

Professor Ulrich Oslender

**GEO 4477-U01: CRITICAL GEOPOLITICS**

*(cross-listed with SYO 4300-U01 Political Sociology)*

**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, 09:30AM - 10:45AM  
**Classroom:** Charles E. Perry (PC) 331  
**Office hours:** Thursday, 2:00PM - 4:00PM (or by appointment); SIPA 324  
**E-mail:** [uoslende@fiu.edu](mailto:uoslende@fiu.edu) (please always put GEO 4477 in the “Subject” line when e-mailing me)  
**Course website:** On Blackboard at: <https://ecampus.fiu.edu/>  
**Teaching Assistant:** tba

**Course Description**

Welcome to the exciting world of *Critical Geopolitics*! Originally coined by the Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén in 1899 to express the territorial basis of the modern state, the concept of ‘geopolitics’ has been on a rollercoaster of emotions, betrayal and reinvention ever since. Associated with Hitler’s policies of spatial expansionism in Nazi Germany, geopolitics was condemned by some as ‘an intellectual poison’ and ‘pseudo science’ in the 1950s, only to be rehabilitated as a term in the Cold War context of the 1970s by security intellectuals and foreign policy advisors in the US, such as Henry Kissinger. In Latin America, geopolitics has been linked to military regimes in Brazil, Argentina and Chile (Chile’s dictator Augusto Pinochet, e.g., was a Professor of Geopolitics at the National Military Academy in Chile; he published a book titled *Geopolítica* in 1974).

Geopolitics then has traditionally been used to refer to the study of the geographical representations, rhetoric and practices that underpin world politics. Classically associated with issues related to state territoriality, sovereignty, international boundary disputes, and warfare, the term now includes such phenomena as global security and global terror. Importantly, geopolitics has historically been tied to the way dominant and powerful sovereign nation-states represent the world spatially with a view to their foreign policy agenda.

This class will focus on *critical geopolitics*, a school of thought that emerged in the 1980s that challenges hegemonic ways of seeing and representing such as in foreign policy discourse. Critical geopolitics takes apart the normalized categories and narratives of geopolitics. It questions assumptions in a taken-for-granted world and often aims at providing an alternative perspective on seeing and representing the world. The course provides an overview of the field of critical geopolitics and encourages students to think critically about all kinds of geopolitical claims made in today's world, as we encounter them on a day-by-day basis, be it in news media, party political broadcasts, political documentaries, or even in movies.

**IMPORTANT:** This is an upper level class intended for College Juniors and Seniors. If you are a Freshman or Sophomore you may find this class too difficult. There will be a high reading load, for which you should be prepared. Students are expected to have read assigned readings *before* coming to class. We will read three books, plus plenty of additional journal articles and book chapters. Please check the reading content of this syllabus very carefully. If you think this might be too ambitious for you, you may want to drop this class. In any case, come and talk to me if you have concerns.

This class is also different from what you may usually expect from an undergraduate class. At the 4000-level, it will be closer to a graduate seminar experience. This means that while I will be giving lectures in the first few weeks introducing students to the study of *critical geopolitics*, increasingly students will take charge in the classroom by giving short presentations on the day's readings at the beginning of class. This will happen in small groups of two or three, depending on class enrolment. You could prepare a brief power-point presentation, or talk freely to the class about the readings to be discussed that particular week. This will be followed by class discussion in which I expect everyone to participate. This means that you need to be well prepared when coming to class. As we progress through class you will see that it is not only beneficial to practice short in-class presentations, it will also be tremendous fun as you get to know each other this way.

### **Learning Objectives**

After successfully completing this course, you should:

1. *Have a broad overview of the field of critical geopolitics.* You will be able to identify key scholars, themes, and terms utilized in this field. Moreover, you will be able to appreciate the interdisciplinary nature of much work in critical geopolitics, as it is related to disciplines such as political science, international relations, sociology, and anthropology.
2. *Be able to apply critical geopolitical thinking to understanding the world around you.* The course will be full of case studies that illustrate geopolitical processes at play in the real world. As a Latin Americanist, I will draw on much material from Latin America, which is central for example in our main text book *Geopolitics and the Post-colonial* by David Slater (see below).
3. *Have improved your teamwork, critical thinking, discussion and presentation skills.* The short in-class presentations and a larger group work and presentation will provide you with the opportunity to deepen your understanding of complex geopolitical issues and to present these ideas in a friendly class-room setting. Believe me, these presentations are fun; most students love them!

4. *Have improved your writing skills.* Each one of you will write up the research findings of your group project in a Final Paper of around 2,000 words. Moreover, there will be one exam at mid-term, with emphasis placed on essay writing, so your essay writing skills are expected to improve considerably during the course.

### **Required Books**

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

Dodds, Klaus (2007), *Geopolitics: a very short introduction*, Oxford University Press

Slater, David (2004), *Geopolitics and the Post-colonial: Rethinking North-South relations*, Blackwell,

These will be the main sources of information and analysis that this course draws on.

Additionally, you have a choice of six books to choose one as part of your group project, in which you relate the conceptual issues discussed in class to the rich material presented in the book. We will discuss the details of this project in class.

