International Relations 466:
Contemporary Issues in Latin American Politics

Spring 2017

When: M & W 5:00-6:20 p.m.  Professor Gerardo Munck
Where: VKC 202  E-mail: munck@usc.edu
Office Hours: M 3:30-4:50 p.m.  Office: VKC 326A
or by appointment

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
political agenda. Then we will sequentially address a range of themes: electoral democracy; the
political inclusion of women, afro-descendants and indigenous peoples; human rights,
viole nce, and drugs; 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 five quizzes (20% of the overall grade), a 15-page
(double spaced) 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, we will have six quizzes and I will drop the lowest one. I
have included provisional dates below in the syllabus, but these may change slightly. The exact
dates will be announced in class.

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 on 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 6. The completed paper is due the last day of class
(April 26).

3. Readings
All the readings are accessible through the Blackboard, under “Readings.” 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 (1/9): Introduction

1. Background, Ideological Trends and Issues

Meetings # 2, 4 & 5 (1/11, 1/18, 1/23): Background: Transitions to Democracy and Neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s


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”).

Meeting # 3 (1/16). Martin Luther King’s Birthday: No class

• Quiz # 1 (1/25)

Meetings # 6, 7, 8 & 9 (1/25, 1/30, 2/1, 2/6): The Post-1990s Political Scenario: Recent Trends in Presidential Ideology

DeBruyne, Nese F., Latin America and the Caribbean: Fact Sheet on Leaders and Elections, August 24, 2016. 3 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).


Blei, Daniela, “Is the Latin American Left Dead?” The New Republic, April 16, 2016. 6 pgs.


• Quiz # 2 (2/8)
Meeting # 10 (2/8): Issues in Latin American Politics: Democracy, Rights, and Development

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

2. Political Rights I: Electoral Democracy

Meetings # 11 & 12 (2/13, 2/15): Electing Representatives


• Quiz # 3 (2/22)

Meeting # 13 (2/20). Presidents’ Day: No Class

Meetings # 14, 15, & 16 (2/22, 2/27, 3/1): 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.


Sullivan, Mark P. “Venezuela: Background and U.S. Relations,” November 2016. Read only the section on “Current Political and Economic Environment,” from page 17 up to the top of page 23 (up to, and including, the part on “Vatican Prompts Renewed Efforts at Dialogue”).
OAS, “Declaration of the Permanent Council About the Situation in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela,” CP/DEC. 63 (2076/16), June 1, 2016. 1 pgs.

• Quiz # 4 (3/6)

Meeting # 17 (3/6): An Overview of Electoral Democracy


-Research Paper (3/6): A brief description of your research topic is due.

Meeting # 18 (3/8). Mid-Term

*** Spring Recess: March 13-17 ***

3. Political Rights II: Political Inclusion

Meetings # 19 & 20 (3/20, 3/22): Questions of Gender, Ethnicity and Race


4. Civil Rights


• Quiz # 5 (4/3)
Meetings # 24, 25 & 26 (4/5, 4/10, 4/12): The Current Violence: Crime and Drugs


• Quiz # 6 (4/17)

Meetings # 27 (4/17): The Inter-American Human Rights System


5. Social Rights

Meeting # 28 (4/19): Revisiting Neoliberalism and the Problem of Inequality


Meeting # 29 (4/24): Poverty and Social Policy


6. Conclusions

Meeting # 30 (4/26): A Recapitulation

-Research Paper (4/26): Research paper is due (please send me an electronic version by email).

*** Final Exam: Wednesday, May 3, 4:30-6:30 p.m. (same classroom) ***
Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity http://equity.usc.edu/ or to the Department of Public Safety http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/ provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. The Office of Disability Services and Programs http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information http://emergency.usc.edu/ will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open from 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.