

## **DESIGN AND METHODS OF RESEARCH IN LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES**

LAS 6293, Fall Semester 2017, 3 credit hours  
Class meets in Grinter Hall 376, Fridays from 9:35 to 12:35 (periods 3, 4, 5)

### **INSTRUCTOR**

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### **OFFICE HOURS**

Regular office hours are each Tuesday from 2:00 – 5:00 p.m. In addition, students are encouraged to write via email and to arrange meetings at other times.

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE**

This course aims to motivate and empower students to develop greater understanding of Latin America through rigorous scientific inquiry and critical analysis of research findings. Participants gain knowledge and skills necessary to design and implement field and library research, which they demonstrate by developing a formal research proposal.

Course participants study some of the main paradigms and instruments applied by scholars and practitioners working in the interdisciplinary field of Latin American Studies. The term “paradigms” refers here to the philosophical/theoretical traditions that shape and support the whole process of research design, implementation and analysis. “Instruments” are tools used to gather, organize, and analyze information. Participants also develop strategies for interpreting and communicating research findings, strengthening their ability to make presentations, review literature, and produce graduate theses and internship papers.

The course experience helps to launch an enduring intellectual community among a graduate student cohort by building on shared commitments and encouraging mutual learning across academic and life experiences.

### **Cycle of research design and method explored in this course:**

Research questions: how can we ask, what can we answer?  
Paradigms of knowledge production  
Strategies for seeking secondary literature and data bases

Strategies for seeking primary sources  
Assessment of scholarly literature  
Working with institutions and grey literature  
Field investigation methods  
Analytic frameworks  
Contextualizing research  
Critical epistemology  
Evidence-based writing

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

**Course-specific learning outcomes:** Students who engage fully in this course will develop the ability to:

1. Formulate relevant and feasible questions for research on important issues in Latin America.
2. Apply an array of instruments to obtain original qualitative and quantitative findings.
3. Find and interpret relevant data and literature.
4. Combine complementary methods and findings (e.g., quantitative with qualitative, broad with deep, case studies with national and regional statistics, primary with secondary data, measurement of biophysical phenomena with subjective views of actors).
5. Contextualize studies in historical, cultural and comparative contexts.
6. Characterize several methodological paradigms (e.g., positivist scientific methods, participatory action research, holistic ethnography, feminist epistemology, postcolonial and de-colonizing approaches).
7. Reflect critically on knowledge and power in scientific research. (Identify influences of disciplinary paradigms, cultural and political stances, colonial and geopolitical positions, gender systems, and other factors in research methods and in published findings).
8. Design and write a research or internship proposal that manifests the knowledge and skills described in preceding outcomes.

The course contributes to the following **program objectives** for a graduate degree in Latin American Studies:

- Evaluate the significance, perspective and quality of information obtained from published literature.
- Generate new knowledge about Latin America through research designed and implemented with an interdisciplinary perspective.
- Communicate this knowledge clearly and effectively in a thesis completed for their graduate degree as well as other spoken and written means.
- Gain experience of professional behavior in academic settings.

**UF graduate training objectives** are advanced in four interrelated areas:

- Epistemological awareness: thinking about knowledge, power, and research process.
- Practical skills: applying scientific research instruments.

- Strategic design: identifying phenomena to study, formulating questions, selecting methods.
- Communications: organizing findings and communicating results.

## REQUIRED READINGS AND VIDEOS

Students are not required to buy any books for this course. Readings relevant for our work are organized in thematic folders under FILES on the course Canvas site. The schedule below indicates weekly required readings, together with videos, websites and other materials. Most readings are also available electronically through UF libraries. In addition to reading required literature, each student will find and work with materials relevant to his or her unique interests.

## WHAT RESEARCH METHODS WILL BE EXPLORED?

In the tradition of Latin American Studies, this course brings together methodological approaches that have been developed and applied in a number of conventional disciplines (e.g., anthropology, ecology, geography, history, economy, law, sociology), and from newer interdisciplinary fields (e.g., development studies, ethnoecology, gender studies, political ecology, environmental studies, peace and justice studies). As course participants experiment with ways of doing and assessing research, they practice applying instruments and also reflect critically on processes of knowledge production. Neither paradigms nor instruments are mutually exclusive. Many research projects draw from more than one paradigm and apply more than one kind of instrument.

<b><i>Some research instruments or techniques</i></b>	<b><i>Some paradigms of knowledge production</i></b>	<b><i>Some analytic frames</i></b>
Interviews Household surveys Statistical analysis of survey findings Life histories/ <i>testimonios</i> Focus groups Participant observation Researcher as instrument Ethnoecology techniques Participatory mapping Spatial measurement and mapping Resource access and control matrix Time use diaries and calendars Ranking and sorting exercises GIS analysis Social network analysis/ Venn diagrams Archival search Interpretation of historical documents Discourse analysis Legislation and policy analysis Research diaries/field notes	Positivist scientific method Participatory action research Postcolonial and decolonizing approaches Ethnography Historicism Political ecology Feminist epistemology Quantitative analysis Comparative analysis Liberation pedagogy	Case study Comparative study Value chain studies Holistic ethnography Ecosystems assessment Gender sensitive framework Livelihoods research

## ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Assignments contributing to grade	Maximum points
Participation and contribution	10
Review of a book based on research in Latin America	15
Annotated bibliography for research proposal	10
Assessment of a completed thesis	15
Peer review of two classmate's research proposals	20
Proposal for field research in Latin America	30

### Training activities carried out in groups (pure learning, no grades assigned)

Questionnaire and survey design  
 Archival hunt for primary sources  
 Ethnographic observation  
 Focus group facilitation

### Letter grades will be implemented using the following scale

95-100	A	78-79.99	C+	60-62.99	D-
90-94.99	A-	73-77.99	C	55-59.99	F
88-89.99	B+	70-72.99	C-		
83-87.99	B	68-69.99	D+		
80-82.99	B-	63-67.99	D		

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES, GUIDELINES FOR ASSIGNMENTS

**Student work should be submitted electronically on CANVAS, unless otherwise indicated.**

### Review of a book based on research in Latin America

Select and read a book that describes research carried out on Latin America issues, and that presents and interprets research findings. Find three different scholarly reviews about the book. Write a paper that totals 3000-3500 words, follows CMS style, and is comprised of two sections:

- (1) Compare and contrast three published book reviews
  - What does each reviewer say about research methods?
  - How do their methodological assessments and interests differ?
  - What disciplinary position is expressed by each reviewer (and/or journal in which review appears)?
  
- (2) Write an original review of the book addressing the following questions:
  - What paradigm(s) guides the study?
  - What specific instruments are used to gather data?
  - A doubt about or critique of the design and/or methods.

- An element that you could adapt and apply in own research.

### **Annotated bibliography for a research proposal**

Meet with UF libraries staff to learn about using historical materials, electronic sources, journals, etc. Participate in training of Refworks, a program that allows you to store and organize resources, and to produce reference lists. Build on both experiences to compile an annotated bibliography for your research proposal according to the following instructions:

- Seek out an array of at least 20 sources that may be useful for proposed research project.
- The set should include literature on the topic of study, on the theoretical and methodological approaches to be applied, and on the research location (ecozone, nation, region).
- Balance different types of sources. A good balance could be 5 peer review journal articles, 5 books, 5 websites, and additional sources relevant to topic, such as popular media, historical archives, legislation, videos, statistical databases.
- Include perspectives/voices of relevant groups, such as publications written by people based in Latin America and others, men and women authors, scholarly and practical work, materials expressing different sides of a conflict.
- For this assignment, it is not necessary to read each book or article. After reviewing each source briefly, students may simply copy journal abstracts, editorial summaries, or advertising blurbs about each source.

Following links are helpful:

How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography

<http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill28.htm>.

Cómo Preparar una Bibliografía Anotada

[http://guides.library.cornell.edu/bibliografia\\_annotada](http://guides.library.cornell.edu/bibliografia_annotada)

### **Critically assess a completed Master's thesis or Internship Report**

Browse through completed theses posted on library or department websites of universities (check out strong Latin American Studies graduate programs such as UF, U Texas, Tulane, Vanderbilt, U Pittsburg, UNC, etc.). Make a bibliography identifying ten Masters or Doctoral Theses that interest you. Select one thesis to study that looks similar in some ways to the thesis you would like to produce. Use supplied guidelines to describe and critically assess the paradigm, instruments, and analysis used in that thesis.

### **Peer review research proposals drafted by classmates**

Teams work to peer-review each other's proposals according to criteria provided.

### **Design a proposal for an original research or internship project**

Develop a proposal following guidelines provided. Most fruitful paths to proposal development involve exploring various research options and methods, and adapting and changing plans during the semester. Participants are encouraged to use this opportunity to build a base for their Masters or Doctoral thesis research projects. Proposals prepared for class may be adapted for grant applications, including the Center for Latin American Study's Summer Field Research Competition. Activities and readings throughout the semester support each step of proposal building. Use CMS.

### **Guidelines for presentation**

1. Polished presentation completed in 3-5 minutes
2. Clear statement of what you want to learn with this research or internship project
3. Context: features relevant for the study (SELECT geographic, political, economic, historical, socio-cultural, ecological, health, education, etc.)
4. Methodological design: set of instruments to be applied, map of how they fit together
5. Purpose: What this study will contribute, how it may influence science or socio-ecological change

**METHODS TRAINING ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT IN GROUPS: EXPLORE**  
[HTTP://WWW.SOCIALRESEARCHMETHODS.NET/](http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/)

**Survey design**

Explore materials on questionnaire and survey design and application posted under FILES, pay particular attention warnings about common problems. Design a short written survey with 6 questions. Clearly indicate the purpose of the survey and the population to be represented by survey respondents. Bring copies of your survey to class to apply to colleagues.

**Archival hunt for primary sources**

Select a Latin American event or issue of interest to you (e.g., Bay of Pigs invasion, Amazon Dams, opening of Panama Canal). With the support of Latin American librarians, find primary materials related to that topic. Identify materials representing 3 different kinds of sources (e.g. microfilm, pamphlets, historical books, artwork, films, posters, folios). Take a photograph of each of the 3 sources and prepare a 2 minute presentation on those sources for class. Extra credit is awarded to the team whose set of materials is voted the most fascinating, original and intriguing.

