Latin American Politics (Andrew Schlewitz, Fall 2001)

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Wabash College
Fall 2001
PSC 325 (25): Latin American Politics

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Course Description:

The central purpose of this course is to introduce students to the current political institutions and practices of Latin American nations, from Mexico and Cuba on down to Chile and Argentina (excluding the rest of the Caribbean). Another purpose is to sharpen our analytical tools so that we can better describe and explain the political differences and similarities among the Latin American countries. Last year, the class focused on political geography. This year, we will examine militarism-military intervention in politics- and its varied manifestations across Latin America. Finally, it is my hope that this course will increase our understanding of the obstacles Latin Americans have faced in building stable, equitable political systems, and better appreciate their many accomplishments.

Course Goals:

By the end of the course, students will:
· be familiar with the variation and commonalities of political institutions, practices, and values across Latin America;
· be able to analytically describe and compare Latin American states in terms of political institutions, practices, and values, and convey two or more opposing explanations of the results of that comparison;
· know how to define and analyze militarism;
· be familiar with very different ways of approaching and understanding Latin American politics, from traditional readings, to movies and novels, gaming, from the “magic-realism” and passionate partisanship of Latin American authors, to the more sedate analysis of a Northamerican political scientists, and be able to evaluate those approaches.

Required Readings:

· Isabel Allende, House of Spirits
· Fernando López-Alves, “A Weak Army and Restrictive Democracy: Colombia, 1810-1886,” in State Formation and Democracy in Latin America, 1810-1900, by same author (Durham: Duke University
Press, 2000). In-class handout.

Course Requirements:
·**Attendance and participation.** Classes will usually be a mix of lecture, discussion, and other activities. All students are expected to participate in the class sessions. Students should bring the readings with them to class because we will turn to them during discussions. The attendance grade will begin to drop after two absences (0 absences means an A+, 1-2 an A, 3-4 a B, and so on). Attendance is worth 5% of the final grade.

·**News Flash.** Each student will give three commentaries that connect a current news article to the reading of the day. In ten minutes, the commentators will briefly sketch the news article, highlighting its significance in terms of the topic for the day. Students will turn in the article along with a paragraph summarizing the commentary. This assignment will be graded according to the relevance of the news article, and the clarity of the student presentation. Missed News Flashes cannot be made up unless there is some extraordinary reason. Each News Flash is worth 5% of the final grade.

·**Movie Reviews.** We will watch two movies this semester. Students will write a two-page review of the movie, evaluating its message and contribution to our knowledge of Latin American politics. These reviews are due a week following the movie. Each is worth 5% of the final grade.

**Latin American Politics Simulation.** This game simulates the issue area conflict and bargaining processes of a generalized Latin American political system. Students, representing different interests and groups, will contest for control of the government and attempt to enact policies that best match their interests and ideals. Those who maintain control of the government the longest, and/or are the most successful at getting their preferred policies enacted, will gain the most points and thereby win the simulation.

Students will write one very brief essay (1-2 pages) in class, before the simulation begins. Drawing on what they have learned to date, students will describe their roles in terms of their fundamentals interests and ideals, their likely enemies and allies, and predict two issues they will advocate, and two they will resist. This short essay will not be graded, but serve as a benchmark for evaluating the simulation once it is over.

After the simulation is over, students will discuss the extent to which the simulation matched their initial role description, and evaluate the simulation as a teaching tool for Latin American Politics courses. With this discussion in mind, and drawing on class material and at least two other academic sources, students will then write an 8-10 page essay in which they 1) write a history of their role in the simulation’s imaginary country; 2) discuss the extent to which this history matches what they have learned from other sources regarding Latin American politics; and 3) suggest and explain one rule change that would make the game more “real.” This essay is worth 20% of the final grade.

**Essay on Latin American Militarism.** At the end of the term, students will submit a 15-20 page paper describing and comparing militarism in two Latin American countries, employing one or more of the following criteria: level of political independence, number and type of non-defense responsibilities,
degree of segregation from civilian life, and pattern of interventions (these will be covered in detail in class beforehand. This assignment will be completed using the steps below (due dates noted in syllabus). Each late step will cost one grade point level (for example, from A to A-). A missed step will cost a full grade (for example, from A to B).

--research topic and question
--annotated bibliography, including at least four references
--refined topic and question, and outline
--first complete draft, presented to the seminar; students must bring copies to the class session before the presentation, enough for all seminar participants
--final draft, worth 45% of final grade.

• Discussant (5%). When it comes time for students to present their work to other seminar members, one student will act as a discussant, starting the conversation with a careful, thoughtful critique (no more than 10 minutes), and afterward, moderating the discussion.

• Essay Guidelines. Essays must be typed, with 12 point fonts, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. Be sure to cite the sources of your quotes and other information (you may use any citation format, but be consistent). Don’t use many quotations, or long ones, particularly in the short essays. I am more interested in the student’s words than in those of some other author.

• Grading policies. Late work will automatically drop one grade, unless the student provides an excuse signed by his advisor. I grade the student work on a modified curve, using the 12 step system (A+, A, A-, etc.). That is, I look at all student work before deciding what constitutes an A, a B+, and so forth. It does not mean that only the top 10% of the class will get an A on any particular assignment (or that the bottom 10% are doomed to fail). If every student turns in excellent work, I will gladly hand out A’s to everyone. On the following page is an example of how the grading scheme works:

Attendance A (5%) 0.20
News Flash I B (5%) 0.15
News Flash II B (5%) 0.15
News Flash III A (5%) 0.20
Movie Review I C+ (5%) 0.12
Movie Review II A (5%) 0.20
Sim Essay I B (10%) 0.30
Sim Essay II A- (10%) 0.37
Discussant B (5%) 0.15
Research Paper A (45%) 1.80

FINAL GRADE A- (100%) 3.64
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sep 4</td>
<td>Skidmore, ch. 2</td>
<td>Modernization</td>
<td>Motiee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 6</td>
<td>Skidmore, ch. 3</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>Fabina</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 11</td>
<td>Movie: “The Official Story” (Bring snacks if you’d like the movie will run into the Chapel Period)</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 13</td>
<td>Fitch, chs. 1-2</td>
<td>Militarism</td>
<td>Bramfeld, Flores</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 18</td>
<td>Fitch, chs. 1-2</td>
<td>Colombia and US “War on Drugs” in Latin America</td>
<td>Attend Sep 19 Sanchez Mendez talk, Depauw</td>
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Dec 10

DUE: Final drafts of Research Papers, 9am, my office