

Geography of Latin America

Spring 2014

GRG 319 / LAS 319

(Unique numbers 37780, 40810)

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Office hours Tuesday 11:00 or by appointment in CLA 3.712
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Meets Tuesday and Thursday 9:30 to 11:00 am in CLA 0.128
Optional Discussion Sections available (times TBA)

Syllabus Last Updated December 29, 2013

This course is a general introduction to the environmental, cultural, economic and political geography of Latin America and the Caribbean. There are no prerequisites, and an effort is made to make the material accessible to the broadest possible range of students, as citizens and future leaders. At the same time, more advanced students can also benefit from the exploration of such topics as environmental hazards, indigenous lifeways and resource management, globalization and modernization, population and migration, cities, sustainable development, geopolitics, frontiers, conservation, and cultural survival.

The course examines major environmental zones as defined by geomorphology, climate, and biogeography, in terms of risks and hazards, resources, and human impacts. Students also study social institutions and processes across a range of historical periods, social structures, and cultures, including early migrants to the Americas, the rise of chiefdoms and indigenous civilizations including Aztec and Inca, the European conquest and spread of Iberian colonial culture and economic relationships, and the inception and spread of modernization as related to neoliberal and alternative forms of development including discourses of sustainability in contemporary Latin America. Relationships between regional, national, and global communities are studied by means of a commodity chain project resulting in a written paper. A range of environmental and social science theories and methods are discussed, including plate tectonics, basic climate models, hazards research, circumscription theory, and theories of modernization, dependency, and development. Communication skills are developed through graphical and essay questions on quizzes and exams, the written course project, and discussion in lectures and optional discussion sections.

The class serves as a preparation for travel, business, government service, journalism or volunteer work in Latin America, as well as for teaching. This course can be used toward a major or minor in either Geography or Latin American Studies, and for a Latin American concentration in International Relations and Global Studies. In the Geography major, the course meets the human geography core requirement, and is also appropriate for students taking the Cultural Geography, Environmental Resource Management (Sustainability), and General Geography tracks. The course can be used to meet the University's Core Requirement in Social and

Behavioral Sciences. The course has a Global Cultures flag. This is also a Bridging Disciplines course (for the Global Studies, Environment, and/or the Social Entrepreneurship & Non-profits BDPs).

Prerequisites: None.

Required textbooks

Robert B. Kent, *Latin America: Regions and Peoples* (Guilford 2006)

Gregory Knapp, ed. *Latin America in the Twenty First Century: Challenges and Solutions* (UT Press, 2002).

In addition, other required materials from the web will be assigned during class.

Optional textbook

Charles Mann, 1491: *New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* (2006)

Canvas Website

The Canvas web syllabus and schedule is the official syllabus for this course. Course lecture Power Points will usually be placed on line within 24 hours after each lecture, but these are no substitute for lecture notes.

Optional Spanish Language Discussion Sections

Discussion sections will be made optionally available to students who wish to practice conversational Spanish in the context of this course. The sessions will require minimal additional preparation. These sessions are not graded, but students who attend and participate will get consideration for extra credit.

Grading

Exams and quizzes test knowledge of locations (with map questions), concepts, explanations, and solutions. The tests contain objective, map, and essay type questions. The student is responsible for all the material in the readings, assigned web pages, and lectures, including maps and other graphics, but the lectures are most important.

* *Quizzes and attendance* (15%). 17 short quizzes will be handed out before, during, and/or after randomly selected lectures and will also check attendance. Some quizzes will involve testing ability to map or otherwise display data; others will test knowledge and ability to communicate concepts through short answers. They are designed to be finished in less than 2 minutes. Students who arrive late will not be allowed to take quizzes. More than one quiz may be administered in the same class. **If you anticipate being late to class, or leaving early, do not take this course!** Students missing a quiz will earn a zero; however, the lowest two quiz scores will be dropped. Quizzes may not be excused unless you provide an acceptable reason such as illness (from a physician or student health service). University of Texas related extracurricular obligations such as sport events are only excusable if cleared with the professor at the start of the semester. Family obligations such as weddings are not excusable.

* *Exams* (60%). February 20, March 27, May 1, May 9.

Exams will include questions testing knowledge of concepts, theories, and ability to analyze observable facts to arrive at informed conclusions. Some questions will involve the ability to map environmental, cultural, and other patterns, others may involve essays discussing the theory and ethical or policy implications of such phenomena as migration and commodity chains. There are three midterms and a final; the lowest of the four scores will be dropped. Students who take all the midterms and are satisfied with their scores need not take the final. Students will be given review sheets of vocabulary terms and practice questions prior to each exam. The first three exams will be conducted in the regular classroom at the regular class meeting time; the final on May 9 will be conducted from 9-12 am.

* *Project* (25%). Due 5 pm, Monday April 14 (electronic submission, Canvas). Commodity Chain term paper. Pick one product from a Latin American country and identify its commodity chain. Writing in an essay format, trace the commodity through each step from its place of origin to a retail outlet in North America or in a different Latin American country. Relate the production and distribution of the commodity to environmental and social patterns and processes, including (for example) colonialism, trade policy, drug policy. How might future changes of any kind (environmental, economic, political) affect the commodity chain and the people involved? Conclude with what you believe are the major impacts of the commodity chain you analyzed. How does it impact your life, or the life of someone like you in the nation that consumes the commodity? The local economy? The US/Latin American economy? Your paper should be 750-1000 words, and should utilize at least four bibliographic sources. Your paper grade will reflect your ability to include effective development, interpretation, and expression of ideas.

