

Graduate Program in International Affairs

COURSE: Issues in Latin American Development

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DESCRIPTION :

Issues: We will immerse ourselves in “development” issues being debated in contemporary Latin America. How are we to understand the last three decades spanning right-wing coups and dictatorships, U.S. interventions, democratic resurgence, neo-liberalism, globalism, the new populism, the new resource nationalism, and etc.? As capitalist relations have alternately stagnated and expanded through booms and crises, in sync with specific political trends, what of this development trajectory is attributable to Latin-America’s objective, material-economic “nature” and what to its historical ideological-political “nurture”? What has indigenous origins/responsibility and what has foreign origins/responsibility?

How will glaring class, national/racial and gender inequalities be reduced, and the scientific-technical and productive capacity of societies raised to developed-world levels? Is this possible under purely capitalist free markets, under capitalism tempered by social-democratic controls, or is “21st century socialism” or another socialist direction necessary?

Methods: So as to attain some specificity with which to judge theories about “Latin American development,” we must first ground ourselves. This includes:

- Understanding the region’s (a) natural resources, especially petroleum, but also minerals and agriculture; (b) the political-economic organization of its societies, and (c) examining objective comparative data on social-economic development over time within the region and compared to other regions.
- Conducting, as a class, case studies of a subset of Latin American states: tentatively Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, México and Colombia. This encompasses their past few decades’ general economic and political history (policies, controversies, outcomes, etc.) and topics such as: energy and/or natural resource extraction sectors (especially oil), social movements (including revolutions as in Venezuela, and armed conflicts as in Columbia and México; barrios, workers, rural sector, etc.), medical care, corruption, infrastructure (water, electricity, services), crime and citizens’ security, education, political parties, military affairs, etc.

Next, with this concrete knowledge of events and conditions, we turn to an introductory critique of *regional* ideological-political trends and theories for sustainable and just social-economic development within a regime of democratic norms and broad participation.

Assigned work: Students will attain significant expertise in a particular Latin American state/society chosen in conjunction with the instructor, which they will analyze across the spectrum of issues discussed above. This will include following its recent and current affairs very closely, a term paper developed through a number of drafts, presentations and debates in class, a comprehensive mid-term and occasional

brief critiques of readings and/or debates. Careful reading of materials, attendance at all classes and active participation in discussions is necessary for success. There should be occasional regional-expert speakers (via video link or when visiting NYC).