

**DRUG WARS & OIL FORTUNES IN LATIN AMERICA (LAS 3040)**  
**Spring 2025 | Class No. 25487**



**INSTRUCTOR:** Dr. Luis Felipe Lomeli

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**CLASS SESSIONS:** MCCB 3124 101, M,W,F 10:40 – 11:30 am.

**OFFICE HOURS:** M, T, W,F 11:45 am to 1:45 pm, Thursdays 12:45 – 2:45 pm. You can email me to arrange a more convenient time to meet, either via zoom or in person.

**OBJECTIVES:** This course examines the historical, comparative, and current dynamics of several commodities that have been labeled as “drugs” in Latin America. It considers how the presumably separate spheres of legal and illegal commodity exchange have been intertwined since colonial times, and covers the linkages between the drug & oil wars, extractivism, indigenous traditions, and pop culture in Latin America. Throughout the semester, we will read articles, passages of books, watch movies, and engage in conversations with invited guests. **At the conclusion of this course you will:**

1. Communicate the basic history, evolution, and current issues shaping debates on illicit and licit drugs and extractivism in Latin America.
2. Examine the cultural, economic, geographic, historical, political, and social experiences and processes that characterize “drug” wars in Latin America.
3. Compare the similarities and differences in how illicit and licit drugs shape society, politics, and the environment in specific sites in Latin America.
4. Learn and/or improve research skills and methodologies to examine socioeconomic processes.
5. Exercise public speaking, communication, and presentation skills.
6. Develop a “critical eye” to unveil and unwrap the hidden and intertwined histories, causes and effects, that construct particular economic and cultural phenomena around “drugs” and extractivism.

Students are encouraged to employ critical thinking and to rely on data and verifiable sources to interrogate all assigned readings and subject matter in this course as a way of determining whether they agree with their classmates and/or their instructor. No lesson is intended to espouse, promote, advance, inculcate, or compel a particular feeling, perception, viewpoint or belief.

\*Photo credits: Eduardo Alejandro Garza García.

**COURSE FORMAT:** Our course will have a mixed lecture/seminar format, with lots of participation from your part. This means that I will rarely arrive with a Power Point presentation, and I will never talk uninterrupted for 40 minutes. Instead, we will build the class together. I will be asking questions to you and you will be discussing—with the whole class or in small groups and aided by assigned readings—the pros and cons of possible answers and approaches to the topic of the day.

Some readings and topics on this syllabus may change according to the interests of the group and the availability of our possible guests.

**COURSE MATERIALS:** There are no required textbooks for this course. All readings will be available on Canvas or in “reserve” at the library. However, movies will not be screened during class time and some streaming services are not free.

### ASSIGNMENTS & EVALUATION

Participation:	16%
Weekly Assignments:	24% (3% each)
Test 1:	10%
Test 2:	10%
Essay 1:	10%
“Essay” 2:	10%
Final Presentations:	20%

**Participation:** We are building this course together and your participation—attendance, questions, ideas, in-class work—is extremely important.

**Weekly Assignments:** The goal of these assignments is to enrich the course adding precise information for specific places by all of you.

**Tests:** Instead of reading quizzes, we will have a couple of tests.

**Essay 1:** This is your first opportunity to, literally, essay your ideas and arguments in the search of a logical and emotive conclusion.

**“Essay” 2:** More than a formal essay, this will be the written, preliminary draft of your final presentation.

**Final Presentations:** This is your second—and, sadly, last—opportunity to share the results of your research.

Additional guidelines and rubrics for each one of the above-mentioned items will be provided on Canvas.

**Evaluation:** Final grades will be assigned on the following scale (based on percentage points out of the total): **A:** >93% **A-:** 92-90% **B+:** 89-87% **B:** 86-83% **B-:** 82-80% **C+:** 79-77% **C:** 76-73% **C-:** 72-70% **D+:** 69-67% **D:** 66-63% **D-:** 62-60% **E:** 59% and below.

A minimum grade of C is required for General Education credit.

**Attendance and Make-Up Work:** Because this is a discussion-based course, students’ attendance and active participation is required for the course’s functioning and the mutual enrichment of all its participants. Requirements for class attendance and coursework are consistent with university policies found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/#illnesspolicytext>

Assignments will be subject to the following reduction of points if turned in late: within 24 hours of the posted date and time, the assignment will be docked 25% of the total possible points; 24-48 hours late will result in 50% loss of total possible points. Assignments will not be accepted beyond 48 hours past the due date. Let me know as soon as possible if you need to miss an assignment due date for any reason (e.g., conference, illness, family emergency).