**IMPORTANT:** If you are repeating this class, you must choose a different book from the one you presented on the last time you took this class.

The six books to choose from are:

- Anonymous (2006), *A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in the Conquered City: a Diary*, Picador  
(see also the movie "A Woman in Berlin" (Dir. M. Färberböck; 2008) NVS 2090 (FIU Library code))
- Chomsky, Noam (2003), *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance*, Penguin
- Demick, Barbara (2012), *Logavina Street: life and death in a Sarajevo neighborhood*, Spiegel & Grau  
(see also the Guardian newspaper article "Logavina Street": [click here](#))
- Esteva, Gustavo (2008), *Celebration of Zapatismo*, Ediciones Basta!
- Fanon, Frantz (2001) [1961], *The Wretched of the Earth*, Penguin
- Harvey, David (2003), *The new imperialism*, Oxford University Press

### **Using Blackboard**

Our course will be on Blackboard at: <https://ecampus.fiu.edu/>. Make sure you know how to log in to the site. Additional readings will be posted here together with announcements. It is your responsibility to ensure that you have access to the site and know how to use it. If you experience problems with Blackboard, phone 305.348-3630, or contact ETS in the Green Library for support (GL 152a).

## **Grading**

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

1. Attendance and Participation	20%	100 points
2. Group work and presentation	20%	100 points
3. Exam	30%	150 points
4. <u>Final Paper</u>	30%	150 points
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>500 points</b>

I use the following grading scale (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% / D = 60%-72% / F = below 60%

## **Exam**

There will be one mid-term exam (one hour long). It will be a mixture of short answer and essay questions drawing from lectures, readings, and videos. I will explain details in class. ***The 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. If you miss a class, make sure you get class notes from classmates. Better still, discuss the missed class with classmates or your group members. I do not post my lectures online.

To monitor attendance and participation, I award points in a number of ways: 1) through announced tasks – for example, I might ask you to prepare relevant questions about the reading for discussion; 2) through unannounced tasks – such as a short quiz in class about the readings; 3) through your scheduled short in-class presentation; students can choose to present more than once and thus improve their points tally. ***Attendance and Participation accounts for 20% of the Final Grade.***

Extra credit: Additional points may be acquired through attending and writing a short report on geopolitics-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 2 to 3 students. As a group you will choose to read one of the six books mentioned above under Required Books, which will be the basis for your group work. The task is to re-interpret and present on the book in class through a conceptual lens of *critical geopolitics*. In other words, you will use geopolitical concepts learnt about in class to explain the content and the arguments of the book chosen. I will help you coordinate this choice and will be able to give you ideas on how to approach this project. I want you not only to learn but also to have fun with it! Here are some useful tips on how to conduct group work successfully: [Link 1](#).

Students' presentations will take place in Weeks 11 to 13. You are encouraged to be creative in your in-class presentations. You could use power-point, include video clips, or record interviews. 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 20% of the Final Grade.***

## **Final Paper**

Each one of you will write a final paper of around 2,000 words on the group work's research findings. This is an individual task, where you have the opportunity to shine and bring your own analysis to the fore; in a short group presentation that is not always possible. Remember to include a properly referenced Bibliography at the end of the paper. References should be ordered alphabetically by author and you should adhere to the following standard of referencing:

### **Book**

Agnew, John (2002), *Making political geography*, London: Hodder Education

Gregory, Derek & Allan Pred (eds), *Violent geographies: fear, terror, and political violence*, New York: Routledge

### **Article in Journal**

Tilly, Charles (2003), "Contention over space and place", *Mobilization* 8(2), pp. 221-226

### **Book chapter**

Gallaher, Carolyn (2009), "Terrorism", in C. Gallaher, C. Dahlman, M. Gilmartin, A. Mountz & P. Shirlow, *Key concepts in Political Geography*, London: Sage, pp.247-259

The Final Paper is due in Week 14 on April 12 (11PM). It must be submitted 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 paper is late. ***The Final Paper accounts for 20% of the Final Grade.***

**IMPORTANT:** *Essay writing* forms an important part in this class. I expect you to be able to write in an articulate manner and present a coherent argument. You also need good command of the English language. If you feel you have problems with your writing skills, please address these concerns asap with me. You may also want to use the resources in the Center for Excellence in Writing (located in the Green Library), where you can get help from writing tutors and participate in workshops to help sharpen your skills as a writer: <http://writingcenter.fiu.edu>

### **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 reasons for this policy are quite simple: First, while electronic devices can be useful tools, 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. Second, I always recommend taking notes in handwritten form, a much more efficient way of learning and memorizing lecture notes. Many scientists agree that handwriting is beneficial to the overall learning process. Read this [NYT article](#), e.g.

As you will agree, I have adopted this strict electronic device policy for your and the class's benefit.

**Please note:** If you are found to ignore this electronic device policy, you will get reprimanded and are subject to being removed from class. I may take away your electronic device for the remainder of the class and will deduct attendance points. Repeat offenders are subject to University disciplinary actions. By taking this class you express your consent to these rules.

