

LATIN AMERICAN POLITICS

Dr. Mark Setzler, High Point University

Spring 2025 Syllabus

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Instructor contact information:

Phone: 336/841-9018 (office)

Email: msetzler@highpoint.edu

Course Website: <https://marksetzler.org/PSC1010/>
(password when needed: icecream)

Seminar Meetings:

TTR: 11:40 - 1:20, Couch Hall, Room 128

Office Hours:

This semester, the political science faculty are officed in cubicles located in the Food Lion strip mall across the street from HPU's Lexington Ave. campus entrance, making meetings there undesirable and inconvenient. Consequently, I plan to hold most face-to-face meetings with students on the first floor of Smith Library or in Phillips Hall's lobby (depending on space availability and noise level) at these times:

Mon. & Wed.: 12:00 – 1:30

Tues. & Thurs.: 1:30 – 2:00

If you would like to meet outside of class, please let me know a little in advance so I can avoid scheduling overlapping meetings and to confirm a meeting location; if I don't hear from you in advance, you may need to meet in my off-campus "office" in the strip mall.

If you are unavailable during the listed meeting times, we can schedule virtual or in-person meetings at another time as long as you give me sufficient notice.

UNIVERSITY CATALOG DESCRIPTION:

This seminar compares the sociopolitical histories, governance systems, and policy priorities of Latin American societies. Through in-depth case country studies, including a close look at regional powers Brazil and Mexico, students will investigate issues of considerable relevance throughout Latin America and beyond. Such questions include: why is poverty so widespread despite the region's rich natural resources; why have military rule, populism, and revolution found such widespread public support; how have US security and economic preferences impacted regional politics, and what can be done to strengthen the rule of law and democracy?

COURSE OVERVIEW, APPROACH TO INSTRUCTION, AND EXPECTATIONS:

This course examines the political actors, institutions, and processes that most influence political life in Latin America. It starts by providing an overview of the major political, social, and economic actors that have shaped the region's political and economic development since the arrival of Europeans. We then will shift our focus to the quality of democratic governance in the region, with a particular emphasis on the political systems of Brazil and Mexico. We will examine the institutions and processes that have the greatest impact on the long-term prospects of democracy in Latin America, including the roles played by political parties, electoral systems, and legislatures, as well as non-state actors such as social movements, drug networks, and guerillas. We will also consider what type of political systems are most effective in stabilizing democracies and explore ways to strengthen the relationship between fragile democratic

governments and their often-disenchanted populations. In the final unit of the class, we will examine how political choices influence economic development and social equity in the region. We will survey several countries that have been presented as potential models of development for the region, particularly Cuba, Venezuela, and Chile. We will consider whether citizens will continue to support democracies if their political leaders fail to promote prosperity and equity.

This class is intended primarily for upper-level political science, international relations, and Latin American studies students who have a strong interest in the subject and are willing to put in their best effort to get the most out of the seminar. Please be aware that the course's reading and assignment load reflect the fact that this is a specialized, upper-division seminar. You should expect to commit a minimum of 8 hours each week to preparing for seminars and completing out-of-class assessment assignments.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENT (After completing this course, you should be able to do the following):

- Be able to understand, critically analyze, and compare leading issues, problems, and actors shaping political life in Latin America. This outcome will be assessed with three exams and three papers.
- Demonstrate a deep understanding of the basic political history, institutions, geography, and important actors of Latin America's most influential nation-states. This outcome will be assessed with the first exam and paper.
- Be able to analyze and systematically compare Latin American countries with varying regime types, formal and informal political institutions, and dominant political ideologies. This outcome will be assessed with two exams exam and a paper.
- Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of and an ability to apply advanced concepts and theories that social scientists—especially political scientists, economists, and political sociologists—use to study the social and economic policy choices of Latin American societies. This outcome will be assessed with three exams and two papers.
- Analyze and apply evidence from complex writings that represent a range of scholarly views and research methods. This outcome will be assessed with three papers and in the short answer section of tests.
- Consistently demonstrate an appropriate level of engagement and professionalism in a work-like setting. This objective will be assessed with a professionalism rubric and grade.

