FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF GLOBAL & SOCIOCULTURAL STUDIES

Professor Ulrich Oslender

GEO 3471-U01: POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

SYLLABUS

[Please note, this syllabus is a draft schedule. Dates and content are always subject to change by University officials.]

Instructor: Professor Ulrich Oslender
Class meets: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30PM - 1:45PM
Classroom: Ziff Education Bldg 120
Office hours: Tue/Thur, 3:00PM - 4:00PM (or by appointment); SIPA 324
E-mail: uoslende@fiu.edu (please always put GEO 3471 in the “Subject” line when e-mailing me)
Course website: On Blackboard at: https://ecampus.fiu.edu/

Teaching Assistant: Oceane Roberts, ojaso001@fiu.edu

Course Description

The world of politics is an exciting and often seemingly unpredictable one. Who would have thought back in the summer of 1989 that a few months later the Berlin Wall would fall, and shortly after the Soviet Empire? I didn’t at the time. And I lived right in the midst of it, in what was then West Berlin. But, of course, I wasn’t a political geographer at the time either … I hope that the excitement of real life politics can be taken into this course and will rub off on students to make for an equally exciting semester.

Political geography is concerned with the uneven spatial distribution of power in the world. Political power is manifest geographically in the establishment of borders between states, for example, or in the control that powerful states exercise over less powerful ones. Traditionally, political geography has taken the state as primary unit of analysis; its internal organization and its interactions with other states. More recently, other political actors have become of interest to political geographers. These include social movements and non-governmental organizations, but also supranational organizations such as the World Bank. In sum, political geography intends to document and analyze the shifting power relations between all these different political actors in an ever more complex world. In this, it pays particular attention to the territorially-based exercise of power.
This course provides an overview of the field of political geography by introducing students to its key concepts and how these have shaped the development of this subdiscipline. Each week we will examine a different concept, such as the nation-state, territory, sovereignty, or hegemony. This will be discussed in relation to concrete case studies to illustrate these concepts at play. Students are expected to have read the assigned readings before coming to class. **IMPORTANT:** This is an upper level class and there will be a high reading load, for which you should be prepared. We will read a total of three books! Apart from the main text book (see below), you will read a second book (Eduardo Galeano’s *Open Veins of Latin America*), which will be the basis for the group project and presentation that make up 15% of your final grade (more on this below). In addition we will read a third book by Gustavo Esteva on Zapatismo in Mexico (discussed in week 15). There will also be plenty of additional readings distributed through Blackboard. Please check the reading content of this syllabus carefully. If you think this might be too ambitious for you, you may want to drop this class.

**Learning Objectives**

After successfully completing this course, you should:

1. *Have a broad overview of the field of political geography.* You will be able to identify key scholars, themes, and terms utilized by political geographers. Moreover, you will be able to appreciate the interdisciplinary nature of much work in political geography, as it is related to disciplines such as political science, sociology and anthropology.

2. *Be able to apply key concepts in political geography to understanding the political world around you.* The course will be full of case studies that illustrate political geographical processes at play in the real world. As a Latin Americanist, I will draw on much material from Latin America. Moreover, your group work on Eduardo Galeano’s book should ensure that you will get an even deeper understanding of the political geography of this world region.

3. *Have improved your teamwork, critical thinking, discussion and presentation skills.* The group work and presentation will provide you with the opportunity to develop a short research project in teamwork. This will help you to deepen your understanding of political geographical issues and to present these ideas in a friendly class-room setting.

4. *Have improved your writing skills.* Each one of you will write up the research findings of your group project in an essay of around 2,000 words. Moreover, emphasis in both exams is placed on essay writing, so your essay writing skills are expected to improve considerably during the course.

**Required Books**

The following required books are available at FIU’s bookstore. They are also available as new or used copies through on-line booksellers:


This will be the main source of information and analysis that this course draws on. Each week, readings from this book will be assigned and you will be expected to have read and studied those before you come to class. Exams will draw directly on the material covered in the textbook. I cannot stress enough how important it is for you to thoroughly read assigned chapters.

This book is a classic now in Latin American literature. It charts the systematic exploitation of Latin America’s resources and its people, first at the hands of the colonizing European powers and later by European and US business interests and multinational companies. You are expected to read this book during the course. It will serve as the base for your group work and presentation (more on this below). There are many editions of this book. It doesn’t really matter which one you get. The important thing is that you should be able to relate the conceptual issues discussed in class to the rich empirical case study material in Open Veins, when you develop your group project. We will discuss the details of this project in class.

Celebration of Zapatismo, 2008. By Gustavo Esteva, Ediciones Basta!

