

Professor Ulrich Oslender

**GEO 3471-U01: POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY**

[cross-listed with SYA 4011-U01: Social Theory]

**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, 2:00PM - 3:15PM  
**Classroom:** Ziff Education Bldg 120  
**Office hours:** Thursdays, 4:00PM-6:00PM (or by appointment); SIPA 324  
**E-mail:** [uoslende@fiu.edu](mailto:uoslende@fiu.edu) (please always put GEO 3471 or SYA 4011 in the “Subject” line when e-mailing me)  
**Course website:** On Canvas at: <https://canvas.fiu.edu/>

**Course Description**

The world of politics is an exciting and often 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 ... 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, globalized 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 sub-discipline. 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 materials *before* coming to 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, international relations, 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, the student groups that choose to work on Eduardo Galeano's book 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 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. Moreover, I have included links below to online versions of the book through the FIU Online Library, which could be a useful resource, particularly at the beginning of the class, as you may still wait for your books to arrive in the mail. However, I strongly recommend you get a physical copy of the books, which allows you to work in greater depth with the text at hand:

- 1) *Key Concepts in Political Geography*, 2009. By Carolyn Gallaher, Carl T. Dahlmann, Mary Gilmartin & Alison Mountz. Thousand Oaks: Sage. ISBN: 978-1-4129-4672-8.  
Available via [FIU Online Library](#)

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

2) EITHER:

*Open Veins of Latin America*, 2009 (1973). By Eduardo Galeano. Monthly Review Press.  
Available via [FIU Online Library](#)

This book is a classic 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 U.S. business interests and multinational companies. For many students in the past this has been an eye-opening read.

OR:

*Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, 1995. Abacus.  
Also available via [FIU Online Library](#)

This book is Nelson Mandela's autobiography, in which he narrates in a personal and captivating style his time as a freedom fighter in South Africa against the apartheid regime. Anyone interested in the history of colonial oppression in South Africa and the long struggle for racial equality by the African National Congress (ANC) will find this to be a fascinating read by arguably one of the most revered political figures in Africa and indeed the world. Here is a link to an [audio version](#) of parts of the book, read by the actor Danny Glover (and introduced by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan). For additional info on the struggle of the ANC, you may wish to watch the documentary [Children of the Light](#) on the recently deceased (2021) Nobel Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu, considered one of the fathers of modern day South Africa.

You are expected to read either Galeano or Mandela during the course. The respective book will serve as the base for your group work and presentation, in which you relate the conceptual issues discussed in class to the rich empirical case study material in *Open Veins*, or *Long Walk to Freedom*. 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.

### **Using Canvas**

Our course is on Canvas at: <https://canvas.fiu.edu/>. Additional readings are posted there, 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 Canvas, contact their support team at 305.348-3630, or <https://canvas.fiu.edu/support/>.

## 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. Final Essay	15%	75 points
4. Exam 1	30%	150 points
5. Exam 2	30%	150 points
TOTAL	100%	500 points

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%

## Exams

There will be two exams during the semester; each one hour long. 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 difficult to obtain, if one chooses not to attend lectures.

To monitor attendance and participation, I award points in a number of ways: through announced tasks – for example, I might ask you to summarize the principal ideas of the reading under discussion; or through unannounced tasks – such as a short quiz during class time about the readings. ***Attendance and Participation accounts for 10% of the Final Grade.***

## Group Work and Presentation

At the beginning of the course you will form into small groups of 4 to 5 students. You will choose to either read Eduardo Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America*, or Nelson Mandela's autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*. You will then re-interpret the respective book 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 or Mandela's book. Here are some useful tips on how to conduct group work successfully: [Link 1](#).

Students' presentations will take place in Weeks 12 to 14. 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 student's record. To assist in this purpose, you will all be asked to assess each other's performance at the end of the project. 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.**

### **Final Essay**

Each one of you will submit a final essay discussing 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:

#### **Book**

Agnew, John (2002), *Making political geography*, London: Hodder Education  
Gregory, D. & A. Pred (eds), *Violent geographies*, 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

**IMPORTANT: *Essay writing*** forms an important part in this class and will be tested not only in the final essay but also in both exams. 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 to help sharpen your skills as a writer: <http://writingcenter.fiu.edu>

The essay is due in Week 15 on April 16. It must be submitted electronically via Turnitin on the course's Canvas 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**

Make-up exams are only allowed for the following reasons: incapacitating illness; a death in the immediate family; official university travel; jury duty. NO make up exams without: 1) doctor's note that student was incapable of attending for medical reasons; 2) documentation of a death in the immediate family; 3) documentation from university official; 4) court documentation on jury duty.

## **Electronic Device Policy**

**IMPORTANT:** 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' benefit.

**Please note:** If you choose to ignore this electronic device policy, your electronic device may be taken away from you for the remainder of the class, and attendance points may get deducted. 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, amongst others, as the following intentional acts or omissions:

**Cheating:** The unauthorized use of any materials, information, study aids or assistance from another person on any academic assignment or exercise. Assisting another student in the unauthorized use of any materials, information, study aids. Having a substitute complete any academic assignment or completing an academic assignment for someone else, either paid or unpaid.

**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.

**Multiple Submission:** Submitting the same or substantially the same academic work (including oral presentations) for credit more than once.

