

Summer A, 2025
PM

Class meetings: MTWR - 11:00 AM - 12:15

Class Location: Keene-Flint Hall 111

LAH 3300
Contemporary Latin America

Helio Augusto de Souza Alves, PhD Candidate

Office hours: Tues and Thurs, 12:30-2:00 pm, Keene-Flint Hall, 222 (3rd floor)

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Syllabus

Course description:

What drives political change and social struggle in contemporary Latin America? What historical processes have shaped the region's current political, social, and economic structures? This course explores the major political, economic, and social challenges facing Latin America today by examining key moments and movements from the early twentieth century to the early twenty-first century. Through selected countries, we will analyze the shifting dynamics of power, the role of institutions, and the agency of diverse social groups in shaping national and regional trajectories. Topics include U.S. influence and intervention, intra-regional collaboration, the rise of authoritarian regimes, and the emergence of organized resistance in defense of democracy. Additionally, weekly discussions will provide insights into the realities of other countries in the region through the analysis of primary sources. Students will also strengthen their skills in analytical writing and the development of well-supported arguments.

Course objectives:

Students will develop a deeper understanding of how long-term historical processes continue to shape the present at both local and regional levels. Alongside building historical knowledge, they will learn to critically analyze and interpret primary and secondary sources, and to construct compelling arguments—both in class discussions and through written work.

Requirements and Assignments

Attendance (10%)

Students will be required to sign an attendance sheet every class. This is to ensure that everyone's attendance is properly registered. Since this is a summer course, it means we will cover a greater number of topics per class than in a regular Fall or Spring course given that it is a shorter semester. For that reason, missing classes will not only affect your grade but your

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ability to comprehend and engage in the discussion. As per the University's regulations, absences will count from the first-class meeting. For excused absences and attendance policies, refer to <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>

Participation (10%)

This course will consist of a mix of lectures and discussions every week. Participation thus consists of taking notes, asking and answering questions relevant to the material during lectures, and engaging in the discussions with the instructor and colleagues. Students are expected to thoroughly read all assigned texts in order to fully contribute to class discussion.

Primary source analysis (25%)

Students are expected to write a short paper analyzing a primary source relevant to the course topic. This analysis should include identification of the type of source, its authorship, date of publication, content, historical context, and broader significance. A list of sources to choose from will be provided by the instructor during the first week of class. The analysis must be between 800 and 1,000 words.

Quiz (5%)

Students will take an in-class quiz. The quiz will assess knowledge on Contemporary Latin American history, geography, and public figures.

Midterm (25%)

By the third week of class, students must select the topic of their final essays in consultation with the instructor. The midterm assignment will consist of a tentative outline of the final essay, including a description of the topic, preliminary arguments, proposed sources, and an annotated bibliography. Outlines must be between 1,000 and 1,200 words in length.

Final essay (25%)

Final essays will consist of a completed, refined version of the midterm outline. Essays are expected to develop the arguments presented by the students in their previous outline and examine primary sources in clear articulation with the bibliography. Students are welcome to benefit from their primary source analysis assignment while working on the final essay. Essays must be between 1500-1700 words.

Grading scale:

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A = 100–94	C = 76–74
A- = 93–90	C- = 73–70
B+ = 89–87	D+ = 69–67
B = 86–84	D = 66–64
B- = 83–80	D- = 63–60
C+ = 79–77	F = 59–0

For information on current UF grading policies, visit: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/#gradestext>

Accommodations:

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center. See the “Get Started With the DRC” webpage on the Disability Resource Center site. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester. For more information, visit: <https://disability.ufl.edu/get-started/>

Required text:

Keen, Benjamin, and Keith (Keith A.) Haynes. A History of Latin America. 8th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009.

Note: All other class material is available in the course Canvas page and/or through the UF Libraries.

Course schedule

Week 1 – Brazil: the early Republic and the Vargas era

May 12

Intro to the course: Why Latin America matters

Lecture – The legacies of the Empire in the formation of Republican Brazil

May 13

Lecture – Electoral politics and economy in the First Republic

May 14

Lecture – The Vargas Era

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May 15

Discussion: Politics, society, and economy in Brazil and Argentina: a comparative discussion.

Read: Keen, pages 260-265; 339-349; and 356-367.

Week 2 – Mexico: from the Porfiriato to the Revolution

May 19

Lecture – Mexico under Díaz: Authoritarian Rule, Land Concentration, and Social Unrest

May 20

Lecture – The Mexican Revolution (1910-1920)

May 21

Lecture – Mexico's Path from Chaos to Stability (1920–1940)

May 22

Discussion: Was the Revolution really a Revolution? Discussing Mexico's many revolutionary projects.

Read: Keen, pages 313-333

AND

Wasserman, Mark. Review: The Mexican Revolution: Region and Theory, Signifying Nothing?" LARR 25, no. 1 (1990): 231-242

Week 3 – Cuba: race, politics, and US dominance

May 27

Lecture – From Colonialism to Neocolonialism: U.S. Influence and the Birth of the Republican Era in Cuba

May 28

Lecture – Race, Politics, and Society in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba (1902–1933)

May 29

Discussion: In what ways did U.S. imperialism affect Cuba's independence, national identity, and broader society? What challenges did Afro-Cubans face, and what solutions did they find in their struggle for equality?

Read: De la Fuente. A Nation for All, pages 23-91 (Canvas).

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Week 4 – Political instability and the struggle for democracy in Guatemala, Brazil, and Argentina

***Mid-term essay due: June 3, 2025 (11:59pm)**

June 2

Lecture – Guatemala and the Cold War: A U.S. Political Laboratory in Latin America
Guest lecture by Thomas Miller, PhD Candidate

June 3

Lecture – From Vargas to Goulart: Brazil on the Eve of the Military Dictatorship (1951–1964)

June 4

Lecture – The Military Dictatorship, Neoliberalism, and the Struggle for Democracy in Contemporary Brazil

June 5

Discussion: Examining the legacies of military dictatorships in Latin America.

Watch: Moura, Wagner (dir.) *Marighella*. ArtMattan Films, 2022

Watch: Blaustein, Susana (dir.) *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. Women Make Movies, 1985.

Week 5 – The PRI rule and the legacies of the Revolution in contemporary Mexico

***Primary source analysis due: June 11, 2025 - 11:59pm.**

***In-class quiz. TBD.**

June 9

Lecture – Mexico under the PRI: one-party rule, foreign capital, and social pressure

June 10

Lecture – Neoliberalism, NAFTA, and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation

June 11

Discussion: How did the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) maintain political dominance for over 70 years, and what mechanisms did it use to suppress dissent? In what ways did indigenous movements, like the Zapatista uprising in 1994, challenge the narrative of national unity promoted by the state?

Read: Keen, pages 508-520

AND

Buchenau, The Perfect Dictatorship, pages 141-166 (Canvas)

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Free time to work on your essays – No class

Week 6 – The Cuban Revolution and the Castro regime

June 16

Lecture – The Rise and Fall of Batista, the Political Emergence of Castro, and the Road to Socialism, 1933-1962

June 17

Lecture – The Communist State, the Exiles, and the Special Period

June 18

Final essay due by 11:59pm – No class