We will discuss this book in week 15 (social movements). You are strongly encouraged to read it well before then (book is currently out of print; pdf-file available on Blackboard).

Additional readings will be distributed through Blackboard. It is the student’s responsibility to make sure that he/she has access to Blackboard and knows how to use it.

Grading

There will be a total of 500 points available in this class, broken down as follows:

1. Attendance and Participation 10% 50 points
2. Group work and presentation 15% 75 points
3. Essay 15% 75 points
4. Mid-term Exam 30% 150 points
5. Final Exam 30% 150 points
TOTAL 100% 500 points

I use a standard grading scale. Final grade ranges are as follows (fractional grades are rounded to the nearest whole number):

A = 93%-100%  /  A- = 90%-92%  /  B+ = 87%-89%  /  B = 83%-86%  /  B- = 80%-82%
C+ = 77%-79%  /  C = 73%-76%  /  C- = 70%-72%  /  D+ = 67%-69%  /  D = 63%-66%
D- = 60%-62%  /  F = below 60%

Exams

There will be two exams during the semester. They will be a mixture of short answer and essay questions drawing from lectures, readings, and videos. I will explain details in class. Each exam accounts for 30% of the Final Grade.
Attendance and Participation

Attendance in class is necessary to achieve a passing grade. Students are responsible for all information, materials, and instructions disseminated during the class period. The lectures and readings will be complimentary but often quite different in content, and the exams will reflect this. The lecture schedule is organized around key concepts in political geography, and each week we will highlight a different concept and examine its empirical implications. A passing grade will be extremely difficult to obtain, if one chooses not to attend every lecture.

To monitor attendance and participation, we will award points in a number of ways: 1) through announced tasks – for example, I might ask you to prepare three relevant questions about the reading for discussion; 2) through unannounced tasks – such as a short quiz in class about the readings; 3) sometimes we will just take attendance. All of these will be quite easy to obtain points, if you attend class on a regular basis and prepare the relevant readings. Attendance and Participation accounts for 10% of the Final Grade.

Extra credit: Additional points may be acquired through attending and writing a short report on geography-relevant lectures (guest speakers on campus, for example). I don’t know when or how many of those opportunities will arise during this particular semester, but shall announce them in good time if they do. Up to a maximum of 10 points may be gained in this way for each extra credit.

Group Work and Presentation

At the beginning of the course you will form into small groups of 4 to 5 students. You will all read Eduardo Galeano’s book Open Veins of Latin America. This will be the empirical material that you will reinterpret through a conceptual lens of political geography. In other words, as a group you will decide which of the key concepts in political geography you want to apply to Galeano’s book. You will coordinate this choice with your TA, who will report back to me. In Week 4, all groups meet to advance this work. Students’ presentations will take place in Weeks 12, 13 and 14. You are encouraged to be creative in this. You could use a power-point presentation, include video clips, or record interviews. Make sure you are in frequent contact with your TA to discuss the progress of the project, or any problems you encounter. The collective nature of the project should encourage you all to put in as much effort as you can. If it becomes apparent that a particular group member does not contribute to the project in an acceptable manner, I will deduct points in this particular student’s record. I will explain the precise procedures of the group project in more detail on the first day of class. Group work and presentation account for 15% of the Final Grade.

Essay

Each one of you will submit a final report on the group work’s research findings of around 2,000 words. This is an individual task, where you have the opportunity to shine and bring your own analysis to the fore; in a group’s presentation that is not always possible. Remember to include a properly referenced Bibliography at the end of the essay. References should be ordered alphabetically by author and you should adhere to the following standard of referencing:
Essay writing forms an important part in this class. If you feel you have problems with your writing skills, please address these concerns asap with your TA and with me. You may also want to use the resources in the Center for Excellence in Writing, where you can get help from writing tutors or participate in workshops to help sharpen your skills as a writer: http://writingcenter.fiu.edu

The essay is due in Week 15 on April 17. It must be submitted both in physical form (typed and stapled) and electronically via Turnitin on the course’s Blackboard page. Similarity percentage on Turnitin needs to be below 10%. You will lose 5 points for every day the essay is late. The essay accounts for 15% of the Final Grade.

Make-Up Policy

Flat tires, conflicts with work or travel, or the neighbor’s dog barking all night are not valid reasons for missing an exam. Make-up exams are allowed for incapacitating illness, a death in the immediate family, official university travel, or jury duty. NO make up exams without: 1) a doctor’s note that a student was incapable of attending for medical reasons; 2) documentation of a death in the immediate family; 3) documentation from a university official; or 4) court documentation regarding jury duty.