### UF ACADEMIC POLICIES & SUPPORT SERVICES

- **Academic Honesty:** As a student at the University of Florida, you have committed yourself to uphold the Honor Code, which includes the following pledge: *“We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.”* You are expected to exhibit behavior consistent with this commitment to the UF academic community, and on all work submitted for credit at the University of Florida, 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 assumed that you will complete all work independently in each course unless the instructor provides explicit permission for you to collaborate on course tasks (e.g. assignments, papers, quizzes, exams). Furthermore, as part of your obligation to uphold the Honor Code, you should report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. It is your individual responsibility to know and comply with all university policies and procedures regarding academic integrity and the Student Honor Code. Violations of the Honor Code at the University of Florida will not be tolerated. Violations will be reported to the Dean of Students Office for consideration of disciplinary action. For more information regarding the Student Honor Code, please see: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>.

- **Services for Students Requiring Accommodations:** The Disability Resource Center (0001 Reid Hall, 352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)) coordinates the needed accommodations of students with disabilities. This includes registering disabilities, recommending academic accommodations within the classroom, accessing special adaptive computer equipment, providing interpretation services and mediating faculty-student disability related issues. ***I want you to do well in this class and will gladly work with you to implement any necessary accommodations.***
- **Course Evaluation:** Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via [www.ufl.bluera.com/ufl/](http://www.ufl.bluera.com/ufl/).
- **Student Privacy:** There are federal laws protecting your privacy with regards to grades earned in courses and on individual assignments. For more information, please see the Notification to Students of FERPA Rights.
- **Campus Helping Resources:** Students experiencing crises or personal problems that interfere with their general well-being are encouraged to utilize the university's counseling resources. The Counseling & Wellness Center provides confidential counseling services at no cost for currently enrolled students. Resources are available on campus for students having personal problems or lacking clear career or academic goals, which interfere with their academic performance.
- **Food Insecurity.** The Pantry is a resource on the University of Florida campus committed to eradicate food insecurity (<https://pantry.fieldandfork.ufl.edu/>). Food insecurity is not having a reliable access to nutritious foods for yourself on a regular basis. If you, or anyone you know is experiencing food insecurity, the Pantry is a resource to visit.
- **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.
- **Sexual harassment of any kind will not be tolerated in this course:** UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment. For more about UF policies regarding harassment: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/studentguide/studentconductcode.php#s4041>
- **Gender Equity Statement.** Gender-based discrimination and violence are antithetical to the university's mission and values, violate university policies, and may also violate federal and state law. The Office for Accessibility and Gender Equity is here for anyone who has been affected by gender-based discrimination and violence. If you or someone you know has experienced gender-based discrimination or violence, please contact the Office for Accessibility and Gender Equity to get support and information about your rights and reporting options. You can learn more about university protections, supportive resources, response processes, and prevention efforts by visiting [www.titleix.ufl.edu](http://www.titleix.ufl.edu) The University Title IX Coordinator is located in the Office for Accessibility and Gender Equity and is responsible for providing support to anyone affected by gender-based discrimination or violence. If you would like to report gender-based discrimination or violence affecting our community, please contact Russell Froman, Assistant Vice President for Accessibility and Gender Equity and ADA and Title IX Coordinator at (352) 273-1094, or by e-mail at [rfroman@ufl.edu](mailto:rfroman@ufl.edu). You can also submit a report using the online portal: [https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?UnivofFlorida&layout\\_id=20](https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?UnivofFlorida&layout_id=20)
- **Video or Audio Recording of Class Lectures.** Students may record video or audio of class lectures for their own personal educational use, in connection with a complaint to the University, or as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. A "class lecture" is an educational presentation delivered by

faculty (including any individual hired or appointed by the University to conduct classroom, teaching activities) or guest lecturer, as part of a University of Florida course, intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject. Students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the faculty or guest. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered to be published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, or leaflet. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

## HEALTH & WELLNESS

- **U Matter, We Care:** If you or a friend is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu) or 352 392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.
- **University Counseling & Wellness Center:** 3190 Radio Road, (352) 392-1575, [www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/](http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/) (Counseling Services, Self-Help Library, Groups and Workshops, Training Programs, Outreach and Consultation, Community Provider Database).
- **Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS):** Student Health Care Center, (352) 392-1161.