**Penalties:** Academic Misconduct will not be tolerated and dealt with according to the proceedings outlined in the Student Conduct and Honor Code. Please familiarize yourselves with this policy. Any student suspected of Academic Misconduct will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity (SCAI). The suggested minimum penalty for Academic Misconduct in this class shall be zero points for the assignment in which misconduct occurred, plus one full grade deduction in the student's final grade (i.e., if you were to receive a B in class, you would get a C instead, etc.).

**Important Notice on Use of Generative AI Tools in Submissions:** After careful consideration and in alignment with our commitment to maintaining the highest standards of academic honesty, I must inform you that the use of generative AI tools, including but not limited to text-generating platforms such as ChatGPT, is strictly prohibited when completing and submitting your assignments. While acknowledging the rapid advancements in technology and the potential benefits they may offer, academic success is best achieved through your individual efforts, critical thinking, and creativity.

Utilizing generative AI tools undermines the learning process, diminishes the value of your education, and compromises the integrity of your work.

To help you further gain awareness of these matters, you are required to include in your submissions the following statement:

“I hereby confirm that I have not made use of generative AI tools in the preparation of my work I am submitting here.”

There is an exception to this rule: Should you use AI tools that help improve your grammar and general writing skills, such as Grammarly or DeepL, then please acknowledge that in the following statement:

“I hereby declare that I have made use of the following AI tools in the preparation of my work I am submitting here: [Name of AI tool]. This tool was exclusively used to improve my grammar/writing skills. All work submitted here is mine.”

Please note that failure to correctly declare your use of generative AI tools will lead to a charge of academic misconduct (see above).

I believe in your abilities and am confident that your dedication to learning and personal growth will yield the best possible outcomes. If you have any questions or concerns about this policy, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation in upholding the principles of academic integrity.

### **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 #1 Feb 20
- Essay due Apr 16
- Exam #2 Apr 18

## **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 9, 11**

- Introduction to course. Approaching Political Geography

Reading: *Key Concepts*, Introduction, pp.1-14

### **Week 2: Jan 16, 18**

- “Nation-State” and “Nationalism”

Reading: *Key Concepts*, Chapters 1 and 23; PLUS:

⇒ article: “Logavina Street: Life And Death In A Sarajevo Neighborhood”: [click here](#)

### **Week 3: Jan 23, 25**

- “Territory” and “Sovereignty”

Reading: *Key Concepts*, Chapters 6 and 2

### **Week 4: Jan 30, Feb 1**

- “Territory” and “Sovereignty” (continued)

Reading: *Key Concepts*, Chapters 6 and 2; PLUS:

⇒ article: Agnew, J. (2005), “Sovereignty regimes: territoriality and state authority in contemporary world politics”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95(2):437-461 (available on Canvas)

### **Week 5: Feb 6, 8**

- “Colonialism / Imperialism”

Reading: *Key Concepts*, Chapter 9; PLUS:

⇒ Excerpts from Said, Edward (1978), *Orientalism*, pp.1-28 (available on Canvas)

Watch: “Battle of Algiers” (movie about national liberation struggle in Algeria)

- <https://fiu.kanopy.com/product/battle-algiers-0>

### **Week 6: Feb 13, 15**

- “Postcolonialism”

Reading: *Key Concepts*, Chapter 25; PLUS:

⇒ Excerpts from Said, Edward (1978), *Orientalism*, pp.49-73 (available on Canvas)

Watch: “Said on Orientalism”: click [here](#) or [here](#)

### **Week 7: Feb 20, 22**

- **EXAM #1: Tuesday, Feb 20**

- “Postcolonialism” (continued)

Reading: *Key Concepts*, Chapter 25; PLUS:

⇒ finish Excerpts from Said, Edward (1978), *Orientalism*, pp.49-73 (available on Canvas)

### **Week 8: Feb 27, 29**

- **NO CLASS:** Spring Break!

### Week 9: Mar 5, 7

- “Geopolitics”

Reading: *Key Concepts*, Chapter 7; PLUS:

- ⇒ Flint, C. (2011), “Prologue”, in *Introduction to geopolitics* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed), Routledge, pp.1-15
- ⇒ On Karl Haushofer: “The Demon of Geopolitics: How Karl Haushofer ‘Educated’ Hitler and Hess” [click [here](#)]
- ⇒ Lacoste, Y. (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 10: Mar 12, 14

- “Critical Geopolitics”

Reading:

- ⇒ 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](#)]
- ⇒ Dowler, L. & J. Sharp (2001), “A feminist geopolitics?”, *Space & Polity* 5(3), pp.165-176
- ⇒ Oslender, U. (2009), “Anti-geopolitics”, in R. Kitchin & N. Thrift (eds), *International Encyclopaedia of Human Geography*, Elsevier, pp.152-158

Watch: Edward Said’s lecture “The Myth of the ‘Clash of Civilizations’”: [click [here](#)]

### Week 11: Mar 19, 21

- “Hegemony”

Reading: *Key Concepts*, Chapter 5; PLUS:

- ⇒ Article in *The Nation* on the new Spanish political party “Podemos”: [click [here](#)]

Watch: clip on Gramsci and Hegemony: [click [here](#)]

### Week 12: Mar 26, 28

- Group Presentations

Reading: none assigned

### Week 13: Apr 2, 4

- Group Presentations

Reading: none assigned

### Week 14: Apr 9, 11

- Group Presentations

Reading: none assigned

### Week 15: Apr 16, 18

- Class wrap-up
- **Tuesday, Apr 16: Final Essay due!**
- **EXAM #2: Thursday, Apr 18**

### Week 16: Apr 23, 25

### FINALS WEEK