Electronic Device Policy

Think of the class as take-off time with an airline. All electronic devices must be turned off and stowed for the duration. That includes laptops, cell phones, iPads, etc. The reason for this policy is simple: while electronic devices can be useful tools (such as for taking notes), they are almost always also being used by students to check Facebook, Twitter, or similar social media sites during class. This is a huge distraction, not just for the student concerned but also for everyone else around, including me. Therefore, I have adopted this very strict electronic device policy. It is for your and the class’s benefit. Please note that failure to comply with this policy may lead to the TA or myself taking away your electronic device for the remainder of the class. We will also deduct attendance points in case of non-compliance. Repeat offenders are subject to disciplinary actions.
Academic Misconduct, Cheating and Plagiarism

Academic misconduct is defined as the following intentional acts or omissions committed by any FIU undergraduate student:

**Cheating:** The unauthorized use of books, notes, aids, electronic sources; or unauthorized use of online exams, library materials or assistance from another person with respect to examinations, course assignments, field service reports, class recitations; or the unauthorized possession of examination papers (or on-line examination) or course materials, whether originally authorized or not. Any student helping another cheat may be found guilty of academic misconduct.

**Plagiarism:** The deliberate use and appropriation of another’s work without any indication of the source and the representation of such work as the student’s own. Any student who fails to give credit for ideas, expressions or materials taken from another source, including internet sources, is guilty of plagiarism. Any student helping another to plagiarize may be found guilty of academic misconduct.

Cheating and Plagiarism will not be tolerated and dealt with according to the proceedings outlined in the Student Handbook. Please familiarize yourselves with this policy. The minimum penalty for such offense is failure for that assignment, and you may be reported to the university for further disciplinary actions, which can include expulsion from the university.

A Reminder of FIU’s Student Code of Conduct

“Florida International University is a community dedicated to generating and imparting knowledge through excellent teaching and research, the rigorous and respectful exchange of ideas, and community service. All students should respect the right of others to have an equitable opportunity to learn and honestly to demonstrate the quality of their learning. Therefore, all students are expected to adhere to a standard of academic conduct, which demonstrates respect for themselves, their fellow students, and the educational mission of the University. All students are deemed by the University to understand that if they are found responsible for academic misconduct, they will be subject to the Academic Misconduct procedures and sanctions, as outlined in the Student Handbook.”

Important Dates

- Mid-term Exam Feb 18
- Spring Break: NO CLASS Mar 10-15
- Essay due April 17
- Final Exam Finals Week (Apr 21-26) Date & Time TBA
Lecture Topics and Readings

Please note: This is a draft and is subject to change. Assigned readings should be completed prior to the lectures for that week.

Week 1: Jan 7, 9
- Introduction to course. Approaching Political Geography
  Reading: Key Concepts, Introduction, pp.1-14

Week 2: Jan 14, 16
- Nation-State and Nationalism
  Reading: Key Concepts, Chapters 1 and 23

Week 3: Jan 21, 23
- Territory and Sovereignty
  Reading: Key Concepts, Chapters 6 and 2

Week 4: Jan 28, 30
- Territory and Sovereignty (continued)
- Jan 30: Groups meet to discuss group project in class

Week 5: Feb 4, 6
- Colonialism / Imperialism
  Reading: Key Concepts, Chapter 9
  Also: Excerpts from Said, Edward (1978), Orientalism

Week 6: Feb 11, 13
- Postcolonialism
  Reading: Key Concepts, Chapter 25
  Also: continue Excerpts from Said, Edward (1978), Orientalism

Week 7: Feb 18, 20
- MID-TERM EXAM: Tuesday, Feb 18
- Geopolitics and Critical Geopolitics
  Reading: Key Concepts, Chapter 7
Week 8: Feb 25, 27
  ● Hegemony
  Reading: Key Concepts, Chapter 5

Week 9: Mar 4, 6
  ● Political Economy and Neoliberalism
  Reading: Key Concepts, Chapters 10 and 13
  Watch: ‘David Harvey on the economic crisis’: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOP2V_np2c0

Week 10: Mar 11, 13
  NO CLASS: Spring Break!

Week 11: Mar 18, 20
  ● Conflict, War and Terrorism
  Reading: Key Concepts, Chapters 19 and 21

Week 12: Mar 25, 27
  ● Group Presentations
  Reading: none assigned

Week 13: Apr 1, 3
  ● Group Presentations
  Reading: none assigned

Week 14: Apr 8, 10
  ● Group Presentations
  Reading: none assigned

Week 15: Apr 15, 17
  ● Social Movements and Resistance
  Esteva, Gustavo (2008), Celebration of Zapatismo, Ediciones Basta!

Week 16: Apr 22, 24   FINALS WEEK
  ● FINAL EXAM, Tuesday, 22: 12:00PM - 2:00PM