### **Academic Misconduct, Cheating and Plagiarism**

Academic misconduct is defined as the following intentional acts or omissions:

**Cheating:** The unauthorized use of books, notes, aids, electronic sources; or unauthorized use of on-line 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 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.

**Penalties:** 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 in this class is zero points for that particular assignment plus one full grade deduction in your final grade (i.e., if you were otherwise to receive a B in class, you will get a C instead, etc.). In addition I report all students guilty of plagiarism to Academic Affairs for further disciplinary actions, which, in case of repeat offenders, may lead to 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**

- Exam Feb 14
- Final Paper due Apr 12 (11PM)

### **Class Schedule and Readings**

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

#### **Week 1: Jan 10, 12**

- Introduction to course. Approaching Critical Geopolitics

#### **Reading:**

- ⇒ Flint, Colin (2011), “Prologue”, in C. Flint, *Introduction to geopolitics* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed), New York: Routledge, pp.1-15 (available on Blackboard)
- ⇒ Dodds, Klaus (2007), “It’s smart to be geopolitical!”, Chapter 1 in: K. Dodds, *Geopolitics: a very short introduction*, Oxford University Press, pp.1-21

#### **Week 2: Jan 17, 19**

- Geopolitics: a brief history

#### **Reading:**

- ⇒ Dodds, Klaus (2007), “An intellectual poison?”, Chapter 2 in: K. Dodds, *Geopolitics: a very short introduction*, Oxford University Press, pp.22-51

### Week 3: Jan 24, 26

- French Geopolitics

#### Reading:

- ⇒ Hepple, Leslie (2000), “*Géopolitiques de gauche: Yves Lacoste, Hérodote and French radical geopolitics*”, in K. Dodds & D. Atkinson (eds), *Geopolitical traditions: a century of geopolitical thought*, London: Routledge, pp.268-301 (available on Blackboard)
- ⇒ Lacoste, Yves (1973), “An illustration of geographical warfare: bombing the dikes on the Red River, North Vietnam”, in H. Bauder & S. Engel-di Mauro (Eds), *Critical Geographies: A Collection of Readings*, Praxis (e)Press, pp.620-636 [click [here](#)]

### Week 4: Jan 31, Feb 2

- Popular Geopolitics

#### Reading:

- ⇒ Dodds, Klaus (2007), “Maps and geopolitics”, Chapter 5 in: K. Dodds, *Geopolitics: a very short introduction*, Oxford University Press, pp.115-144
- ⇒ Dodds, Klaus (2007), “Popular Geopolitics”, Chapter 6 in: K. Dodds, *Geopolitics: a very short introduction*, Oxford University Press, pp.145-172
- ⇒ Watch: “Edward Said on Orientalism”: click [here](#)

### Week 5: Feb 7, 9

- Feminist Geopolitics and Anti-geopolitics

#### Reading:

- ⇒ Dowler, L. & J. Sharp (2001), “A feminist geopolitics?”, *Space & Polity* 5(3), pp.165-176
- ⇒ Hyndman, J. (2003), “Beyond either/or: a feminist analysis of September 11th”, *ACME. An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 2(1), pp.1-13 [click [here](#)]
- ⇒ Ó Tuathail, Gearóid (1996), “An anti-geopolitical eye: Maggie O’Kane in Bosnia, 1992-93”, *Gender, Place and Culture* 3(2), pp.171-185 (available on Blackboard)
- ⇒ Oslender, U. (2009), “Anti-geopolitics”, in R. Kitchin & N. Thrift (eds), *International Encyclopaedia of Human Geography*, vol. 1, Oxford: Elsevier, pp.152-158 (on Blackboard)

### Week 6: Feb 14, 16

- **EXAM: Tuesday, Feb 14**
- Thursday, Feb 16: Geopolitics and the Post-colonial

#### Reading:

- ⇒ Slater, D. (2004), “For a Post-colonial Geopolitics” (Chapter 1), pp.3-29

### Week 7: Feb 21, 23

- Geopolitics and the Post-colonial

#### Reading:

- ⇒ Slater, D. (2004), Part III: “Archipelagos of Critical Thinking”, pp.115-165

### Week 8: Feb 28, Mar 2

- Geopolitics and the Post-colonial

#### Reading:

- ⇒ Slater, D. (2004), Part IV: “Geopolitics in a Globalizing World”, pp.167-222

**Week 9: Mar 7, 9**

- Geopolitics and the Post-colonial

Reading:

⇒ Slater, D. (2004), “Conclusions: Beyond the Imperiality of Knowledge”, pp.223-233

**Week 10: Mar 14, 16**

- NO CLASS: Spring Break!

**Week 11: Mar 21, 23**

- Group Presentations

Reading: none assigned

**Week 12: Mar 28, 30**

- Group Presentations

Reading: none assigned

**Week 13: Apr 4, 6**

- Group Presentations

Reading: none assigned

**Week 14: Apr 11, 13**

- Wrap-up of class

Reading: none assigned

***Apr 12 (11PM): Final Paper due!***

**Week 15: Apr 18, 20**

- NO CLASS: Professor Oslender at IGU Conference, La Paz, Bolivia

**Week 16: Apr 25, 27**

**FINALS WEEK**