

LAH 3931

Modern Central America

Fall 2024 / FLI 0101 / MWF 12:50pm-1:40pm



These images may reflect what comes to your mind when you think about Central America. What else comes to mind? Why, do you think?

Dr. Heather Vrana

Office: 364 Grinter Hall

Email: hvrana@ufl.edu

Zoom meeting ID: 487 640 3433

Office hours: Monday, 11:30am – 12:30pm, Weds 2 – 5pm, and by appointment

This course addresses key themes in Central America from the eve of independence from Spain in 1821 to the corruption scandals of the 2010s and 20s. We will discuss land, labor, U.S. intervention, dictatorship, revolution, counterrevolution, and civil war through traditional historical sources and works of literature, music, and art.

The course material is organized into six chronological units: 1) Introduction and Colonial Roots, 2) U.S. Imperialism Part I, 3) Caudillos and Dictators, 4) Reform and Revolution, 5) Civil War, and 6) Ir/Reconciliation.

In general, Mondays and Wednesdays will be lectures. Fridays will be discussion days.

Course Goals

By the end of the course, you will:

- come to understand several key social, political, economic, and cultural changes in Central America from independence from Spain to the present
- recognize how these changes affected Central America lives over time
- identify and explain the diverse and interconnected histories of Central America's many nations and their inhabitants
- explain the endurance of colonial patterns and identities over time
- understand the role of the history of Central America in relationship to the United States and Latin America, in terms of labor, migration, law, religion, and more
- recognize and be able to analyze primary sources, including newspapers, speeches, diaries, music, photographs, films, and other visual sources
- improve your critical thinking skills & your thesis-driven writing skills

Readings

As this is a 3000-level class, you can expect to read around 60-70 pages per week (although some weeks will exceed 70 pgs.), and usually a combination of primary and secondary sources (including scholarly articles and book chapters). As you know, not all reading is created equal and some texts will be harder than others, though they appear shorter at first glance. Be sure to allocate adequate time for reading.

Many of our readings will be primary sources that are available as PDFs on Canvas. You will also purchase three books for this class.

Required books:

- W. George Lovell, *A Beauty that Hurts*
- Joan Didion, *Salvador*
- Manlio Argueta, *One Day of Life*

Optional reference texts:

- Héctor Pérez-Brignoli, *A Brief History of Central America*
- James Dunkerley, *Power in the Isthmus: A Political History of Central America*

For those of you who read in Spanish, there are many excellent Spanish-language sources; see me if you are interested.

Assignments:

1. Attendance/Participation – 200 points
 - a. Your participation in class is crucial to our and your success. I will take attendance during every class period. But you will grade your own participation on a scale of 0-10 once every two weeks. You are expected to participate actively in class by answering questions, asking questions, and taking notes. I reserve the right to modify the grade—either up or down—and will inform you on a biweekly basis of these modifications. If you are sick, please use caution and take care of yourself and your classmates by staying home. The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us all to be more careful about spreading sickness. If you need to discuss an attendance concern, feel free to reach out to me. Requirements for make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>
2. Weekly Reading Quizzes –100 points
 - a. There will be 12 (nearly) weekly 10-point quizzes administered on Mondays across the semester worth 10 points each. I will drop the 2 lowest grades. The quizzes will be based on the readings.
3. Midterm paper – 150 points
 - a. This paper will be an analytical paper based on primary and secondary sources. You will respond to this prompt: Discuss the limitations on political expression in late 19th – early 20th century Central America, focusing on one country. Your paper should be at least 2500 words in length.
4. Debates – 50 each, 150 total points
 - a. Three times during the semester, we will have an in-class debates on important questions in the history of Modern Central America. You are responsible for participating meaningfully and actively in these debates. There are a variety of ways to contribute, which we will discuss.
5. Final Paper – 200 points
 - a. This paper will be a synthesis essay about one of the units of the course. Your paper must include an adequate number of secondary and primary sources to support your argument. You should use assigned readings and outside sources. Your paper should be at least 2500 words in length.
6. Group Podcast or Website – 200 points

- a. Working in groups of about 3-5 people, you will research a topic in Central American history since 1821 that we may or may not have touched upon in class. You will engage theories of history, secondary materials, and original primary sources. You should try to include one interview. What you research is largely up to you, but it should in some way reflect the entirety of the semester, as this assignment is in lieu of a final exam. With this research, you will create a podcast. Your podcast should be at least 20 minutes long and it may be in English or Spanish (or Spanglish). You will share your podcasts with the class during the last week of class. You can also choose to create a website, which should include photographs, other primary sources, audio, and analysis.

7. Extra Credit

- a. There will be opportunities for extra credit across the course of the semester, including events, film screenings, and current events reports.

Total: 1000 points

Note: You will submit assignments on Canvas and I will enter grades there, too; you are responsible for monitoring your own grade by adding the points you earned on assignments by the points you could have earned.