READING SOURCES AND MATERIALS:

- **A textbook focusing on regional issues as well as the political histories and structures of numerous Latin American countries:** Harry E. Vanden and Gary Prevost. 2021. *Politics of Latin America*, 7th edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
- **Various academic journal and news magazine articles.** High Point's library provides access electronically to almost all of your non-text reading assignments, and the remainder will be available through the reserve desk if necessary. While you are free to locate these materials in the library on your own, most students will probably want to access electronic versions of the readings that I have linked via the course's website in the online version of the assignments schedule. Many readings will require this password to open them:
icecream

GRADE COMPONENTS:

Your final grade will be based on your performance in several different types of activities:

- **Professionalism—class preparation, participation, and engagement: 15 percent.** I assess participation and professionalism at the end of each course unit, adjusting the component's overall grade up or down to reflect how you have done up to that point in the term as a whole. As described in

detail in a rubric on the course website, this grade will assess the extent to which you demonstrate the pre-meeting preparation, listening, note-taking, speaking, and engagement skills required to actively participate and contribute in professional settings for extended periods.

- **Quizzes and statistical research assignments: 5 percent of the grade.** At least at the start of the term, we will have quizzes, including two on the location of countries and major cities in Latin America. I also anticipate assigning a few exercises that involve analyzing public opinion data for various Latin American countries. This work will involve just descriptive statistics (i.e., no data recoding). We will either use the SPSS statistical package (which HPU students can download at no cost) or online analysis programs for datasets published by the AmericasBarometer or LatinoBarometer.
- **Two unit examinations: 30 percent of the course grade.** At the end of the first two course units, you will take in-class examinations that assess your understanding of each unit's assigned readings and any materials reviewed in our seminar meetings.
- **Two analytical papers: 20 percent.** You will write mid-length (a minimum of 1750 words) analytical essays at the end of the first two course units. Each paper will address a specific question, require full citation, and apply only materials that have been assigned in the class.
- **An optional research essay on a political issue, film, or book.** If you choose to submit it by the last day of class, this 1,500-word assignment will replace two-thirds of the lowest test or paper grade earned in the course as long as you earned at least a D on that assignment; alternatively, you may use this optional assignment to earn half credit on any missing assignment. You will need to begin this assignment after the midterm and have its topic preapproved within a week of receiving the grades for your Unit 2 paper and test. You will receive a handout with further details on the assignment when we are finishing up Unit 2.
- **A final examination: 30 percent.** Half of the final examination will address materials covered only in the third unit of the course. The other half will be a single-question essay test that incorporates one or more major themes covered in the course as a whole; you will be provided with the long-essay topic in advance.

GRADING:

University policy mandates that letter grades accurately reflect a student's quality of work. As noted in the University Bulletin, A-range grades must be reserved for excellent "work of a markedly superior quality" when compared to what is typical performance in a course at this grade level. Bs are assigned to work that is "clearly above average," when compared to typical student work at this course level. C-range grades are assigned to "satisfactory work" that at least meets the course's minimum expectations. Ds are assigned where student performance is markedly weaker than what is typical for a student taking a college course at this level. An F grade indicates that a significant portion of the work has not been completed or is so deficient in quality that it does not merit college credit.

To calculate course grades involving multiple types of activities and grade weights, most instructors translate letter grades into numerical values and vice-versa. When I assign letter grades to test items, papers, and other course/assignment elements, these grades are also recorded as numerical scores.

Unless otherwise specified in an assignment's instructions, the numerical values substituted for letter grades are calibrated so that a modestly lower letter grade on one item will not lower your overall letter grade if you earn higher grades on at least two other equally weighted items. For example, a student who earns an A- on two essay questions and then a B+ on a third question will earn a 90 A- grade for the three items as a whole.

At the end of the semester, I will convert the overall numerical score you have earned into a single letter grade using these assignment weights noted earlier, with these cut-off points:

92.5% and above, A • 90, A- • 87.5, B+ • 82.5, B • So, B- • 77.5, C+ • 72.5, C • 70, C- • 67.5, D+ • 62.5, D • 60, D- • Below 60%, F.

COURSE POLICIES:

- **Changes to the schedule, specific assignments, or course policies.** Instructors and the University reserve the right to modify course requirements/policies as unanticipated circumstances dictate. I don't expect to make any major changes to courses once I have written their syllabi but sometimes need to make alterations part way through the semester as unexpected challenges (e.g. class cancellations) and opportunities emerge. If any changes are necessary, you will be notified as soon as possible.
- **Attendance.** Students are expected to attend class except for documented instances of: 1) documented illness or serious emergency; 2) OARS-approved online accommodations in combination with an instructor-approved plan to replace missed classwork with alternative assignments or; 3) other unavoidable, documented circumstances.

