Instructor: Professor Ulrich Oslender  
Class meets: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 09:30-10:45am  
Classroom: Charles Perry Bldg 426  
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 3:00-4:00pm and Thursdays, 12.00-13.00pm; or by appointment  
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Teaching Assistant: Kimiko Tanita: kimikoharu@gmail.com

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, neoliberalism, 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. This is an upper level class and there will be a high reading load, for which you should be prepared. Apart from the main text book (see below), there will be plenty of additional readings distributed in class. In addition, 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 20% of your final grade (more on this below). 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 now.

**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 1,500 words. Moreover, emphasis in the final exam 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. The final exam 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.

Additional readings will be distributed in class and through Moodle. It is the student’s responsibility to make sure that he/she has access to Moodle. Your TA will be able to help you with that, should you encounter problems.

**Grading**

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

1. Attendance and Participation  
   15%  
   75 points
2. Group work and presentation  
   20%  
   100 points
3. Essay  
   15%  
   75 points
4. Final Exam  
   50%  
   250 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):

\[ A = 93\%-100\% \]
\[ A- = 90\%-92\% \]
\[ B+ = 87\%-89\% \]
\[ B = 83\%-86\% \]
\[ B- = 80\%-82\% \]
\[ C+ = 77\%-79\% \]
\[ C = 73\%-76\% \]
\[ C- = 70\%-72\% \]
\[ D+ = 67\%-69\% \]
\[ D = 63\%-66\% \]
\[ D- = 60\%-62\% \]
\[ F = below 60\% \]
\[ F0 = never attended class \]
Final Exam

There will be a final comprehensive exam at the end of the semester, i.e. it will cover the entire course. It will be a mixture of short answer and essay questions drawing from lectures, readings, and videos. I will explain details in class. The Final Exam accounts for 50% 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 exam 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 guarantee 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 simple 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 15% 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, record interviews, or even act out a scenario. Make sure you are in frequent contact with your TA to discuss the progress of the project, or any problems you may 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 20% of the Final Grade.
Essay

Each one of you will submit a final report on the group work’s research findings of around 1,500 words. This is an individual task, where you have the opportunity to shine and bring your own analysis to the fore; maybe in the group’s presentation that was 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
Gregory, Derek & Allan Pred (eds), *Violent geographies: fear, terror, and political violence*, New York: Routledge
Massey, Doreen (2005), *For space*, London: Sage

Article in Journal

Book chapter

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/?page=1](http://writingcenter.fiu.edu/?page=1)

The essay is due in Week 15 on April 17 and must be submitted both in physical form (typed and stapled) and electronically via turnitin.com. You will lose 5 points for every day it 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 note from a doctor 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) documentation from the court regarding jury duty.
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 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 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.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Spring Break: NO CLASS</td>
<td>Mar 12-17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essay due</td>
<td>April 17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>Final Week (April 23-27) Date &amp; Time TBA</td>
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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 10, 12
- Introduction to course. Approaching Political Geography
  
  **Reading:** Key Concepts, Introduction, pp.1-14
  

Week 2: Jan 17, 19
- Nation-State and Nationalism
  
  **Reading:** Key Concepts, Chapters 1 and 23

Week 3: Jan 24, 26
- Territory and Sovereignty
  
  **Reading:** Key Concepts, Chapters 6 and 2

Week 4: Jan 31, Feb 2
- Jan 31: Territory and Sovereignty (continued)
  
  
  - **Feb 2:** Groups meet to discuss group project in class

Week 5: Feb 7, 9
- Colonialism / Imperialism
  
  **Reading:** Key Concepts, Chapter 9

Week 6: Feb 14, 16
- Postcolonialism
  
  **Reading:** Key Concepts, Chapter 25
  
  Also: Excerpt from Said, Edward (1978), Orientalism (to be distributed in class)

Week 7: Feb 21, 23
- Geopolitics and Critical Geopolitics
  
  **Reading:** Key Concepts, Chapter 7
  

Week 8: Feb 28, Mar 1
- Hegemony
  
  **Reading:** Key Concepts, Chapter 5
  
  - Feb 28: Professor Oslender away at AAG Conference, New York
Week 9: Mar 6, 8
- Political Economy and Neoliberalism
  
  Reading: *Key Concepts*, Chapters 10 and 13
  
  

Week 10: Mar 13, 15
- NO CLASS: Spring Break

Week 11: Mar 20, 22
- Conflict, War and Terrorism
  
  Reading: *Key Concepts*, Chapters 19 and 21
  
  

Week 12: Mar 27, 29
- Group Presentations
  
  Reading: none assigned
  
  Mar 29: Professor Oslender away at SECOLAS Conference, UF Gainesville

Week 13: Apr 3, 5
- Group Presentations
  
  Reading: none assigned

Week 14: Apr 10, 12
- Group Presentations
  
  Reading: none assigned

Week 15: Apr 17, 19
- Social Movements and Resistance
  
  

Week 16: Apr 24, 26  FINALS WEEK
- EXAM II, Date and Time TBA