Grade Scale

A	930	C	730
A-	900	C-	700
B+	870	D+	670
B	830	D	630
B-	800	D-	600
C+	770		

Course Policies

Accessibility and accommodations

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565 or www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter, which should be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

We will work together proactively to improve accessibility in this classroom and syllabus. I will seek opportunities to make assignments, discussion, the classroom itself, and technologies more accessible. Please let me know how I can support you.

Cell phones, etc.

Cell phone use during class is distracting. Please also refrain from computer use that is not directly related to the course, which distracts you and your classmates. Of course, I understand that emergencies do arise.

Honor Code & Pledge

In 1995 the UF student body enacted an [honor code](#) and voluntarily committed itself to the highest standards of honesty and integrity. When students enroll at the university, they commit themselves to the standard drafted and enacted by students. Undisclosed (that is, uncited) use of ChatGPT or other LLM-based chatbots and Generative AI amounts to plagiarism, unauthorized assistance, and academic dishonesty.

The Honor 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. On all work submitted for credit by students at the university, the following pledge is either required or implied: On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

Resources

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit U Matter, We Care website to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need or visit the Student Health Care Center website.

[Note: I may update the syllabus, if necessary, through the course of the semester. If changes are made, the updated syllabus will be announced in class and on the course Canvas site.]

~*~Notes~*~

Course Schedule

Thematic Unit	Week	Date	Class Topic & Format	Weekly Readings (to be read for our Monday class meeting unless otherwise noted)
Introduction and Colonial Roots	Week 1	8/23	Introductions Lecture: Why Central America?	* W. George Lovell, “Nobel K’iche” in <i>A Beauty that Hurts: Life and Death in Guatemala</i> , pp. 17-25. [Canvas]
	Week 2	8/26 8/28 8/30	Lecture: Colonial Central America Lecture: Independence and the Federation Discussion: Unity and Autonomy	* Archbishop Pedro Cortés y Larraz, “Fugitive Indians” in <i>The Guatemala Reader</i> pp. 94-100. [Canvas or UF Libraries] * Lovell, “The Colonial Experience” in <i>A Beauty that Hurts: Life and Death in Guatemala</i> and “The Century After Independence,” pp. 107-119 and 120-131. * Sylvia Sellers-García, “Walking While Indian, Walking While Black: Policing in a Colonial City,” <i>American Historical Review</i> 126, no. 2 (2021): 455-480. [Canvas or UF Libraries]
U.S. Imperialism	Week 3	9/2 9/4 9/6	No Class – Labor Day Lecture: Filibusters and other Foreign Threats Discussion: U.S. Imperialism	* Michel Gobat, “Chapter 7. The Promise of Development” in <i>Empire by Invitation</i> , pp. 190-214. [Canvas or UF Libraries] * Thomas Francis Meagher, “Holidays in Costa Rica, 1858” in <i>The Costa Rica Reader</i> [Canvas] * “Salvador,” <i>New York Times</i> July 12, 1858 [Canvas or NYT online] * “More Filibustering,” “Walker Again.,” and “Used Up.,” <i>New York Times</i> , July – September 1860. [Canvas or NYT online] * Lowell Gudmundson, “Peasant, Farmer, Proletarian: Class Formation in a Smallholder Coffee Economy, 1850-1950,” <i>HAHR</i> 69, no. 2 (1989): 221-257. [Canvas or UF Libraries]
	Week 4	9/9 9/11 9/13	Lecture: Liberal Restoration Finish Lecture Discussion: Liberals and Conservatives	* Justin Wolfe, “Chapter 2. Death and Taxes: Building a Nation State” in <i>The Everyday Nation-State</i> , pp. 45-79. [Canvas] * E. Bradford Burns, “The Modernization of Underdevelopment: El Salvador, 1858-1931,” <i>The Journal of Developing Areas</i> 18, no. 3 (Apr. 1984): 293-316. [Canvas or UF Libraries] * David McCreery, ‘This Life of Misery and Shame’: Female Prostitution in Guatemala City, 1880-1920,” <i>Journal of Latin American Studies</i> 18, no. 2 (1986): 333-353. [Canvas or UF Libraries]