If you need to miss a class or two during the semester for personal, professional, or university-sanctioned obligations, please discuss your situation with me as soon as possible, the same way you will need to do so in future work environments. I have built a maximum number of permissible absences to accommodate illness or these types of situations.

If you are unable to attend a class for any reason, you are responsible for obtaining missed materials and submitting assignments when they are due. As discussed below, make sure to contact me as soon as possible about any absences that will influence your ability to complete assignments as scheduled.

Attendance concerns will be documented in Starfish, and *students who miss more than five classes typically will be withdrawn*. If you are tardy for a class, it is your responsibility to alert the instructor at the end of class so that you are not marked as missing and to explain why you are late. Your punctual, regular attendance also is assessed as part of your professionalism grade.

Make sure to consult the university's Academic Calendar before making your end-of-term, mid-term break, and holiday travel plans. Students are expected to attend class and be available for presentations, assignments, and tests whenever the university is in session or final examinations are being held. Out of fairness to all students (many of whom would like to leave early for breaks and holidays), if you book a ticket to leave school early at the end of the term or for a school break, be prepared to receive a zero grade on any assignments you miss. You should note the date of the final exam for this course (and all of your others) on the first day of the course: <https://www.highpoint.edu/registrar/final-exam-schedule/>.

- **E-Mail accounts.** I rely on your HPU email account to distribute important course materials and announcements. I assume that any message sent to your university mailbox will be accessed by you within one day. When contacting me, please use my email account; I may well not see messages sent via Starfish or Blackboard.
- **Starfish flags.** HPU uses the Starfish system to alert you and others on campus when you may need additional support to achieve academic success. If instructors observe situations where you are struggling with assignments, seem disengaged, or appear to be in distress, they may raise a Starfish flag. They may also refer you to your academic advisor, or another support resource on campus. Flags do not affect your grade or carry any punitive consequence and are intended to signal that you need to make some changes in how you are approaching your coursework.
- **Student remote access to classes.** HPU is committed to in-person learning, and the faculty have been instructed to not permit short-term remote attendance to classes unless explicitly approved by the University. There are a limited number of absences built into the syllabus; any instances of remote attendance will need to be approved on a day-by-day basis by your professor and Dr. Kifer, the Chair of Political Science, (mkifer@highpoint.edu). Long-term remote learning related to accessibility issues must be approved by the Office of Accessibility Resources and Services (OARS).
- **Late work and extensions.** Make-up tests for unscheduled absences normally will not be allowed except for serious extenuating, verifiable circumstances (e.g., a serious illness). As likely will be the case with your future employers, I can be more flexible about postponing tests and giving assignment extensions when you provide advance notice and a reasonable justification for needing to move an assignment's date. If you know you will not complete an assignment, take a test, or give a presentation as scheduled (e.g., required participation in a university-sponsored

event or a religious holiday), see if I am willing to grant an extension well before the assignment is due.

If a student's late work is accepted or a late exam permitted, the typical penalty will be a five percent deduction per day, starting the same day the work was due. This penalty will double if a student does not promptly notify me that they have missed a due date, explain why work is tardy, and tell me when it will arrive.

- **The use of electronic devices in class.** Please do not use phones, laptops, or other distracting electronic devices during our seminar meetings unless their use has been approved explicitly or you have been instructed otherwise. Repeated use of electronic devices will result in a substantial reduction in your course grade as explained in the online grading rubric addressing expectations and grading for professionalism and engagement. If you have OARS accommodations or a unique situation related to your learning style, see me for guidance.
- **Recording and distributing course content.** Students are welcome to seek permission to record in-class lectures to assist in their notetaking. Neither your instructor nor your classmates have granted permission for any recorded or online content to be shared outside the instructional purposes of this class. Per our college's guidelines, "Any audio or video recording in the class, including the instructor's lecture/discussion, or other classroom activity, is strictly prohibited unless authorized by the instructor and students in the classroom. This includes the unauthorized recording of online discussions and online breakout rooms." If you want to record classes to assist in effective note-taking, this will be encouraged as long as you receive approval in advance and adhere restrictions that will prohibit you from sharing your recordings with any other party.
- You are strongly encouraged to study with your peers in this class; however, you may not share completed assignments, test questions, graded work, or your class/readings notes with other students who are or will be preparing to complete similar assignments in the future.