More information and further instructions will be available on Canvas.

Grading is based on total points (90-100 A, 80-89.9 B, etc.) and is not normally "curved." No plus or minus grades are given in this course (only A, B, C, D, and F), and scores are not rounded up; an 89.9 earns a B, for example.

Although the course is designed to be accessible to everyone, this is not an easy course, and some students do earn F's and D's every semester. If you are on probation, or are trying to use this course to raise your GPA to graduate, qualify for a study abroad program, or for other reasons, this course might not meet your needs.

Core Curriculum Requirement, Social and Behavioral Sciences

This course may be used to fulfill the social and behavioral sciences component of the university core curriculum and addresses the following four core objectives established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board: communication skills, critical thinking skills, empirical and quantitative skills, and social responsibility.

Global Cultures Flag

This course carries the Global Cultures flag. Global Cultures courses are designed to increase

your familiarity with cultural groups outside the United States. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from assignments covering the practices, beliefs, and histories of at least one non-U.S. cultural group, past or present.

Classroom Policy on Electronic Devices and Behavior

Laptops are NOT allowed. Laptops, tablets, phones, MP3 players, and other such devices must be turned off and stowed during classes and exams. Lectures may not be recorded in any way without prior permission. Online materials may not be copied or distributed without prior permission. In exceptional cases, with prior permission, students will be allowed to take lecture notes on their laptops; in these cases, laptop lecture notes need to be provided to the professor for each class, and students need to pledge not to use computers for any other purpose during class. The professor will not provide feedback on lecture notes.

Students will arrive on time, minimize unscheduled personal breaks, and stay until the class ends. They will respect the views and opinions of their colleagues. Disagreement and debate are encouraged. Intolerance for the views of others is unacceptable.

Accommodations for Special Needs

The University makes reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Any student who requires special accommodations must obtain a letter that documents the disability from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (471-6259 voice or 471-4641 TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing). Present the letter to the professor at the beginning of the semester so that needed accommodations can be discussed. The student should remind the professor of any testing accommodations no later than five business days before an exam. For more information, visit <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>.

Religious Holidays

By UT Austin policy, students must notify the professor of a pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If the student must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, the professor will give the student an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL)

If students are worried about someone who is acting differently, they may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone their concerns about another individual's behavior. Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

Sanger Learning Center

You may find assistance with specific strategies to help you study effectively at the Learning Center. The Center offers a range of services to become a better student through assistance in one-on-one tutoring, academic counseling, and other classes. For more information see

<http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/slc>

Academic Integrity

Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced.

SCHEDULE OF LECTURES, READINGS, AND EXAMS

The schedule is subject to revision as the semester proceeds.

Key to readings:

RK: Robert Kent, *Latin America, 1st Edition (2006)*

GK: Gregory Knapp, *Latin America in the 21st Century*

Charles Mann, *1491*

Week One

Readings: RK 8-14, 37-54

Jan 14 Introduction

Jan 16 Environmental Geography; Volcanoes and Hazards

Week Two

Jan 21 Mountain Resources and Hazards

Jan 23 Highlands and Lowlands; Plate Tectonics

Week Three

Jan 28 Climate

Jan 30 Vegetation and Soils

Week Four

Readings, Charles Mann (entire book) RK 15-18, 67-77, 113-118

Feb 4 Dry Lands, El Niño, Climate Change

Feb 6 Early Lifeways

Week Five

Feb 11 Civilizations

Feb 13 Aztec and Inca

Week Six

Feb 18 Conquest and Culture
Feb 20 MIDTERM 1

Week Seven

Readings: RK 19-20, 77-90, 118-129, 206-213, 322-329

Feb 25 Colonial Economies, Plantations
Feb 27 Exports and Commodity Chains after Independence

Week Eight

Readings: RK 154-178, 21-35, 246-270; GK 45-104, 149-170, 251-268

Mar 4 Drugs
Mar 6 Transportation and Markets

March 8-16 spring break

Week Nine

Mar 18 Population
Mar 20 Cities

Week Ten

Mar 25 Employment and Housing
Mar 27 MIDTERM II

Week Eleven

Readings: RK 292-307, 329-347; GK 105-148

Apr 1 Modernization
Apr 3 Economic Integration

Week Twelve

Apr 8 Development Examples
Apr 10 Term Paper Work Session

Week Thirteen

April 14 PAPER DUE (5 pm, submit electronically on Canvas).

Apr 15 Alternative Regimes

Apr 17 Political Geography and Frontiers

Week Fourteen

Readings: RK 348-364, 365-389; optional: 91-112, 130-153, 179-205, 213-235

Apr 22 Migration.

Apr 24 US and Latin America

Week Fifteen

Readings: RK (optional) 236-245, 271-291, 308-321, 365-389; GK 171-250; optional: 1-44

April 29 Post Development and Sustainability

May 1 MIDTERM 3

May 9 FINAL EXAM 9-12 am in CLA 0.128