U.S. Latinxs in Contemporary Society

LAS 4935/LAS 6938
Fall 2019
Wednesday Period 5-7 (11:45-2:45)
Grinter Hall 376

Dr. Nicholas Vargas
Nicholas.Vargas@ufl.edu
Office Hours (Be sure to Schedule an Appointment): Fridays 10:30am-12:30pm
360 Grinter Hall

Description:

Why do people use different terms like “Hispanic,” “Latina/o,” or “Latinx”? How did Latinxs come to be conceptualized as a group? What can colleges do to better serve Latinx students? Are Latinxs becoming more or less religious? How are Latinxs shaped by the criminal justice system? To what degree has immigration enforcement changed over time? This course considers questions like these as we seek to understand the diverse, and at times shared, experiences of Latinxs in contemporary U.S. society. We will also consider how new immigrant destinations shape Latinx lives, and how the state of Florida is transforming with regard to Latinx demographics. As we explore these questions we will be attuned to how skin color, socioeconomic status, national origin, generation, gender, legal status, and other factors intersect to shape life chances and experiences. Course readings will focus principally on research undertaken by Latinx Studies scholars over the past decade.

Course Goals:

- Learn the foundational and dominant frames for the study of Latinxs in the contemporary society
- Assess different methods and approaches used in the study of Latinxs
- Examine the cues and mechanisms that shape Latinx racialization in the U.S.
- Detail levels of Latinx incorporation in accordance with their experiences in societal institutions
Assignments and Evaluation:

For Undergraduate Student enrollees, grades will be based on 100 points divided as follows:

- (10 points) Class Participation
- (10 points) Discussion Facilitations
- (20 points) 8 Weekly Notes (1.75 points each) + 2 Reaction Papers (3 points each)
- (20 points) Written Essay Exam
- (30 points) Research Paper/Proposal
- ( 5 points) Research Presentation
- ( 5 points) LAS Intellectual Engagement Activity Review

100 total points

For Graduate Student enrollees, grades will be based on 100 points and divided as follows:

- (10 points) Class Participation
- (10 points) Discussion Facilitations
- (30 points) 5 Reaction papers (5 points each) + 5 Weekly Notes (1 point each)
- (40 points) Research Paper/Proposal
- ( 5 points) Research Presentation
- ( 5 points) LAS Intellectual Engagement Activity Review

100 total points

Attendance: Because this is a discussion based seminar, attendance is mandatory. In a small seminar we must rely on one another to attend class and be prepared for discussion each day. An unexcused absence will result in a final grade reduction of 15 points (1.5 full letter grades). Excused absences are permitted only in very extreme circumstances, and with proper documentation detailing said circumstance.

Participation in Class Discussions

This course is organized as a seminar. Seminars are most useful and enjoyable when everyone attends class prepared having read ALL assigned readings. Informed questions, comments, and critiques about each assigned reading are expected of all students. This format allows for a deep and critical exploration of ideas. Commentary that does not illustrate knowledge of the assigned readings will not earn points.

Essay Exam: Undergraduate Students Only

Undergraduate students will complete 1 take-home essay exam over the course of 1 week. The exam will be provided on April 22nd at the conclusion of class, and is due at the beginning of class on April 29th. Make-up exams are permitted only under very extreme circumstances. Make-ups also require official documentation pertaining to the extreme circumstance. In such cases, a make-up exam must be taken within 7 days of the original exam.

Weekly Notes (8 for Undergraduate Students; 5 for Graduate Students)

For 8 classes, undergraduate students will write at least 1 full page of single spaced notes that cover all of the day’s assigned readings. For 5 classes, graduate students will do the same. These notes are informal. There is no correct format or style, but they should incorporate independent thoughts, critiques, and commentary. It is expected that you will develop a style that best allows you to organize your thoughts. The following are some guidelines adopted from Jusionyte (2015) to help get you started:

- Write down the main points, new concepts, important quotes or phrases you would like to remember from the readings, and explain them in your own words;
- If you are puzzled by the text (or its parts) or would like to know more about a certain subject, write down your questions;
- You can list the arguments you disagree with and why;
Use the material from the text to reflect on your research subject or on another topic that is of interest to you;

Compare and contrast the text with other readings assigned for the class.

Reading notes are due on Canvas by the start of class each week. You should also bring a print copy to class. You will receive credit if you complete the assignment in a timely manner and engage with all assigned texts.

**Reaction Papers: (5 for Graduate Students; 2 for Undergraduate Students)**

Students will complete reaction papers (3-4 pages each) as careful reflections of the week’s readings. Guidelines for these papers are adapted from White (2016) and Embrick (2014). An ideal reaction paper references most/all of the required readings. The paper may take the form of a critique, an insight provoked by the readings that is distinct from the readings’ findings, or some combination of critique and insight. Critiques should not focus primarily on the writing or style, but rather, on the substantive arguments, soundness of the methodology, and the veracity/robustness of the evidence provided to reach the author’s conclusions. Critiques that emphasize errors of omission (i.e., “Author did not focus on “X” topic”) should be careful to consider the relevance of any omitted concept given the paper’s stated objectives as well as the length limits of journal articles. A stronger critique of omission would argue that in accordance with previous scholarship on omitted topic “X” (cite sources, detail findings), the author would have likely reached alternative “Y” conclusion.