Thematic Unit	Week	Date	Class Topic & Format	Weekly Readings (to be read for our Monday class meeting unless otherwise noted)
	Week 5	9/16	Field Trip: Panama Canal Zone Archive @ Smathers	* Marixa Lasso, "Chapter 2. The Canal Zone in 1904" in <i>Erased</i> , pp. 51-91. [Canvas or UF Libraries] * Lara Putnam, "Eventually Alien: the Multigenerational Saga of British West Indians in Central America, 1870-1940" in <i>Blacks and Blackness in Central America</i> , pp. 278-306. [Canvas or UF Libraries]
		9/18	Guest Lecture by Marianne Quijano	
		9/20	Discussion: Impoverishing Growth & Debate Prep	
Caudillos and Dictators	Week 6	9/23	Debate: Colonization, imperialism, and neo-imperialism	* Miguel Angel Asturias, <i>El señor presidente</i> in <i>The Guatemala Reader</i> , pp. 167-172. [Canvas or UF Libraries] * Catherine Rendón, "Magical Modernism" in <i>The Guatemala Reader</i> , pp. 162-166. [Canvas or UF Libraries] * David Carey, "Chapter 3 Epidemics" in <i>Our Elders Teach Us</i> , pp. 115-138. [Canvas]
		9/25	Lecture: <i>Los señores presidentes</i>	
		9/27	No Class	
	Week 7	9/30	No Class: Work on Midterm	* Jeffrey L. Gould and Aldo Lauria-Santiago, "Garden of Despair: The Political Economy of Class, Land, and Labor, 1920-1929" in <i>To Rise in Darkness</i> , pp. 1-31. [Canvas or UF Libraries]
		10/2	Lecture: El Salvador 1932	* Excerpts, Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, Erik Ching, and Rafael A. Lara-Martínez, "The Uprising and the Matanza of 1932," <i>Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador</i> , pp. 22-67. [Canvas]
		10/4	Finish Lecture and Discussion: Primary Sources	* Excerpts, TBD, Thomas Anderson, <i>Matanza</i> [Read for Friday] [Canvas] * "A Landowner's Account, 1932" in <i>Remembering a Massacre</i> , pp. 333-337 [Read for Friday] [Canvas] * "Message of the Distinguished President of the Republic..." in <i>Remembering a Massacre</i> , pp. 337-340. [Read for Friday] [Canvas]
Reform or Revolution	Week 8	10/7	Lecture: The End of Dictatorship?	* Paul Almeida, "Chapter 2. Regime Openings and Violent Closings, 1925-1962" in <i>Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005</i> , pp. 35-69. [Canvas]
		10/9	Finish Lecture	* Mark B. Rosenberg, "Social Reform in Costa Rica: Social Security and the Presidency of Rafael Angel Calderón," <i>HAHR</i> 61, no. 2 (1981): 278-296. [Canvas or UF Libraries]
		10/11	Discussion: Imperialism and Sovereignty	* Excerpts, Manuel Mora Valverde, <i>Imperialism: Our Sovereignty before the State Department</i> (1940) in <i>Anti-colonial Texts from Central American Student Movements</i> [Canvas]
				Midterm paper due on Friday, Oct. 11

Thematic Unit	Week	Date	Class Topic & Format	Weekly Readings (to be read for our Monday class meeting unless otherwise noted)
	Week 9	10/14	Lecture: Guatemala's Ten Years Spring	* Heather Vrana and Gibbins, "Introduction" and Jim Handy, "Foreword," <i>Out of the Shadow: Revisiting the Revolution from Post-Peace Guatemala</i> , pp. xi-xx and 1-32. [Canvas]
		10/16	Finish Lecture and Discussion: Reform or Revolution	* Juan José Arévalo, "A New Guatemala" in <i>The Guatemala Reader</i> , pp. 206-210. [Canvas or UF Libraries]
		10/18	No Class – Homecoming	* Nick Cullather, "Operation PBSUCCESS" in <i>The Guatemala Reader</i> , pp. 230-237. [Canvas or UF Libraries]
				* Various primary sources on the CIA in Guatemala in <i>The Guatemala Reader</i> , pp. 238-248. [Canvas or UF Libraries]
	Week 10	10/21	Lecture: The Somozas	* Knut Walter, "Chapter 3: Revamping the State" in <i>The Regime of Anastasio Somoza, 1936-1956</i> , pp. 66-128. [Canvas]
		10/23	Finish Lecture & Debate Prep	
		10/25	Debate: Reform and Revolution	
Civil War	Week 11	10/28	Lecture: Guatemala	* FAR, EGP, ORPA, and URNG, "Guerrilla Armies of the Poor" in <i>The Guatemala Reader</i> , pp. 335-339. [Canvas or UF Libraries]
		10/30	Finish Lecture	* "Chapter 6. Intent to Destroy" and various primary sources in <i>The Guatemala Reader</i> , pp. 362-365. [Canvas or UF Libraries]
		11/1	Discussion: Truth and Reconciliation	* Mario Payeras, "Thunder in the City" in <i>The Guatemala Reader</i> , pp. 367-372. [Canvas or UF Libraries]
				* Ricardo Falla, "The San Francisco Massacre, July 1982" in <i>The Guatemala Reader</i> , pp. 373-377. [Canvas or UF Libraries]
				* U.S. Department of State, "We Cannot Confirm nor Deny" in <i>The Guatemala Reader</i> , pp. 378-385. [Canvas or UF Libraries]
				* Commission for Historical Clarification, "Acts of Genocide" in <i>The Guatemala Reader</i> , pp. 386-394. [Canvas or UF Libraries]
				* Guatemalan Army High Command, "Inverting Clausewitz" in <i>The Guatemala Reader</i> , pp. 417-420. [Canvas or UF Libraries]
				* Lovell, "Into the Fire (1981)" and "Peace of the Dead (1982-83)" in <i>A Beauty that Hurts</i> , pp. 47-63.
				* Photographs by Jean-Marie Simon here: https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/02/a-testament-from-guatemalas-war-years/ .

