Syllabus

UNDERSTANDING LATIN AMERICAN DEMOCRACIES

15 class hours

Professor: Daniel Haering (dhaering@ufm.edu)

Intriguing questions . . .

- Why do Latin American countries traditionally perform so poorly politically and socially?
- Is there a way to improve the region’s democratic political systems?
- Who’s to blame for rampant corruption? The state? The market?
- Are Latin American countries culturally doomed to conflict, violence, and instability, or is the future brighter than we think?
- Is drug legalization the way to reduce homicide rates?

Why take this course?

Latin America is one of the most vibrant and interesting regions in the world. Today, after years of violent conflict and political instability, and decades of being no more than “America’s backyard,” the region is facing much better odds. Its natural resources put the Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries at the center of tomorrow’s geopolitics. Increasingly, Brazil presents itself to the world as a democratic superpower, while Colombia and Peru follow suit with their astonishing growth rates. Democracy appears to be consolidating in some nations, the middle class is quietly rising like never before, life expectancy has been increasing consistently for years, and at long last illiteracy appears to be an endangered phenomenon.

But not everything is good news. The risks posed by populism and the effects of corruption are far from over. Venezuela, Ecuador, Argentina, and Bolivia are developing a completely different political and social model that will rival capitalist and democratic states. Central America and Mexico struggle against powerful transnational crime organizations and persistent poverty.
Which path will be followed? Will it be free, democratic, and stable societies or weak populist systems? Will we have effective markets or big-government paternalistic states?

To try to answer these formidable questions, we’ll use two fundamental learning techniques: the most rigorous tools we have in social science and the Socratic method.

Class methodology

1. Students will come to class having read the assigned material for each session.
2. Scheduled class sessions will be one hour and twenty minutes.
3. Class discussions will use the Socratic method, that is, students will be guided into investigating and discovering answers for themselves, come to class prepared to discuss the day’s lessons, and eventually draw their own conclusions.

Grading

One research paper: 40 points
Participation in class discussions: 40 points
Final take-home exam: 20 points
## Schedule

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<th>SESSION</th>
<th>READING</th>
<th>CLASS DISCUSSION</th>
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<td><strong>Session 4</strong></td>
<td><em>The Economist</em> “Societies on the move: Expanding the middle class requires better schools and reforms in public spending.” Available online: <a href="http://www.economist.com/node/16964039">http://www.economist.com/node/16964039</a></td>
<td>Industrialization, outsourcing, and the rise of the middle class. The death of castes? Peasants and citizens. Education and the political system, are we heading in the right direction? Rural-urban migration. Urban macrocephaly and its consequences.</td>
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| Session 10 | Socratic discussion  
1. *Liberty for Latin America*, pp. 162–192  

*Updated August 2013*