Seminar: Political Economy of Latin America (PSCI 571)

Lauder Institute, University of Pennsylvania
2010 Fall Semester, Wednesdays 4:30-7:30PM
Instructor: Isabella Alcañiz
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Office Hours by Appointment on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays at the Lauder Institute

This course examines key political and economic policies in Latin America over the past four decades. The seminar will be of interests to students who wish to deepen their knowledge of major events and trends in the region, such as the democratic transitions of the 1980s, the market reforms of the 1990s, and the rise of a Leftist leadership in the 2000s. Students will survey the main debates of contemporary political economy in the region. Drawing from studies in the discipline of Political Science, this course explores the interactions of political and economic actors under specific international conditions, with a particular emphasis on how the state structures, channels and negotiates the economy.

Course Requirements
Over the semester, students must:
* Always attend class and be prepared to discuss ALL the material assigned for the week.
* Write a short paper critiquing two or more of the assigned readings.
* Give a brief presentation (approximately 10 minutes) at the beginning of class of the critical paper.
* Write an even shorter paper discussing a classmate’s critical paper.
* Give a brief presentation (approximately 5 minutes) immediately after the presentation of the critical paper.
* When not presenting critical or reaction papers, submit via email to the instructor the night before class (by 10PM) 3 critical questions based on the assigned readings. These questions must be open-ended and serve as triggers for class discussion.
* Either take a final exam or write a research paper. When choosing the latter, students must turn in a paper proposal to the instructor by November 3.

Instructions for:
*All Assigned Readings
Students must be able to answer succinctly and clearly the following questions:
1) What is the author’s research question?
2) What is the author’s causal argument (or what “causal mechanisms” does s/he advance)?
3) What are the author’s main findings?
4) How does the author arrive to these findings (or what methods does s/he use)?
5) In what larger theoretical/policy debate is the work embedded?

Readings available at www.study.net The Murillo book is available at the U Penn bookstore.
*Critical Paper
In this paper, students must discuss at least 2 of the assigned readings of the week by briefly answering the 5 questions aforementioned and offering their own critical analysis of the authors’ arguments.
Students must email the paper to the instructor and the assigned discussant by 7PM the night before class.
Approximate length: 4-5 pages long.
The number of critical papers/presentations students are responsible for over the semester will be determined the first week of class.

*Discussant Paper
In this paper, discussants critically engage the argument presented in the Critical Paper. The idea is that discussants critique their fellow students’ analysis (interpretation) of the assigned readings, NOT the assigned readings themselves.
Discussants will give a hardcopy of their paper to the instructor right before class.
Approximate length: 2-3 pages long.
The number of discussant papers/presentations students are responsible for over the semester will be determined the first week of class.

*Final Research Paper
To write this paper, students must begin by formulating a relevant and viable research question. The paper must offer a tentative answer (or argument) that is grounded in some of the literature covered by this seminar. Students must indicate how they plan on carrying out the necessary research to test their argument (or hypotheses), but can stop short of actual data analysis. However, the paper needs to be viable. Consequently, the student must identify the appropriate, relevant data.
Approximate length: 10 pages.
A proposal of the paper, stating the research question, a summary of the central argument, relevant data, and bibliographical sources, is due November 3.

Course Evaluation is based on the following:
30% of final grade, short papers and presentations.
30% of final grade, attendance and class participation throughout the semester.
40% of final grade, research paper or final exam.

Attendance Notice
All students are expected to attend class each and every time we meet. Only a highly contagious or severely grave disease is a valid excuse to miss class. As a significant percentage of your final grade depends on class participation, and you can only contribute to class discussion if you are present, it follows you cannot afford to be absent.

Assigned readings by week
September 8
Class Expectations and Organization.

September 15
The Latin American State Before the 1980s


September 22
The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions (I)


September 29
The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions (II)


October 6
The Politics of Market-Oriented Reforms (I)


October 13
The Politics of Market-Oriented Reforms (II)


Morris Goldstein. 2003. Debt Sustainability, Brazil, and the IMF. Institute for


October 20

The Politics of Deregulating the Public Sector


October 27

Oil and the Resource Curse


Read: Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8, pp. 71-185. Recommended: page 7 and skim Chapter 3.


November 3

The Politics of Trade Liberalization


November 10

Welfare Politics


November 17

Blaming the Economy: Protest Votes


November 24
The Politics of Anti-Neoliberalism


December 1
The Rise of Brazil, the Regional Giant


December 8
The New Leftist Leadership


Final Exam: December week 15