International Relations 466:
Contemporary Issues in Latin American Politics

Spring 2012

When: M & W 3:30-4:50 p.m.  Professor Gerardo Munck
Where: VKC 206              E-Mail: munck@usc.edu
Office Hours: W 1:00-2:00 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 and human rights; economic inequality and poverty; and the role of the United States in the region. 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 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 five quizzes, I will drop the lowest one and thus compute grades on the basis of your best four 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 19.

3. Readings
All the readings are accessible through the Blackboard, under “Course Content.” Some of the electronic files include other materials, which do not need to be read. The specific chapters and page numbers are clearly indicated below.
1. Introduction

Meeting 1 (1/9): Outline of Course and Requirements

2. Background, the Current Political Scenario, and the New Agenda of Democracy and Citizenship

Meetings 2 & 3 (1/11, 1/18): Transitions to Democracy and Neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s


Documentary: *El Salvador and the School of the Americas* (1994, 13 min.).

*** Martin Luther King’s Birthday: No class on Monday, January 16 ***


Documentary: *Commanding Heights: The Battle for the World Economy* (2002), Parts 2.5 and 6 (5 min.) and 2.7 (9 min.).

Meetings 4, 5, 6 & 7 (1/23, 1/25, 1/30, 2/1): Recent Electoral Trends and the Debate About the Lefts


Patricio Navia 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).


the Latin American Left (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press). Read only pp. 1-26.

Documentary: A part of South of the Border (2009, 78 min.).

-Quiz # 1 (2/1)

Meetings 8 & 9 (2/6, 2/8): What is Democracy? What is the State of Citizenship Rights?

OAS and UNDP, Our Democracy in Latin America (Washington, D.C. and New York: OAS and UNDP, 2011). Read only from page 12 (“Introduction) through page 84 (the end of Chapter 3).

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

3. Political Citizenship I: Electoral Democracy

Meetings 10 & 11 (2/13, 2/15): Electing Representatives


-Quiz # 2 (2/15)

*** Presidents’ Day: No class on Monday, February 20 ***

Meetings 12, 13 & 14 (2/22, 2/27, 2/29): 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).

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.


Report of the Secretary General concerning compliance with operative Paragraph 3 of resolution AG/RES. 2480 (XXXIX-O/09) “Promotion and Strengthening of Democracy: Follow-up to the Inter-American Democratic Charter” (Presented to the Permanent Council at its meeting held May 6, 2010). Read only pp. 20-25 (on “Honduras”).

-Quiz # 3 (2/29)

Meeting 15 (3/5). Mid-Term

*** In-Class Mid-Term Exam: March 5 ***

4. Political Citizenship II: Political Inclusion

Meetings 16 & 17 (3/7, 3/19): Questions of Gender, Ethnicity and Race


*** Spring Break: March 12-17 ***

- Research Topic (3/19): A brief description of your research topic is due
5. Civil Citizenship


Documentary: *The Judge and the General* (2008, 84 min.).


Documentary: *Parts of Mexico’s Drug War* (2010, 59 mins.).

Meetings 23 (4/9): The Inter-American Human Rights System


-Quiz # 4 (4/9)

6. Social Citizenship

Meetings 24 & 25 (4/11, 4/16): Revisiting Neoliberalism and the Problem of Inequality

Michael Reid. *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,” skip pp. 132-47 and resume reading with the section on “A balance sheet of the reforms.”


Evelyne Huber, “The New Left Versus Neoliberalism in Latin America,” pp. 67-82, in


Meeting 26 (4/18): Poverty and Social Policy


-Quiz # 5 (4/18)

7. Conclusions

Meetings 27 (4/23): The US and Latin America during the Bush and Obama Years


Meeting 28 (4/25): A Recapitulation

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