Thematic Unit	Week	Date	Class Topic & Format	Weekly Readings (to be read for our Monday class meeting unless otherwise noted)
	Week 12	11/4	Lecture: Nicaragua	* Claudia Rueda, “Chapter 6. Radicalizing Youth, 1966-1972” in <i>Students of Revolution</i> , pp. 149-175. [Canvas or UF Libraries]
		11/6	Lecture: Panama, Honduras, and Costa Rica	* Margaret Randall, Excerpts, “Chapter 2. The Commanders” in <i>Sandino’s Daughters</i> [assigned pgs. TBD] [Canvas]
		11/8	Discussion: Comparisons within Central America	* Carlos Fonseca, “A Message to Revolutionary Students (1968)” in <i>Anti-Colonial Texts from Central American Student Movements</i> , pp. 182-192. [Canvas]
				* Alan McPherson, “Courts of World Opinion: Trying the Panama Flag Riots of 1964,” <i>Diplomatic History</i> 28, no. 1 (Jan. 2004): 83-112. [Canvas or UF Libraries]
				* OPTIONAL: Steven Palmer, “Carlos Fonseca and the Construction of Sandinismo in Nicaragua,” <i>Latin American Research Review</i> 23, no. 1 (1988): 91-109. [Canvas]
	Week 13	11/11	No Class – Veterans Day	* Manlio Argueta, <i>One Day of Life</i>
		11/13	Lecture: El Salvador	* Joan Didion, <i>Salvador</i>
		11/15	Discussion: Argueta and Didion	
Ir/Reconciliation	Week 14	11/18	Debate: Revolution	* Lovell, “Epilogue” in <i>A Beauty that Hurts</i> , pp. 149-180.
		11/20	Lecture: Post-War and Violence	* Diane M. Nelson, “The Algebra of Genocide” in <i>Who Counts? The Mathematics of Death and Life after Genocide</i> , pp. 63-92. [Canvas or UF Libraries]
		11/22	Finish Lecture	* Jeffrey L. Gould, “Nicaragua: A View from the Left,” <i>NACLA</i> July 25, 2018. [Canvas or online]
				* Anthony Quainton, “Managua and Washington in the Early Sandinista Revolution,” <i>ReVista</i> May 1, 2019. [Canvas or online]
Thanksgiving Break (November 25 – 30)				
	Week 15	12/2	Wrap Up Discussion	* Rachel Nolan, “Guatemalan Child Refugees, Then and Now,” <i>NACLA</i> November 13, 2020. [Canvas]
		12/4	Podcast Presentations	* NISGUA, “Seeds of Life: Guatemala Beyond Elections,” <i>NACLA</i> January 12, 2024. [Canvas]
				* Jorge Cuéllar, “With Bukele Consolidated, Salvadorans Enter Uncharted Terrain,” <i>El Faro</i> Feb. 7, 2024. [Canvas]
Final Papers and Podcasts will be due on Canvas during the Final Exam Period on the date assigned by the university.				

Model Podcasts for the Group Podcast Assignment

Under the Shadow (hosted by Michael Fox and produced by the North American Congress on Latin America and the Real News Network, an investigative narrative podcast about U.S. intervention in Central America.)

Revolutions (“A weekly podcasting exploring great political revolutions.”)

American History Tellers series (hosted by Lindsay Graham, a long-running podcast that examines key moments in US history from the perspective of people who lived them, including the Cold War, Prohibition, Pirates, the Civil War, and more.)

Throughline (an NPR podcast that seeks to go “beyond the headlines to answer the question, ‘How did we get here?’”)

Reveal (hosted by Al Letson, a weekly investigative narrative podcast usually related to history, politics, and justice in the US.)

Decoder Ring (hosted by Willa Paskin, each episode takes an object, cultural norm, or question and unpacks it.)

Song Exploder (also a long-running podcast where “musicians take apart their songs, and piece by piece, tell the story of how they were made.”)

30 for 30 (part of ESPN’s “30 for 30” documentary dynasty, this podcast “goes beyond the field to explore how sports, competition, athleticism and adventure affect our lives and our world.”)

Previous students’ podcasts are also available on Canvas.