at the 2009 and 2012 Summits of the Americas
  - Secretary of State John Kerry’s Remarks at the Organization of American States (November 18, 2013)

- **Optional readings**
  - Christopher Sabatini, “Rethinking Latin America.” *Foreign Affairs* 91 (March/April 2012), 8-13.

- **May 8: Last class**

May 10 (Saturday) – Final exam due (12:30 pm)