



GEA 3405 | Geography of Latin America

Class Number: 12602

Instructor Information

Name: Cynthia Simmons

Course Details

Catalog Description: Examines the interconnecting land, life, and welfare throughout Latin America.

Pre- and Co-Requisites: Prereq: Sophomore standing

Credit Hours: 3

Course Fees: \$0.00

Additional Course Description

This course examines the interconnecting land, life, and welfare throughout Latin America. It is designed to be an introduction to Latin American Geography, and will consequently cover many topics with a broad-brush stroke, with the aim to fill in some detail regarding contemporary issues facing the region. To facilitate learning, the course will follow thematically with the required text, which divides the material into three components: Physical, Cultural, and Economic Geography.

Required Materials

Latin America and the Caribbean, 6E (Kortext eBook)

Publisher: Oxford University Press

All Access: This material is available on All Access

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: LANDS AND PEOPLES

ISBN: 9780199759248

Authors: CLAWSON, DAVID L.

Publisher: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Edition: 6TH

Writing Requirement

This course fulfills 2000 Words of the Writing Requirement.

- The Writing Requirement (WR) ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning.
- Course grades have two components. To receive writing requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course.
- The instructor will evaluate and provide feedback on all of the student's written assignments with respect to grammar, punctuation, clarity, coherence, and organization.
- University's Writing Studio: <http://www.writing.ufl.edu/>

Course Goals and Objectives

The objectives of the course are to provide the student with an understanding of: (1) the variety of physical environments covering Latin America, (2) the cultural, social, and historic factors that influenced the creation of Latin American cultural diversity, and (3) the manner in which economic, social, and environmental processes coalesce to shape different geographies of development throughout the diverse regions of Latin America.

Expectations and Student Learning Outcomes

The course is designed to give students a solid foundation in the study of Latin America. By the end of the semester, learners should be able to:

1. Describe the diversity of biomes, relief, and climatic-hydrological resources that characterize Latin America, and identify the key physical drivers of climate, soil, and vegetation.
2. Explain how the region's physical features (mountain ranges, plains, deserts, rivers) have influenced human settlement patterns and the formation of political borders.
3. Identify the historical processes (colonization, migration, ethnicity, religion) that created Latin American cultural diversity and explain them with regional examples.
4. Evaluate how cultural identities manifest in social practices, land use, and the development of distinct urban and rural spaces.
5. Analyze how production chains (e.g., agribusiness, mining, oil, tourism, creative industries) interact with social and environmental forces to produce diverse development patterns. |
6. Assess the impacts of public policies and trade agreements on the restructuring of Latin American economic regions.
7. Combine knowledge of physical, cultural, and economic geography to develop proposals (or projections) addressing contemporary challenges such as deforestation, migration, climate change, and territorial inequality.

Methods of Evaluation

Graded Components

- 13 Module Quizzes (%): Quizzes will be due each week by Sunday at 11:55 PM. Each quiz is worth 10 points.
 - Total = 130 points.

Quizzes are worth 40% of Grade.

- 13 Module Activities and Discussion Boards (%): Assignments will be due each week by Friday at 11:55 PM and Peer Reviews by Sunday at 11:55 PM. Each assignment is worth 15 points.
 - Total = 195 points.

Activities and Discussions are worth 60% of Grade.

TOTAL: 100%

Grading Scale

Letter grade and percentage

Letter	Percentage Value
A	94 - 100%
A -	90 - 93%
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%
E	59% and below

Minimum Grade Required

A minimum grade of C is required to earn General Education, Quest, and/or Writing Requirement credit. Courses used to satisfy these requirements may not be taken S/U.

