INTRODUCTION TO LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES (LAS2001)
Fall 2023 | Class No. 13923

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Luis Felipe Gómez Lomelí

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CLASS SESSIONS: Tuesday 4:05 – 4:55 pm & Thursdays 4:05 – 6:00 pm.

OFFICE HOURS: You can email me to arrange a more convenient time to meet, either via zoom or in person.

OBJECTIVES: This course offers a panoramic introduction to that astonishingly immense variety of cultures and societies that we—mysteriously—group together under the concepts of “Latinx” and “Latin America.” Using topics such as food, clothing, music, and art as a pretext, we will explore historical, cultural, political, socioeconomic, and other relevant issues in this region of the world. Throughout the semester, we will read articles, passages of books, and engage in conversations with invited guests. At the conclusion of this course you will:

1. Gain a panoramic understanding of fundamental topics, shared characteristics, and distinctions among the variety of societies that live in “Latin America.”
2. Conduct discussion-based seminars and critically engage with key theoretical, historical, political, and socioeconomic issues.
3. Learn and/or improve research skills and techniques to analyze texts and other cultural products.
4. Exercise public speaking, communication, and presentation skills.
5. Develop a “critical eye” to unveil and unwrap the hidden and intertwined histories, causes and effects, that construct a particular cultural phenomenon or product.
6. Practice the ability to understand and articulate diverse points of view for a single event.
7. Acquire a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities that underlie your own academic interests in “Latin America.”

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.

COURSE FORMAT: Due to our unique schedule (50 min. on Tuesdays and 55 min. on Thursdays) our course will have a mixed format. Our short Tuesday sessions will usually have a lecture 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 uninterruptedly 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.

*Santiago de Chile, Skyline. Photograph by Marianna Ianovska.
On our long Thursday meetings or workshops, the session will be usually divided in two. We will have, approximately and subject to change, nine guests. In our sessions with guests, during the first half we will have an informal conversation with our guest: sometimes they would be sharing an article in advance with us and sometimes they would just arrive to chat and answer questions. During the second half it would be your turn on the stage. We will have short and mini-presentations (the time lapse of these will depend on the number of enrolled students) where you will present your research, data and thoughts on a particular topic and engage in a critical discussion with your classmates. Accordingly, if we don’t have a guest, workshop sessions will have longer presentations and we will dedicate some time to conduct research during class time. Thus, our workshops will cover the three main branches of academic research: 1) discussion with experts, 2) research presentation and discussion, and 3) teamwork research. Details for each workshop will be posted on Canvas.

Why will we have so many presentations? Because there are so many different societies in that thing we call “Latin America” and the best way to cover most of them is working together and sharing our knowledge (i.e. if each student specializes in one country, and we are 20 in the classroom, at the end of the semester we will all know, at least, about 20 countries). Thus, research/presentations and participation in class comprise the largest share of your final grade. The other two components will be the midterm essay and the final essay.

Finally, 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 the course Canvas page or in “reserve” at the library.

**ASSIGNMENTS & EVALUATION**

- Participation: 20%
- Research/Presentations: 50%
- Midterm Essay: 15%
- Final Essay: 15%

Guidelines and rubrics for each one of the above-mentioned items will be provided on the course Canvas page.

**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.

**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](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/](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.uflbluera.com/ufl/](http://www.uflbluera.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/](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](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. 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 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/ (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.

- **Career Resource Center**: Reitz Union, (352) 392-1601 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.

WEEKLY TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS
Subject to change based on the research interests of students enrolled in the course and the availability of invited speakers

Week 1: What is “Latin”? What is “America”? Why did they put these two words together?
1. **Lecture & Workshop:** Course introduction, main concepts, and basic geography.
   **Objective:** Each student will propose a working definition of “Latin America.”

Week 2: (Latin) America as utopia.
1. **Lecture:** What makes America unique?

   **Workshop:** Music.
   **Possible guest:** Welson Tremura.
   **Homework:** Watch and listen several (Latin) American music videos of your choice. Prepare a short presentation about how music (i.e. the genre or artist of your choice) reflects cultural variety and its intertwining across history.
   **Objective:** Propose tentative hypotheses to explain the processes of continuity and differentiation of traditional and contemporary music in (Latin) America.

Week 3: The invasion(s) of America and the new socioeconomic order.
1. **Lecture:** The Pacific Ocean and the Americas: The Invention of “Capitalism.”

   **Workshop:** Food.
   **Homework:**
   b. Choose one or several culinary dishes from a (Latin) American country, investigate its history, the geographical origin of the ingredients, nutritional value, technological features of the dishes’ preparation, and the dishes’ cultural value. Prepare a short presentation.
   **Objective:** Analyze and explain the historical processes, cultural implications, and global trade webs that produced the diversity of culinary dishes across (Latin) America.

Week 4: The Construction of America
1. **Lecture:** The translators.

   **Workshop:** Independence fighters and national models during the 19th century.
   **Homework:** Study the life, ideals, and accomplishments of a (Latin) American independence fighter. Make an ultrashort presentation about that person.
   **Objective:** Analyze and classify the different national models proposed in the independence movements.
Week 5: The Latin American Communities.
1. **Lecture:** Being “Latino”: Law & performance.
2. **Workshop:** Communities. Clothing.
   **Possible guest:** Ariadna Tenorio.
   **Homework:**
   b. Choose one or several traditional and contemporary clothing trends in a (Latin) American community, investigate the designs’ origin, cultural value, and technological features. Make a short presentation about it.
   **Objective:** Analyze and explain the historical processes, cultural implications, and performance of traditional and contemporary clothing across (Latin) America.