**Ethnographic observation**

Start by studying **detailed guidelines for this assignment** and materials about ethnographic observation posted under FILES on CANVAS. Groups will identify and research a phenomenon in one scene in Gainesville. Each student will carry out at least two hours of observation in a selected location where manifestations of or practices related to the select phenomenon can be observed.

Observers should **DESCRIBE** exactly what they SEE, HEAR, FEEL, TOUCH, TASTE, COUNT. Work hard to refrain from interpreting or imposing one's own ethnocentric and subjective judgments. Each group will discuss their observations with the class. Multi-materials (maps, photos, drawings, lists) and acting out aspects of what was observed can be good ways to communicate complex scenes.

**Focus group facilitation**

Start by studying materials on focus groups posted under FILES on CANVAS. Select a fascinating topic to be explored via focus group discussion. Design a set of questions, prompts or scenarios that can be used to provoke conversation among focus group participants. Gather a group of at least 5 friends, and facilitate a practice focus group discussion with them. This may last from 20 minutes to 2 hours, depending on how relevant and exciting the topic, and how motivating and provocative the prompts. Assess your practice experience and adapt an improved strategy to facilitate a focus group conversation in class among classmates.

## COURSE POLICIES

### Attendance

Class meetings are a vital part of this course. All students are expected to complete readings and assignments before class, to attend each class, and to participate actively in classroom learning. The class will involve a great deal of interaction and discussion, and students will be rewarded for efforts to learn collaboratively with respect, enthusiasm and open minds.

### Personal Technology in the Classroom

During most class time students will not need to use personal technology devices (laptops, mobile email devices, smartphones, mobile phones, iPods, iPads, and similar technologies). The instructor will indicate when devices may be used for select class activities. Exceptions will be made in the case of students who use personal technology devices due to documented disabilities, or students who need to leave a phone on in anticipation of emergency calls.

## UF POLICIES

- **Students with Disabilities Act:** The Dean of Students Office coordinates the needed accommodations of students with disabilities. This includes the registration of disabilities, academic accommodations within the classroom, accessing special adaptive computer equipment, providing interpretation services, and mediating faculty-student disability related issues. *Dean of Students Office*, 202 Peabody Hall, 392-7066, [www.dso.ufl.edu](http://www.dso.ufl.edu)
- **Software Use:** All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate.
- **Academic Honesty:** The University of Florida requires all members of its community to be honest in all endeavors. Cheating, plagiarism, and other acts diminish the process of learning. When students enroll at UF they commit themselves to honesty and integrity. Your instructors fully expect you to adhere to the academic honesty guidelines you signed when you were admitted to UF. As a result of completing the registration form at the University of Florida, every student has signed the following statement: *"I understand the University of Florida expects its students to be honest in all their academic work. I agree to adhere to this commitment to academic honesty and understand that my failure to comply with this commitment may result in disciplinary action up to and including expulsion from the University."*

Furthermore, on work submitted for credit by UF students, the following pledge is either required or implied: *"On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment."* It is to be assumed all work will be completed independently unless the assignment is defined as a group project, in writing by the professor. This policy will be vigorously upheld at all times in this course.

## CAMPUS HELPING RESOURCES

- **Challenges in Academic Writing, English Grammar and Style:** The University of Florida Writing Studio is committed to helping University of Florida students and faculty meet their academic and professional goals by becoming better writers. We support independent learning and encourage scholarship by providing one-on-one consultations, workshops tailored to specific classes (graduate and undergraduate), and faculty retreats focusing on publishing original research. Students and faculty at all levels and in every discipline are welcome! <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>
  
- **Technical difficulties for E-learning in CANVAS:** please contact the UF Help Desk at:
  - [Learning-support@ufl.edu](mailto:Learning-support@ufl.edu)
  - (352) 392-HELP - select option 2
  - <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>
  
- **Personal Challenges:** Students experiencing crisis or personal problems that interfere with their general wellbeing are encouraged to utilize the university's counseling resources. Both the Counseling Center and Student Mental Health provide confidential counseling services at no cost for currently enrolled students. Resources are available on campus for students having personal problems or lacking clear career and academic goals, which interfere with their academic performance. The Counseling Center is located at 301 Peabody Hall (next to Criser Hall). Student Mental Health is located on the second floor of the Student Health Services in the Infirmary.
  1. *University Counseling Center*, 301 Peabody Hall, 392-1575; personal and career counseling:  
**[www.counsel.ufl.edu](http://www.counsel.ufl.edu)**
  
  2. *Student Mental Health*, Student Health Care Center, 392-1171, personal counseling:  
**[www.hsc.ufl.edu/shcc/smhs.htm](http://www.hsc.ufl.edu/shcc/smhs.htm)**
  
  3. *Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS)*, Student Health Care Center, 392-1161, sexual assault counseling;
  
  4. *Career Resource Center*, Reitz Union, 392-1601, career development assistance and counseling.