Regardless of intent, posting course materials to Chegg and similar online "tutoring" websites or otherwise making them available to peers provides them with an unfair academic advantage, which is a violation of HPU's Honor Code, even if you have no idea who the recipient of your assistance might be.

- **Using OARS-approved accommodations.** Students with accommodations due to a diagnosed disability must submit appropriate documentation and receive instructions from the Office of Accessibility Resources and Services (336-841-9026; oars@highpoint.edu). Only that office can approve accommodations (including requests to use a computer for note-taking). Remember, by federal policy, students must verbally request each specific accommodation to which they are entitled and proactively discuss with instructors the implementation of their accommodation(s). Accommodations cannot be applied retroactively. If your OARS-approved accommodations include typing exams, a separate testing environment, or extended testing time, you must follow OARS policies and procedures that require you to *make appropriate arrangements with the testing center several days ahead of exams*.
- **When can you use AI in *this* class?** Public access to artificial technology (AI) bots capable of generating clear, elegant prose is a recent development. At least in the short term, you may find that courses and instructors may have different policies regarding the use of AI, depending on each course's specific learning outcomes.

You may use AI as a personal tutor to help you to better understand class and reading concepts. ChatGPT and comparable resources can be a wonderful, personalized tutor for some subjects if you use it like a personal tutor rather than as a crutch to answer questions for you. It can be especially helpful if you are the kind of learner who benefits from seeing examples or hearing the same core information explained in several different ways.

*You may also use AI to assist in proofreading and editing **your** writing to enhance its clarity.*

Any AI assistance with submitted work *must* be disclosed in a short note at the start of your assignment (i.e., in the paper title section where you put your name and other assignment specifics).

When using AI to proofread, you are responsible for any factual, grammar, or phrasing issues, even if they were introduced by the digital assistance. As has long been the case with an electronic thesaurus, don't use any words or phrasing in your paper that you do not understand completely

and that fits the exact idea you are trying to communicate.

- **When can't you use AI in this class?** (I.e., what uses would be a violation of the Honor Code's provisions stating that you may only take credit for your own ideas and work)?

One of the key objectives for the political science classes I teach is to help students learn how to better formulate, organize, synthesize, and articulate *their* comprehension of and views about facts, concepts, theories, and ideas covered in class materials and homework. In other words, my pedagogy and assignments are structured to help you build critical thinking, reading, vocabulary, analytical, writing, and communication skills by applying them. You build and demonstrate knowledge and mastery by learning how to explain complex ideas and present original arguments *in your own words*.

Consequently, **you will not be permitted to use AI for *any* of the following purposes:**

- To *assist you in any way during in-class exams*, where using a laptop may be permitted for some parts of tests.
 - To *write*—either in draft or final form—partial or full responses to any prompt on any assignment. If there is doubt about the authorship of any writing you submit for credit, you will be asked to complete an oral or hand-written assignment demonstrating your ability to clearly explain passages from your assignment as well as the course materials on which the assignment is based.
 - To *paraphrase* material written by someone else and then presenting the AI-generated writing as if this writing were the result of your own effort, understanding, and writing skills.
 - To *do any of background research required of students who choose to do the optional essay assignment*. The purpose of the assignment is for you to become familiar with an issue, film, or book that you care about and to apply concepts and ideas you have learned in this class to inform *your* thoughts on the selected subject.
 - To *summarize or take notes on any assigned reading materials*. You will be asked to read materials of varying difficulty, length, and intended audiences. They have been carefully curated to help you build vocabulary, reading comprehension, note-taking, and critical thinking skills of the kind you will need in professional workplaces and graduate schools. While AI is a wonderful tool for helping authors to polish their writing, its widespread use also makes it more important than ever to develop *your* critical reading skills so that you can better leverage AI to effectively communicate *your* ideas and understanding of complex concepts.
- **Academic dishonesty.** We all must support and enforce the university's Honor Code. As a condition of membership in the university community, every High Point Student is honor-bound to refrain from cheating, collusion, and plagiarism. You also are honor-bound to report violations of the honor code should you ever observe them. Without exception, students taking or facilitating an inappropriate academic advantage will have an honor code violation case filed, and they will be sanctioned according to the applicable university policies.

