Politics 318
SEMINAR: POWER AND RESISTANCE IN LATIN AMERICA
Oberlin College
Fall 2011
Tuesdays 7:00-9:00 pm, King 325
3SS credits, CD

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Students can sign up for office hours at http://tinyurl.com/34ywc3f

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Political power is traditionally conceived as functioning through formal institutions of the state (executives, legislatures, bureaucracies, etc.) and the rules they generate. Yet political power is also generated outside of state structures, by popular and elite groups that can seek to transform the established rules and structures. In Latin America, popular and elite forces on both the political left and right have long influenced the trajectory of politics in the region. The course studies a selection of the forces that have been influential in transforming politics in the region in the 20th and early 21st century, with a particular emphasis on how political power is both created and resisted.

We begin the course with a survey of the 20th century’s first revolution, the Mexican Revolution, which reflected core aspirations of land reform, social justice, political democracy, and national sovereignty that have remained prominent themes in later movements in Latin America. In the rest of the semester, we will study how similar social groups (the coffee elite in Central America), have taken different paths in exercising their power, with important implications for the development of democracy in their countries; how illegal armed groups have been able to embed themselves and maintain power within the state in post-civil war Guatemala; and how a variety of contemporary social movements are mobilizing for change in their communities.

This seminar requires at least an introductory understanding of Latin America’s political and economic development, so prior coursework, particularly in politics, history and economics, is generally prerequisite.

Goals. This seminar is designed to provide students with 1) a conceptual framework for understanding the dynamics of political power and movements for change in Latin America 2) an empirical base of knowledge about the historical and contemporary impact of particular powerholders in the region and 3) guidance as they conduct research and write a substantial analytical paper on a topic related to the course.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Regular attendance in each class, reading of the assigned texts well before class, and active discussion of the texts and issues are essential for success of the course. The readings require critical evaluation and debate in class, and provide theoretical and empirical stimuli for your research projects. In class we’ll be summarizing the author’s argument, considering the methodology s/he used in the research, and considering particular questions the instructor provides.

Good preparation for discussion also involves reflecting back on readings and trying to analyze how they relate to each other. With that in mind, you will have 4 short (1-2 page) analytical comparisons to write. Please print these out and bring to class, but also post in Blackboard to share with your classmates. Figure one every 2 weeks as an average, but you’re welcome to do several in a row if the readings grab you. This is your opportunity to draw together themes we’ve covered or critique the readings. The analytical comparisons are evaluated simply as “fair” “good” or “excellent” and are intended more for feedback on your analysis than for grading purposes, though I will figure them into your overall class participation grade.

In addition to weekly preparations for class, students will complete a research paper (20-25 pages) on a topic directly relevant to the course. During the last weeks of the course, students will read and critique each other’s draft research papers, and each student will give a presentation from his/her research paper in the class. These activities are intended to provide you with the opportunity to refine your analytical skills, to shape and participate in class discussions, and to develop critical-constructive abilities in assessing the work of their peers. Papers should be theoretically driven by a research question you attempt to answer in the paper, and follow a particular research methodology you acknowledge in the paper; they should also indicate the theoretical and practical implications of your findings.

Grades are based on three components of the course:

30% toward class participation. This includes:
  • Regular attendance and involvement in class discussions.
  • Preparation of 4 analytical comparisons.

20% toward presentation of your own project and discussion of other students’ projects during the last weeks of the course.

50% toward the research paper. This includes the research proposal (10%), annotated bibliography (5%), draft paper (given an interim grade to guide student expectations) and final paper (35%).

ACADEMIC STANDARDS
All academic work for the course must meet the standards of the Honor Code. Please be sure you are familiar with it and see me if you have questions about how it applies in assignments for the course.
Students must complete all components of the course in order to qualify for a passing grade.

The following terms apply to paper-related assignment due dates. Due dates are firm and not negotiable; you should plan ahead to be able to meet them. Late assignments will receive a lower grade (1-step grade reduction per 24-hour period, e.g. from B to B –); assignments submitted more than 7 days late receive an automatic F. If you are unable to submit assignments to me as due in class, be sure to hand them in to me personally or email if necessary as a Word document. Do not shove papers under my office door!! Only extreme circumstances such as medical or family emergencies, may warrant exceptions to these terms.

I request that any students with a documented disability needing academic accommodations speak with Jane Boomer, Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities (G-27 Peters Hall) and with me as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential.

**READINGS**

**Required Readings.** Several books are recommended for purchase, as noted below. In addition, there are a number of readings available in Blackboard. Assigned readings are available from at least one of the following sources: download from Blackboard (BB), purchase at the Oberlin College Bookstore (OC), borrow from Mudd Library reserves (R). It is possible that there will be some changes to the readings/topics scheduled in the syllabus.


**Further Readings.** Note also the following books, which are not required for the course but recommended for further study. The first two are major collected volumes on social movements in the region:


WEEKLY SCHEDULE

PART I
Political Power through Social Alliances: National-Revolutionary, Class-Based, and Illicit

Week 1/September 6. Introduction: Thinking about Power through Citizenship


Week 2/September 13. The First Revolution of the 20th Century: Mexico

- Beezley and MacLachlan, Mexicans in Revolution. Introduction and chs 1-3. OC, R

Week 3/September 20. Consolidating the Mexican Revolution

- Beezley and MacLachlan, Mexicans in Revolution. Chs 4-end. OC, R

Week 4/September 27. Central American Paths: the 1930s Crisis

- Paige, Coffee and Power chs 1, 3 (El Salvador), 4 (Costa Rica) and 5 (Nicaragua) OC, R


- Paige, Coffee and Power chs 6 (El Salvador), 9 (Nicaragua), 10 and 11. OC, R

Week 6/October 11. Illegal Armed Groups in Postwar Guatemala


Though we won’t have a regular discussion session, please keep your reading going with:

- Stahler-Sholk et al, “Social Movements in the 21st Century” (chapter 1 of LASM)

Proposals for Research Paper are due Friday, Oct. 20 by 5pm via email to Mani
Week 8. No Class, Fall Break

PART II
New Social Movements in Latin America

Week 9/November 1. Conceptualizing New Social Movements

- David Slater, “Power and Social Movements in the Region” (ch 2 of LASM)
- Harry E. Vanden, “Social Movements, Hegemony, and New Forms of Resistance” (ch 3 of LASM)
- Richard Stahler-Sholk, “Resisting Neoliberal Homogenization: The Zapatista Autonomy Movement” (ch 7 of LASM)

Week 10/November 8. Grassroots Resistance to Resource (and Peoples’) Exploitation

**Annotated Bibliography Due in Class**

- Glen Kuecker, “Fighting for the Forests Revisited: Grassroots Resistance to Mining in Northern Ecuador” (ch 6 of LASM)

Note: In class, we’ll watch a film (most likely Crude) and discuss it alongside the reading.

Week 11/November 15. Indigenous Rights and Democracy

- Kwame Dixon, “Transnational Black Social Movements in Latin America: Afro-Colombians and the Struggle for Human Rights” (ch 11 in LASM)

Note: This session is intended to connect with the visit of 2 documentary filmmakers who will be screening and discussing their works on campus; more info TBA.

PART III
Student Research Presentations

Week 12/November 22. Research Presentations

**Draft of Research Paper due**

Week 13/November 29. Research Presentations

Week 14/December 6. Research Presentations and Course Wrap-Up

Final Paper due on Tuesday, December 13 before 4:30pm (i.e., when classes officially end)

9.6.11