International Relations 466:

Contemporary Issues in Latin American Politics

Spring 2014

When: M & W 2:00-3:20 p.m.  Professor Gerardo Munck
Where: VKC 206                 E-Mail: munck@usc.edu
Office Hours: M 3:30-4:50 p.m. Office: VKC 326A

1. Course Description
   The course focuses on current politics in Latin America. We will first consider the
   background to current politics in the region, recent electoral trends and the new regional
democratic agenda. Then we will sequentially address a range of themes: electoral democracy;
the political inclusion of women, afro-descendants and indigenous peoples; violence, drugs and
human rights; and economic inequality and poverty. The discussion will touch on most of the
countries in Latin America and we will analyze current issues and trends, and also consider
possible responses to the problems we identify.

2. Requirements
   The basic requirements include six quizzes (20% of the overall grade), a 15-page
research paper (20%), an in-class mid-term (30%), and an in-class final exam (30%). Class
participation is also an essential part of the course.
   With regard to the quizzes, I have included provisional dates in the syllabus, but these
may change slightly. The exact dates will be announced in class. Of the six quizzes, I will drop
the lowest one and thus compute grades on the basis of your best five quizzes.
   With regard to your research papers, you are supposed to define your own topic of
study. The only requirement concerning topic selection is that it must be related to the issues
discussed in the course and that it must be based largely upon scholarly literature, that is,
academic books, articles in professional journals, etc. A brief description of your topic, on a
sheet of paper or by email, is due on March 26. The completed paper is due the last day of
class (April 30).

3. Readings
   All the readings are accessible through the Blackboard, under “Course Content.” Some
of the electronic files include sections that do not need to be read. The specific page numbers
you need to read are clearly indicated below.
Course Outline, Readings and Assignments

Meeting 1 (1/13): Introduction

1. Background, the Current Political Scenario, and the New Democracy Agenda

Meetings 2, 3 & 4 (1/15, 1/22, 1/27): Background: Transitions to Democracy and Neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s


*** Martin Luther King’s Birthday: No class on Monday, January 20 ***

Reid, Michael, Forgotten Continent: The Battle for Latin America’s Soul (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 2007). Read only pp. 118-20 (the section on “The rise and indebted fall of statist protectionism”) and pp. 132-47 (the sections on “A paradigm shift,” “Debt and the battle for stability,” “Tearing down barriers” and “Public vices, private passions”).

-Quiz # 1 (1/29)

Meetings 5, 6, 7 & 8 (1/29, 2/3, 2/5, 2/10): The Current Political Scenario: Who Governs? What do the Governors Stand For?

Torreon, Barbara Salazar, Latin America and the Caribbean: Fact Sheet on Leaders and Elections, December 3, 2013. 2 pgs.


Navia, Patricio and Ignacio Walker, “Political Institutions, Populism, and Democracy in Latin America,” pp 245-65, in Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully (eds.), Democratic Governance in Latin America (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010). Read only pp. 256-63 (the sections on “The neoliberal economic reforms of the nineties and their outcome” and “Populist and non-populist responses”, and pay attention to Figure 7.1 on p. 262).


-Quiz # 2 (2/10)
Meeting 9 (2/12): The New Hemispheric Agenda to Promote and Defend Democracy: The OAS and Inter-American Democratic Charter


OAS, Inter-American Democratic Charter. (Adopted by the General Assembly at its special session held in Lima, Peru, on September 11, 2001). 20 pgs.


*** Presidents’ Day: No class on Monday, February 17 ***

2. Political Rights I: Electoral Democracy

Meetings 10 & 11 (2/19, 2/24): Electing Representatives


-Quiz # 3 (2/24)

Meetings 12, 13, 14 & 15 (2/26, 3/3, 3/5, 3/10): Completing Electoral Terms


OAS AG/RES. 1080 (XXI-O/91) on Representative Democracy. (Resolution adopted at the fifth plenary session, held on June 5, 1991). 1 pg.

OAS, Inter-American Democratic Charter. (Adopted by the General Assembly at its special session held in Lima, Peru, on September 11, 2001). Reread Ch. 4.


-Quiz # 4 (3/10)

Meeting 16 (3/12). Mid-Term

*** In-Class Mid-Term Exam: March 12 ***

*** Spring Break: March 17-21 ***

3. Political Rights II: Political Inclusion

Meetings 17 & 18 (3/24, 3/26): Questions of Gender, Ethnicity and Race


-Research Paper (3/26): A brief description of your research topic is due.

4. Civil Rights

Meetings 19, 20 & 21 (3/31, 4/2, 4/7): Confronting the Past: Transitional Justice


-Quiz # 5 (4/7)
Meetings 22, 23 & 24 (4/9, 4/14, 4/16): The Current Violence: Crime and Drugs


**Meetings 25 (4/21): The Inter-American Human Rights System**


Cantón, Santiago A. “Protecting Truth from Power: 15 Years of The Special Rapporteur For Freedom of Expression,” *Americas Quarterly* (Fall 2013). 8 pgs.

-Quiz # 6 (4/23)

5. Social Rights

**Meeting 26 (4/23): Revisiting Neoliberalism and the Problem of Inequality**

Reid, Michael, *Forgotten Continent: The Battle for Latin America’s Soul* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 2007), Ch. 6 (pp. 124-58) on “The Rise and Fall of the Washington Consensus,” Read only pages 124-132, skip pp. 132-47, and resume reading on page 147 (the section on “A balance sheet of the reforms”).


**Meeting 27 (4/28): Poverty and Social Policy**


6. Conclusions

**Meeting 28 (4/30): A Recapitulation**


*** Final Exam: Monday, May 12, 2:00-4:00 p.m ***