Course Schedule

Topic	Required Text	Assignment (due date)
Module 1: Introduction to Latin America	Ch 1	1a. Discussion Board: Mapping Latin America (Fri 8/28) 1b. Discussion Board: Video Introductions (Fri 8/28) - Peer Reviews for Discussion Board 1a (Sun 8/30) - Quiz (Sun 8/30)
Module 2: Landform Regions	Ch 2	- Discussion Board: Landforms of Latin America (Fri 9/4) - Peer Reviews for Discussion Board (Sun 9/6) - Quiz (Sun 9/6)
Module 3: Weather and Climate	Ch 3	- Discussion Board: Climate Change Debate (Fri 9/11) - Peer Reviews for Discussion Board (Sun 9/13) - Quiz (Sun 9/13)
Module 4: Natural Regions	Ch 4	- Discussion Board: Google Earth Engine - Human Environment Connections (Fri 9/18) - Peer Reviews for Discussion Board (Sun 9/20) - Quiz (Sun 9/20)
Module 5: Native American Civilizations; Iberian Heritage	Ch 5 (97-109) Ch 7 (156 – 172)	- Activity: Guns, Germs and Steel (Fri 9/25) - Peer Reviews for Discussion Board (Sun 9/27) - Quiz (Sun 9/27)
Module 6: Colonial Era to Independence	Ch 5 (109-124) Ch 7 (173-177)	- Discussion Board: Revolution or Reform? (Fri 10/2) - Peer Reviews for Discussion Board (Sun 10/4) - Quiz (Sun 10/4)

Topic	Required Text	Assignment (due date)
Module 7: Republican Period to Contemporary Political Change	Ch 6	• Discussion Board: Revolution or Reform? (Fri 10/9) • Peer Reviews for Discussion Board (Sun 10/11) • Quiz (Sun 10/11)
Module 8: Race, Ethnicity and Social Class	Ch 7 (177-192)	• Activity: Black in Latin America (Fri 10/16) • Peer Reviews for Discussion Board (Sun 10/18) • Quiz (Sun 10/18)
Module 9: Latin America as a Culture Region	Ch 8	• Google Earth Assignment: Latin American Cultural Landscape (Fri 10/23) • Peer Reviews for Discussion Board (Sun 10/25) • Quiz (Sun 10/25)
Module 10: Religion	Ch 9	• Discussion Board: Dia de Los Muertos (Fri 10/30) • Peer Reviews for Discussion Board (Sun 11/1) • Quiz (Sun 11/1)
Module 11: Agriculture and Agrarian Development	Ch 10	• Discussion Board: Direct Action Land Reform (Fri 11/6) • Peer Reviews for Discussion Board (Sun 11/8) • Quiz (Sun 11/8)
Module 12: Mining, Manufacturing, and Tourism	Ch 11	• Discussion Board: Belo Monte Dam (Fri 11/13) • Peer Reviews for Discussion Board (Sun 11/15) • Quiz (Sun 11/15)

Topic	Required Text	Assignment (due date)
Module 13: Urbanization, Population Growth, and Migration	Ch 12	• Group Wall Activity PART 1 (Mon 11/16) • Quiz (Sun 11/22) • Writing Credit Draft Essay (Sun 11/22) • Writing Credit Essay - Peer Reviews (Sun 11/29) • Group Wall Activity: PART 2 - POST WORD CLOUD (Tues 12/1) • Group Wall Activity: Peer Reviews (Sun 12/6) • Group Wall Activity: Team Participation Evaluations (Sun 12/6) • Writing Credit Final Essay (Sun 12/6)

Module	Supplementary Materials (Videos (V), Readings (R), Websites (W))
Module 1	• (R) Holloway (2008) Latin America: What's in a Name. A Companion to Latin American History. Waltham, MA: Wiley/Blackwell. • (V) National Geographic. Latin America and the Caribbean: Wild Wealth (2013).
Module 2	• (W) USGS: Plate tectonics and people. • (V) IRIS Earthquake Science. Earthquakes & Tectonics of Western South America: • (W) Incorporated Research Institutions for Seismology: • (V) PBS: Guatemala's Fuego Volcano eruption - June 2018: • (V) Smithsonian. The Devastation Caused by the 2018 Fuego Eruption: • (V) National Geographic: Drones Sacrificed for Spectacular Volcano Video: • (WR) USGS: This Dynamic Earth. The Story of Plate tectonics. Online Book