While there are many forms of academic dishonesty, its core element is easy to understand: Cheating refers to any effort to gain academic credit or a higher grade by representing that you have behaved appropriately, completed work, and adhered to both syllabus and assignment-specific expectations when this is not true. The HPU Honor Code also states that facilitating cheating by other students is an act of academic dishonesty. Examples of academic dishonesty include:

- The presentation of writing or work done by another student or an AI assistant as your own work (unless explicitly instructed otherwise, you must use quotation marks around phrasing that is not your own)
- Taking a block of someone else's writing and replacing some words or slightly rearranging the phrasing to conceal the fact that the writing or structure of the prose is mostly not your work

- Verifying test or assignment answers against other students' work without having been given instructor permission to do so or without other students being aware they are providing you with assistance
- Splitting assigned work among multiple students who subsequently each represent in papers or exams that they individually completed the entirety of the required work on their own
- Hiring other students or external services to complete your assignments, such that you are passing off the effort and original work of someone else as though it were your own (working with HPU's tutors, seeing the writing center, or asking an HPU peer to read through your work to assist you with proofreading or provide you with critical feedback are all appropriate stopes and encouraged; having others do your work for you is not appropriate and violates the Honor Code)
- Working with other students or outside resources to obtain test questions or assignments before they are distributed to all students in a class. Providing such assistance either directly or by posting course assignments to websites facilitates cheating and will be treated as such
- Misconstruing the circumstances under which class meetings, exams, or assignment deadlines have been missed to avoid a grade deduction
- Substantially overstating the word count of an assignment to meet minimum-length requirements
- Submitting without preapproval by all involved instructors the same work for academic credit in multiple courses

COURSE OUTLINE AND MAJOR ASSIGNMENT DEADLINES

*Please consult the online schedule for assignment details and links to your readings and assignments. Many of the readings will be downloaded and require a password to be opened: **icecream***

Unit 1: How Did Contemporary Latin American Political Life Come to Be?

Topic 1—Why is getting to know about Latin American politics—including the political history of the region—worth your time?

Topic 2—Does it make any sense to compare countries across a large, highly diverse setting like Latin America?

Topic 3—How in the world did a few hundred Spanish *Conquistadores* topple two Latin American empires, and why does that have any political relevance today?

Topic 4—Why was Latin America's colonial period so different from North America's?

Topic 5—Why didn't independence lead to democracy in Latin America like it did in the US?

Topic 6—Why has the military played such a central role in Latin American politics?

Topic 7—Why did the Catholic Church do so little to help most Latin Americans until recently?

Topic 8—What are the main causes and consequences of the growing political power of women and the “other” Americans?

Unit 2: The Slow and Uneven Democratization of Latin America

Topic 1—Why has democracy continued to struggle to take root in Latin America?

Topic 2—How democratic is Latin America? (And how do you measure this concept when comparing countries?)

Topic 3—What do Latin American citizens think about democracy? And what factors explain variations in the support for democracy?

Topic 4—Mexican political history and its contemporary political system

Topic 5—Will Mexico’s young democracy be able to endure in the face of challenges from narco-traffickers, corruption, and populists?

Topic 6—Brazilian political history and its contemporary political system

Topic 7—What does Brazil tell us about democratic institutional choices and the success or failure of Latin American states?

Unit 3: Latin American Political Economy: Can Any Political Path Lead to Economic Prosperity for All Latin Americans Over the Long Run?

Topic 1—What is the state of development in Latin America? Why are so many Latin Americans poor, and why does it matter so much?

Topic 2—Cuban political history and its contemporary political system

Topic 3—Can a country achieve both equity and adequate economic growth through the revolutionary model of communism?

Topic 4—Venezuelan political history and its contemporary political system

Topic 5—Why does populism keep showing up in Latin America? Can a Chavismo-style model of state socialism ever deliver on its promises? Why is Argentina perpetually an economic basket case?

Topic 6—Chilean political history and its contemporary political system

Topic 7—Did Chile's military dictatorship and the Chicago Boys build a better economy than its democrats ever could have? What are the long-term economic and political issues involved with the neoliberal model?

Topic 8 (time permitting, and it rarely does) —How can US-Latin American relations better serve peace, democracy, and development in the Americas?

The final exam, as scheduled by the University: Wednesday, May 1, 3:30 – 6:30.