## ACADEMIC RESOURCES

- **E-learning technical support:** (352) 392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to [Learning-support@ufl.edu](mailto:Learning-support@ufl.edu).
- **Career Resource Center:** Reitz Union, (352) 392-1601. [www.crc.ufl.edu/](http://www.crc.ufl.edu/). Career assistance and counseling.
- **Library Support:** <https://uflib.ufl.edu/find/ask/> Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- **Teaching Center:** Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. <https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/> General study skills and tutoring.
- **Writing Studio:** 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

**WEEKLY CALENDAR OF TOPICS**

**Subject to change based on the research interests of students enrolled in the course and the availability of invited speakers**

WEEK	TOPIC
1	Drugs from the heavens to the North Pole
2	America runs on... (sugar & coffee)
3	Rum & revolutions
4.	From pirates to narcos
5	In search of the Blue Deer
6	Mining and planting ancient drugs
7	It was not the spice trade after all...
8	The opium wars & the Sinaloa Cartel
9	Just add water
10	<u>Spring Break</u>
11	Oil Nations and neoliberalism
12	Displacement, oil, and drug wars
13	Spicing the western hemisphere
14 & 15	Final presentations.

### WEEKLY CALENDAR OF TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

**Subject to change based on the research interests of students enrolled in the course and the availability of invited speakers**

#### **Week 1. (Legal) Drugs from the heavens to the North Pole.**

Session 1. Presentations, introduction & general format of the course.

No assignments for today, just chat about the course.

Session 2. Our Lady Opossum of Pulque: the drink of the gods.

Read: "Artists and the rise, fall, and rebirth of pulque in Mexican culture and identity,"  
by Luis Felipe Gómez Lomeli.

Session 3. Mexican radio (and tobacco) go to the North Pole.

Read: "Mexican radio goes to the North Pole," by Rubén Gallo.

Assignment 1:

1. Search 1 old tobacco advertising image from Latin America.
2. Take 1 screenshot of an old law regulating alcohol or tobacco in Latam.

#### **Week 2. America runs on... (sugar & coffee).**

Session 1. No class.

Session 2. Sugar & coffee & capitalism.

Read one of these two (if you took LAS2001, you must read Howard W. French):

1. Born in Blackness, by Howard W. French (Chapters 10 & 11).
2. "The Capitalocene Part I..." by Jason W. Moore.

Session 3. Bitter sweetness: South Asians in the Caribbean and the Biafran War.

Read:

1. "Cane is Bitter," by Sam Selvon.
2. "Sugar baby," by Chinua Achebe **OR** "Lo indivisible" (in Spanish) by Max Jorge Hinderer Cruz (pp. 33-38).

Assignment 2:

1. Go to <https://www.slavevoyages.org/>
2. Chose a destination port or territory in Latin America and the Caribbean (such as French Guiana, British Honduras, Cuba, Recife, et cetera), analyze the resulting data (cargo, flag, vessel's name, port of origin, years...), and write down your conclusions in bullet points.

#### **Week 3. Rum & revolutions.**

Session 1. Rum & Coca Cola (The Spanish American War).

Read: And a bottle of rum, by Wayne Curtis (pp. 1-9 and 186-211).

Session 2. Soldiers, tourism, and the sexualization of the Caribbean.

Read: Sexing the Caribbean, by Kamala Kempadoo (pp. 1-14 and 73-77).

Assignment 3:

1. Search 1 travel ad (vintage or contemporary) for a Caribbean destination.
2. Analyze the connections of the image with these weeks' topics.

Session 3. Cuba Libre: Bacardi vs Castro.

Read: And a Bottle of Rum, by Wayne Curtis (pp. 36-52 and 232-246).

**Week 4. From pirates to narcos.**

Session 1. Carnivals and the transfiguration of holidays.

Read: Domination and the Arts of Resistance, by James C. Scott (pp. 172-182).

Session 2. Pirates' regalia.

Watch online: The Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl (Disney).

Session 3. Narco's meta-state.

Watch online: Saving Private Pérez (Lemon Films).

**Week 5. In search of the Blue Deer.**

Session 1. A brief history of psychedelics.

**Deadline: Submit Essay 1.**

Read: Food of the Gods, by Terence McKenna (pp. 223-245).

Session 2. Brujos & anthropologists.

Read:

1. The Teachings of Don Juan, by Carlos Castaneda (pp. 1-9).
2. "Wixárica Culture: The legend of the Blue Deer."

Session 3. Religious/Drug tourism.

Read: "What it's really like to join an Ayahuasca Retreat," by Michaela Trimble.