Module	Supplementary Materials (Videos (V), Readings (R), Websites (W))
Module 3	• (R) J. Gillis, In Sign of Warming, 1,600 Years of Ice in Andes Melted in 25 Years, The New York Times (2013). https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/05/world/americas/1600-years-of-ice-in-perus-andes-melted-in-25-years-scientists-say.html. • (R) R. T. Walker, Collision Course: Development Pushes Amazonia Toward Its Tipping Point. Environ. Sci. Policy Sustain. Dev. 63, 15–25 (2021). • (V) CNC3 Television: Rising Tides, Shifting Lives: Climate Change across the Caribbean. (Sep 20, 2025). • (V) France 24: Climate change: Peru's melting glaciers contaminate water supply (2025). • (V) Firstpost: Extreme Heat Supercharges Chile's Catastrophic Wildfires, 50,000 Ordered to Evacuate (2026).
Module 4	• (WR) Haniff, The Rights of Nature Movement, Latin America Bureau (2021). https://lab.org.uk/the-rights-of-nature-movement/. • (V) BBC. What's being done to protect the Amazon rainforest? - BBC World Service. (2025). • (V) Mongabay. Why is protecting this Honduran lagoon so dangerous? (22 Oct 2025).
Module 5	• (WR) Maya Dates, Collapse, Facts, Religion, People, Language, & Civilization Britannica (2026). https://www.britannica.com/topic/Maya-people. • (V) William McKeown, Guns, Germs, and Steel: Episode II (2017) • (V) TimelessTreasury, The Tairona Civilization: Unveiling the Secrets of an Ancient Indigenous Legacy (2023) • (V) Study of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, Origins of the Ancient Inca DNA, History and Mythology (2021) • (V) Native Historian, Before the Inca: The Lost Empires of South America (2025) • (V) See U in History / Mythology, The Fascinating Guarani Civilization – 2,000 Years of Guarani History (2025)

Module	Supplementary Materials (Videos (V), Readings (R), Websites (W))
Module 6	Watch one of the following movies about a Latin American Liberator : • (V) The People Profiles. (2023). Simon Bolivar - Latin American Liberator Documentary. • (V) Top Documentary Films. (2009). Haitian Revolution: Toussaint Louverture. • (V). PBS. (2014). The Storm That Swept Mexico - Morelos: Land of Zapata.
Module 7	• (V) Journeyman Pictures (2014). Uncovering Pinochet's Secret Death Camps. • (V) Coktas Enter (2015). Cuban Families Divided by The Cuban Revolution. Watch one of the following movies about a Latin American Revolution: • (V) PBS Frontline: Captive in El Salvador (1984). • (V) Top Documentary Films (2007). The True Story of Che Guevara • (V) Know Nothing, (2014). Cuban Revolution.
Module 8	• (WR) E. E. Telles, S. R. Bailey, S. Davoudpour, N. C. Freeman, Racial inequality in Latin America. Oxf. Open Econ. 4, i200–i218 (2025). • (WR) Race - Latin America, Ethnicity, Culture Britannica (2026). https://www.britannica.com/topic/race-human/Latin-America. • (WR) Race, Class and the World Cup in Brazil, Global Research (2014). https://www.globalresearch.ca/race-class-and-the-world-cup-in-brazil/5386639. • (WR) N. A. Thompson, Skin Color Politics, African Diaspora and Latinos in America and Latin America: Skin Tone and Self-Identity [SERIES] PART III, Latin Post (2014). https://www.latinpost.com/articles/8097/20140305/skin-color-politics-african-diaspora-latinos-america-latin-america-skin-tone-self-identity-series.htm.