A strong reaction paper demonstrates a close understanding of the readings and some careful original thinking. The reaction paper does not summarize the arguments and findings of the designated papers and spends little time reporting the papers’ results. Instead, the paper assumes the reader understands all the key results and emphasizes the development of an original argument. Papers will be evaluated according to the strength of the argument and supporting analysis. Reaction papers are limited to 3-4 double-spaced pages. Anything in excess of four pages will not be read. There is no need for a title page. A list of references is necessary for cited references that do not appear on this syllabus (inclusion of external peer-reviewed sources encouraged).

**Facilitating Discussions**

Over the course of the semester, you will be asked to facilitate class discussions. The number of facilitations will depend on class enrollment and status as an undergraduate or graduate student—to be determined the first day of class. Discussion facilitators are entirely responsible for planning and leading an informed discussion of the readings. This is best accomplished when discussion facilitators provide a list of discussion questions on Canvas several days in advance so that others can consider said questions when reading the material.

**Research Paper:**

Exactly one week after the final class meeting of the semester, a final paper related to U.S. Latinxs will be due. This paper can be either (1) a work of original empirical social scientific research; or (2) an empirical research proposal. Students must clear their topic with me in person by the end of Week 10. There is no formal page limit, but papers are typically between 16-25 pages in length.

Empirical research proposals should specify the empirical object of study and indicate, with as much specificity as possible, how one would go about studying it, the kinds of sources to be used, the kinds of cases one would select, or the specific dataset and variables to be used, and, in general, how one would deploy ideas or methods covered in this course when addressing that empirical problem. The goal should be to have a project that will be ready for presentation at a conference, and/or a paper that will eventually be suitable for publication. This might also serve as the basis for an MA thesis, or a chapter of a dissertation.

**Presentations (5 points):** On the last two days of class, each student will make a 15 minute presentation of his or her paper. This presentation will follow the format of a professional presentation at an academic conference, typically in Powerpoint. We will discuss tips for these presentations in class.

**LAS Intellectual Engagement Activity (5 points):**
There is much intellectual activity that we benefit from inside the classroom. Yet, UF is a dynamic, internationally renowned institution wherein speakers and performers from across the nation and Latin America regularly visit to share their expertise on issues related to Latinxs and Latin America. It is important to participate in the intellectual vitality of our campus community. All students should attend 1 lecture, performance, workshop or other Latin America/Latinx related event over the course of the semester. Following the event, you will be required to write a one-page paper (single spaced, 12 point font, Times New Roman) in which you: indicate the title, place, time and presenter(s) of the event; make observations and raise questions related to our course objectives; discuss an aspect of the event that you found interesting, motivating, insightful; and take a photo showing your face and the speaker to document your presence. Please also feel free to post a report/comment/photo of the event to social media, either tagging the Center for Latin American Studies or using the hashtag #UFLAS.

All reviews must be submitted by the last day of class. But be sure to plan in advance. See the Center for Latin American Studies’ events calendar here: http://www.latam.ufl.edu/calendar/

Grading:

93-100 = A
90-92 = A-
87-89 = B+
83-86 = B
80-82 = B-
77-79 = C+
73-76 = C
70-72 = C-
67-70 = D+
63-66 = D
60-62 = D-
<60 = E
COURSE SCHEDULE:

(Week 1: August 21) Introductions

1. Latino Americans, PBS Documentary Series: Episodes 1 and 2 (In Class)

(Week 2: August 28) Latinx History in the U.S. and Introduction to Migration Theory

1. Latino Americans, PBS Documentary Series: Episodes 3-6 (Homework)

(Week 3: September 4) Identities, Ethnoracial Classifications, and Terms


(Week 4: September 11) Theoretical Approaches: Racialization vs Assimilation?


(Week 5: September 18) Empirical Debates: Racialization vs Assimilation


(Week 6: September 25) Empirical Debates: Racialization vs. Assimilation


(Week 7: October 2) New Latinx Destinations


(Week 8: October 9) New Latinx Destinations

**Week 19: October 16** Education


**Week 10: October 23** Religion


**Week 11: October 30** Punishment and Control


**Week 12: November 6** No Class

**Week 13: November 13** The Immigration Enforcement Regime


**Week 14: November 20** Cubans and Puerto Ricans in Florida


5. Mass mobilization—governor change. Implications for Florida?

(Week 15: November 27) Holiday Break—No Class

(Week 16: December 4) Final Presentations