Assignment 4:

1. Search 1 image of a religious/drug tourist destination.
2. Analyze it and write your conclusions in bullet points.

**Week 6. Mining and planting ancient drugs.**

Session 1. Peyote extractivism.

Read:

1. "Peyote crisis confronting modern indigenous people...", by James D. Muneta (pp. 136-144 and 162-170).
2. "The Wixárica community's legal thirteen-year battle to stop mining...", by Astrid Arellano.

Session 2. "The Mission" of mate.

Watch online: "The Mission" (Roland Joffé).

Read: "Vicio abominable y sucio," by Nora Sánchez.

Session 3. In-class test.

**Week 7. It was not the spice trade after all...**

Session 1. ...It was the drug trade.

Read: Opium: How an ancient flower shaped and poisoned our world, by John H. Halpern and David Blisten (pp. 66-86).

Session 2. Coffee break with Catherine Tucker.

Reading to be determined.

Session 3. Let's have a coffee sometime.

Read: A history of the world in 6 glasses, by Tom Standage (pp. 133-150).

Assignment 5: Search for an image related to a coffee anecdote and bring it to class.

## **Week 8. The Opium Wars & the Sinaloa Cartel**

### Session 1. The forced opium dream.

Read: Opium: How an ancient flower shaped and poisoned our world, by John H. Halpern and David Blisten (pp. 87-90, 112-114, and 122-138).

### Session 2. The “guano” connection.

Read: “Guano” in *Ecology and Power*, Edited by Alf Hornborg, Brett Clark, and Kenneth Hermele, Rutledge, 2012.

### Session 3. German and Dutch drug dealers arrive to Mexico.

Read: “A history of Opium commodity chains in Mexico 1900-1950,” by Juan Antonio Fernández Velázquez and Benjamin T. Smith.

#### Assignment 6:

1. Search 1 image of an old (19<sup>th</sup> century or early 20<sup>th</sup> century) advertising add promoting morphine, cocaine, opium, heroine, etc.
2. Upload your image and add context if needed.

## **Week 9. Just add water.**

### Session 1. A terrible verdure.

Read: “Prussian Blue”, in *When we cease to understand the world*, by Benjamín Labatut (pp. 7-33).

### Session 2. Test 2.

### Session 3. Wrap-up

**Deadline: Submit Essay 2.**

## **Week 10. Spring Break.**

## **Week 11. Oil Nations and neoliberalism.**

### Session 1. Introduction to “Oil Nations.”

Read: “Are we developed?,” by Rajiv Gopie.

### Session 2. Fake oil nations: The Chaco War narratives.

Read: “Fuel for Conspiracy...” by Luis Roniger and Leonardo Senkman.

#### Assignment 7:

1. Select one Latin American country and research its situation regarding oil production, refining, dependency, etc.
2. First arrived, first served: Do not repeat countries.

### Session 3. Drugs, oil, and liberation armies.

Read: “Drug war as neoliberal trojan horse,” by Dawn Paley.

## **Week 12. Population displacement during oil & drug wars.**

### Session 1. Cartels and migration.

Watch online: The pool of the Nobodies, by José Luis Solís.

### Session 2. Huachicol, cattle, and narcos.

Read:

1. “Ghost town,” by Cecilia Ballí.
2. “Nafta’s cartel economy,” by Robert T. Walker.



Session 3. Do cartels exist?

Read: To be defined.

**Week 13. Spicing the Western Hemisphere.**

Session 1. Chocolate wars.

Read:

1. "Before the bar: The intriguing history of drinking chocolate," by Chocopedia.
2. "The Cadbury family: A sweet tradition of giving." by Cadbury.

Session 2. The Spice Girls and the spice agents.

Read (Select one reading):

1. Spice, by Jack Turner (pp. xi – xxiv).
2. Smoke and ashes, by Amitav Ghosh (pp. 3 – 13).

Assignment 8:

1. Go to the supermarket and buy and try a spice you have never tried before.  
Check the Asian, South Asian, African, Mediterranean, Caribbean, and Latin American supermarkets in town.
2. Take a picture of it and upload your image. Add context: how is it called?, how does it taste?, where was it grown?, et cetera.
3. First arrived, first served: Do not repeat images.

Session 3. Fiction invades reality.

Watch online: Rosario Tijeras, by Emilio Maillé (2005).

**Week 14. Final presentations.**

**Week 15. Final presentations.**

**No textbooks are required to buy for this course.**

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[Webpage info](#)