Module	Supplementary Materials (Videos (V), Readings (R), Websites (W))
Module 9	• (WR) S. Kugel, The Kugel Family: Big in Brazil, The New York Times (2014). https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/11/opinion/the-kugel-family-big-in-brazil.html. • (WR) S. Romero, His Friends Know Him as Petrowskiconicovick, The New York Times (2014). https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/02/world/americas/his-friends-know-him-as-petrowskiconicovick.html. • (V) VICE News (2014) Contra A Copa: The Other Side of Brazil's World Cup. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTW1ePYoV7Q. • (V) PBS (2014) 11th and Grant Salsa Loca Season 9 Episode 901 https://www.pbs.org/video/11th-and-grant-salsa-loc/
Module 10	• (WR) A southern Reformation, The Economist. https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2014/11/15/a-southern-reformation. • (WR) B. Wormald, Religion in Latin America, Pew Research Center (2014). https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2014/11/13/religion-in-latin-america/. • (V) Washington Post. (2015). A look inside the world of Candomblé. https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/world/a-look-inside-the-world-of-candomble/2015/02/05/303af2de-ad6c-11e4-8876-460b1144cbc1_video.html. • (V) National Geographic, Initiation With Ants National Geographic (2007) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGIZ-zUvotM • (V) National Geographic, Umbanda Religion National Geographic (2007) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qyrS7TQnoAo • (V) 2024. SLICE, Cuba : The Santeria Religion and the Crocodile Spirit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-AnbKflbQs

Module	Supplementary Materials (Videos (V), Readings (R), Websites (W))
Module 11	• (R) S. Romero, E. R. Mega, C. Rodríguez, Americans Love Avocados. It's Killing Mexico's Forests., The New York Times (2023). https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/28/us/mexico-avocado-deforestation.html. • (R) C. Simmons, R. Walker, S. Perz, S. Aldrich, M. Caldas, R. Pereira, F. Leite, L. C. Fernandes, E. Arima, Doing it for Themselves: Direct Action Land Reform in the Brazilian Amazon. World Dev. 38, 429–444 (2010). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2009.06.003 • (V) National Geographic, Kendra McSweeney: Drugs, Destruction, and Deforestation Nat Geo Live (2014) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jx6wWbja9cE
Module 12	• (R) R. T. Walker, C. Simmons, E. Arima, Y. Galvan-Miyoshi, A. Antunes, M. Waylen, M. Irigaray, Avoiding Amazonian Catastrophes: Prospects for Conservation in the 21st Century. One Earth 1, 202–215 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oneear.2019.09.009 • (R) W. Finnegan, A Fortune at the Top of the World, The New Yorker (2015). https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/04/20/tears-of-the-sun. • (R) C. S. Simmons, L. Famolare, M. N. Macedo, R. T. Walker, M. T. Coe, B. Scheffers, E. Arima, R. Munoz-Carpena, D. Valle, C. Fraisse, P. Moorcroft, M. Diniz, M. Diniz, C. Szlafsztein, R. Pereira, C. Ruiz, G. Rocha, D. Juhn, L. Otávio do Canto Lopes, M. Waylen, A. Antunes, Y. M. Galvan, Science in support of Amazonian conservation in the 21st century: the case of Brazil. Biotropica 50, 850–858 (2018). https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/btp.12610 • (V) DamocracyTV, DAMOCRACY The Movie (English) (2013) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnMD4e6nLms