Week 6: Conservatives vs Liberals.
1. **Lecture:** National struggles during the 19th century (and beyond).
2. **Workshop:** Territory & urbanism.
   **Possible guest:** Carlos A. Suárez.
   **Objective:** Utilize digital cartography to analyze the political and cultural implications of space/territory.

Week 7: (Latin) American modernity.
1. **Lecture:**
   a. What does it mean to be “modern”?
   b. Wrap-up of previously discussed topics.
2. **Midterm essay:** Handwritten in-class essay. You’re welcome to bring all handwritten notes, physical books, printed articles, and other non-electronic aids you may find useful.

Week 8: A nation of a thousand nations.
1. **Lecture:** Modernity vs. diversity.
2. **Workshop:** Languages & worldviews.
   **Possible Guest:** Carmen Martínez Novo.
   **Homework:**
   b. Choose an indigenous (Latin) American culture and study its language, history, territory, and worldview. Prepare a short presentation.
   **Objective:** Reflect on the conflict between the idea of progress and language and worldview diversity.
Week 9: Revolutions of the 20th century.

1. **Lecture:** Utopia, interrupted.
   a. No general reading today. Select a Mexican revolutionary figure from the list and find a) ideals and/or political/economic agenda, b) geographical range of military operations, c) armies he fought against, d) death (killed by…)

2. **Workshop:** Populism. Latin American guerrilla fighters.
   **Possible guest:** Carlos de la Torre.
   **Homework:** Select a (Latin) American guerrilla movement and research its origins, social demands, actions, and outcomes. Prepare a short presentation. Important: Choose a single point of view for your presentation and declare it at the beginning (i.e. the government’s point of view or the guerrilla fighter’s point of view).
   **Objective:** Analyze, classify, and explain the origins, goals, and aftermaths of the diverse revolutionary movements across (Latin) America.

Week 10: Nation building and literacy.

1. **Lecture:** How literature shapes our social imaginaries?

2. **Workshop:** Latin American short stories.
   **Possible guest:** Ave Barrera.
   **Homework:**
   a. Read: Barrera, Ave, “Movie Marathon” at: [https://southwestreview.com/volume-107-number-2/movie-marathon/?fbclid=IwAR34yZ1Tu1D5QP9qdLQQxrz1-WJheKR1kIEBD9J4bCvU0y1AE533ysVH6E](https://southwestreview.com/volume-107-number-2/movie-marathon/?fbclid=IwAR34yZ1Tu1D5QP9qdLQQxrz1-WJheKR1kIEBD9J4bCvU0y1AE533ysVH6E).
   b. Plus: read one or two (Latin) American short stories and reflect on what it unveils about that particular (Latin) American society that we had not talk about in class. Prepare a short presentation.
   **Objective:** Use (Latin) American short stories to reflect on natural, social, and ideological aspects.

Week 11: Art!

1. **Lecture:** Picturing national imaginaries.

2. **Workshop:** Arts as ideology and/or resistance.
   **Possible guest:** Ninive Vargas de la Peña.
   **Homework:** Explore a (Latin) American plastic artist or movement: artistic and social ideals, works, and impact. Prepare a short presentation.
   **Objective:** Propose a working definition for the thin borders between art and propaganda, tradition and innovation, and resistance and global art markets across (Latin) America.

Week 12: Latinx in the borderlands.

1. **Lecture:** The borderlands.

2. **Workshop:** Latinx voices.
   **Homework:** Research a Latinx thinker, scholar, comedian, writer, etc., and prepare a short presentation.
   **Objective:** Reflect on the diversity, and political and cultural implications, of the Latinx communities living in the USA and other non-officially Spanish or Portuguese-speaking territories.
Week 13: (Sustainable) Development.

1. **Lecture:** Infrastructure mega-projects in (Latin) America.

2. **Workshop:** Environment and development.

   **Possible guests:** Susan Paulson.


   **Objective:** Analyze an environmental conflict in (Latin) America. Draft a theoretical framework to evaluate pros and cons of economic projects vs environmental conservation.

Week 14: Open Topic

1. **Lecture:** To be defined.
   a. Reading to be defined.

   Yes, for this class and the next you will decide the topic of our sessions. We could talk about telenovelas, the etiquette of loving & crying in (Latin) America, monsters & ghost stories, fantasy & maps, demographics and what does it mean to be classy in (Latin) America, movies, religions & saints, architecture and architects, health, “madness”, the (Latin) American families, et cetera.

Week 15: Open Topic and Crime.

1. **Lecture:** To be defined.
   a. Reading to be defined.

2. **Workshop:** Media, crime, and narcos.

   **Possible guest:** Rebecca Hanson.

   **Homework:**
   b. To be defined.

   **Objective:** Discuss the intertwining of economic ideologies, governmental policies, inherited inequality, and crime.

Week 16: Final thoughts.

1. **Discussion:** What can the world learn from Latin America?

   **Final essay.**