Module	Supplementary Materials (Videos (V), Readings (R), Websites (W))
Module 13	• (R) In South America, Another Controversial Border Wall, Newsweek (2017). https://www.newsweek.com/peru-wants-ecuador-stop-construction-wall-along-controversial-border-621536 • (W) Los muros del mundo: 21 fronteras históricas, El País (2017). https://elpais.com/elpais/2017/02/27/album/1488207932_438823.html • (W) A. Morales, Los muros fronterizos de América Latina, Distintas Latitudes (2022). https://distintaslatitudes.net/explicadores/muros-fronterizos-latam • (WR) B. E. S. in Society, Countries With Border Walls, WorldAtlas (2017). https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/countries-with-border-walls.html • (R) E. Vallet, Border walls are ineffective, costly and fatal — but we keep building them, The Conversation (2017). https://doi.org/10.64628/AAM.e3vcsf7tf • (WR) M. Kroth, 10 Border Walls That Artists Have Turned Into Powerful Protests, AFAR Media (2019). https://www.afar.com/magazine/10-border-walls-that-artists-have-turned-into-powerful-protests • (V) E. Berenstein, F. Santos, Video: A Border Fence Blurred Through Art, The New York Times (2017). https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000005222699/border-fence-blurred-through-art.html • (V) BBC News, Migrant Crisis: Border Fences around the World - BBC News (2015) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYUZ-LKbGUu

University Policies and Resources

Information about grading policies, support for students with disabilities, course evaluations, the Honor Code, and other course policies and campus resources can be found on the [Syllabus Policies page](#).

Attendance Policy

Excused and Unexcused Absences

Students may only participate in classes if they are registered officially or approved to audit with evidence of having paid audit fees. The Office of the University Registrar provides official class rolls to instructors.

Students are responsible for satisfying all academic objectives as defined by the instructor. Absences count from the first-class meeting.

Acceptable reasons for absence from or failure to engage in class include illness; Title IX-related situations; serious accidents or emergencies affecting the student, their roommates, or their family; special curricular requirements (e.g., judging trips, field trips, professional conferences); military obligation; severe weather conditions that prevent class participation; religious holidays; participation in official university activities (e.g., music performances, athletic competition, debate); and court-imposed legal obligations (e.g., jury duty or subpoena). Other reasons (e.g., a job interview or club activity) may be deemed acceptable if approved by the instructor.

For all planned absences, a student in a situation that allows an excused absence from a class, or any required class activity must inform the instructor as early as possible prior to the class. For all unplanned absences because of accidents or emergency situations, students should contact their instructor as soon as conditions permit.

Students shall be permitted a reasonable amount of time to make up the material or activities covered during absence from class or inability to engage in class activities because of the reasons outlined above.

If a student does not participate in at least one of the first two class meetings of a course or laboratory in which they are registered, and they have not contacted the department to indicate their intent, the student can be dropped from the course. Students must not assume that they will be dropped, however. The department will notify students if they have been dropped from a course or laboratory.

The university recognizes the right of the instructor to make attendance mandatory and require documentation for absences (except for religious

holidays), missed work, or inability to fully engage in class. After due warning, an instructor can prohibit further attendance and subsequently assign a failing grade for excessive absences.

Religious Holidays Guidelines

At the University of Florida, students and faculty work together to allow students the opportunity to observe the holy days of their faith. A student should inform the faculty member of the religious observances of their faith that will conflict with class attendance, with tests or examinations, or with other class activities prior to the class or occurrence of that test or activity. The faculty member is then obligated to accommodate that particular student's religious observances. Because students represent a myriad of cultures and many faiths, the University of Florida is not able to assure that scheduled academic activities do not conflict with the holy days of all religious groups. Accordingly, individual students should make their need for an excused absence known in advance of the scheduled activities.

The Florida Board of Education and state law govern university policy regarding observance of religious holidays.

Guidelines

- Students, upon prior notification to their instructors, shall be excused from class or other scheduled academic activity to observe a religious holy day of their faith.
- Students shall be permitted a reasonable amount of time to make up the material or activities covered in their absence.
- Students shall not be penalized due to absence from class or other scheduled academic activity because of religious observances.

If a faculty member is informed of or is aware that a significant number of students are likely to be absent from class because of a religious observance, the faculty member should not schedule a major exam or other academic event at that time.

A student who is to be excused from class for a religious observance is not required to provide a second party certification of the reason for the absence. Furthermore, a student who believes that they have been unreasonably denied an education benefit due to religious beliefs or practices may seek redress through the student grievance procedure.

Absence due to Illness

A student who is absent from class or any required class-related activity because of illness should contact their instructor, if feasible, as early as possible prior to the missed class or activity.

Students shall be permitted a reasonable amount of time to make up the material or activities covered during an excused absence.

Students should contact their college by the deadline to drop a course for medical reasons. Students can petition the Dean of Students Office to drop a course for medical reasons. The university's policy regarding medical excuse from classes is maintained by the Student Health Care Center.

Twelve-Day Rule

Students who participate in university-sponsored athletic or scholarly activities are permitted to be absent 12 scholastic days per semester without penalty. A scholastic day is any day on which regular class work is scheduled as defined in the approved university calendar. [More Info](#)

The student or student's advisor must notify the instructor as early as possible prior to the anticipated absence to allow ample time for accommodations. Instructors must be flexible and not penalize students when re-scheduling during-term and final exams, class assignments, and other required activities and must follow the UF Attendance Policy herein and UF Examination Policies. As noted in the UF Examination Policies, during-term exams should be re-scheduled no later than before the end of the semester, while final exams no later than 90 days after the originally scheduled exam time. However, instructors are encouraged to re-schedule final and during-term exams, assignments, and other activities as soon as possible after the last day of the absence and must not penalize the student in any way. [More Info](#)

A group's schedule that requires absence of more than 12 scholastic days should be adjusted so that no student is absent from campus more than 12 scholastic days. Students who previously have been warned in writing by their instructor about the impact of absences on their individual class performance should not incur additional absences, even if they have not been absent 12 scholastic days. The student is responsible to maintain satisfactory academic performance and attendance.

Writing Requirement Rubric

Word Credit Essay Rubric

CRITERIA	SATISFACTORY (Y)	UNSATISFACTORY (N)
CONTENT	Papers exhibit at least some evidence of ideas that respond to the topic with complexity, critically evaluating and synthesizing sources, and provide at least an adequate discussion with basic understanding of sources.	Papers either include a central idea(s) that is unclear or off- topic or provide only minimal or inadequate discussion of ideas. Papers may also lack sufficient or appropriate sources.
ORGANIZATION AND COHERENCE	Documents and paragraphs exhibit at least some identifiable structure for topics, including a clear thesis statement but may require readers to work to follow progression of ideas.	Documents and paragraphs lack clearly identifiable organization, may lack any coherent sense of logic in associating and organizing ideas, and may also lack transitions and coherence to guide the reader.
ARGUMENT AND SUPPORT	Documents use persuasive and confident presentation of ideas, strongly supported with evidence. At the weak end of the Satisfactory range, documents may provide only generalized discussion of ideas or may provide adequate discussion but rely on weak support for arguments.	Documents make only weak generalizations, providing little or no support, as in summaries or narratives that fail to provide critical analysis.

CRITERIA	SATISFACTORY (Y)	UNSATISFACTORY (N)
STYLE	Documents use a writing style with word choice appropriate to the context, genre, and discipline. Sentences should display complexity and logical sentence structure. At a minimum, documents will display a less precise use of vocabulary and an uneven use of sentence structure or a writing style that occasionally veers away from word choice or tone appropriate to the context, genre, and discipline.	Documents rely on word usage that is inappropriate for the context, genre, or discipline. Sentences may be overly long or short with awkward construction. Documents may also use words incorrectly.
MECHANICS	Papers will feature correct or error-free presentation of ideas. At the weak end of the Satisfactory range, papers may contain some spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors that remain unobtrusive so they do not muddy the paper's argument or points.	Papers contain so many mechanical or grammatical errors that they impede the reader's understanding or severely undermine the writer's credibility.