The Political Economy of Latin America

Course Description

Although the national debate surrounding the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) highlighted the importance of Mexico for the U.S. economy, our undergraduates know little about the changing societies in other Latin American countries. American neighbors to the south are establishing institutions of a market economy, but their transition has been hobbled by a myriad of problems. This course will survey the political economies in important Latin American countries. The emphasis will be on history, politics, and culture; no prior knowledge of economic theory is required.

Course Rationale

In the past, programs to enhance student awareness of other societies have been limited to a few strategically important areas: Russia, Japan, China, and the European Union. This is unfortunate because, for instance, our students should know about Brazil, a country with size, resource endowment, and racial mix of population similar to the U.S., or about Argentina, a country that until recently was a prosperous society with economic performance comparable to that of advanced industrial democracies. This course will introduce students to economic and political institutions of the important countries in Latin America, knowledge essential for the success of the next generation of business executives and diplomats operating in that hemisphere.

Course Objectives

This course will acquaint undergraduates with contemporary Latin America, a region of ancient civilizations and unique cultures, presently focused on economic growth. Is NAFTA to be blamed for environmental deterioration along the U.S.-Mexico border? Will Brazil alleviate the disparities in its income and land distribution? How will Colombia deal with public insecurity, lack of economic confidence, and political cynicism? Does Argentina have an alternative to the fiscal restraints expected of it from the International Monetary Fund? Issues like these will be discussed against the background of information provided by essays culled from contemporary literature. By the end of the course, students should be able to discern a relation between political instability and poor economic performance.

Course Content

Contemporary Latin America
Inequality in Latin America
Democracy in Latin America
Every fall my task is to introduce American capitalism to three contingents of incoming freshmen. In four months, I walk them through the maze of the U.S. economy, stopping at important landmarks such as the Federal Reserve System and Wall Street. They learn about inflation and unemployment, fiscal and monetary policies, but, above all, they learn how America’s democratic institutions and multitude of participants in the economy work together to produce the largest bundle of goods and services known to human history.

The knowledge gleaned from participating in *Southern Cone Explorations* will animate my instruction of *Political Economies of Latin America*, an interdisciplinary course in which I show that our southern neighbors, disenchanted by both capitalism and socialism, are searching for a model that suits their unique culture and history.

**Relevance to Curricular Initiatives**

Kutztown University is presently engaged in an ambitious effort to internationalize its undergraduate curriculum. Our newly instituted International Studies Program has forged faculty and student exchange relationships with numerous overseas universities and offers a variety of courses that focus on the culture and history of other countries. However, most of these exchange relationships and courses have a European orientation. A genuine internationalization of curriculum would include Asia, Africa, and Latin America; there is definitely a need to broaden our view and add new perspectives.


*Southern Cone Explorations* provided me the opportunity to observe two more societies in South America. The “war stories” I gathered in Ecuador in Summer 2003 and in Peru
and Argentina last summer will animate my instruction of Political Economies of Latin America for years to come.

Bibliography


Knight, Franklin W. Race, Ethnicity and Class: Forging the Plural Society in Latin America and the Caribbean. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 1998.


**Reaching a Wider Audience**

Kutztown University regularly organizes conferences that focus on one region or country: Portrait of Latin America, 2002; The European Union: Possibilities and Limitations, 2000; Multiculturalism in Canada: Issues and Perspectives, 1998; The Islamic World in Transition: A Conference on the Middle East, 1995; The Shape of the Future: East Asia in Transition, 1993; Canada, Mexico, and the United States: Neighbors in Transition, 1992 -- to name a few. For most of the residents in and around Kutztown, these conferences offer a window to the world beyond the United States. I participate in these conventions as a speaker or panelist and -- in view of the large Spanish-speaking population in the area -- have lobbied for an encore of the conference on Latin America. First-hand knowledge of the economic and political developments in the region gathered in Southern Cone Explorations would enrich my contribution to the conference.

Kutztown University is affiliated with several outreach programs designed to heighten community appreciation of international issues. KU faculty, for instance, partake in seminars convened by the World Affairs Council of Berks County. Also, we belong to the Eastern Pennsylvania World Studies Network, an organization that brings together 26 public school districts and six regional institutions of higher education for the purpose of internationalizing curricula. The symposia and workshops arranged in collaboration with these groups also present forums for attracting public school teachers as participants.
Indeed, one of the major goals of the International Studies Program at KU has been to make contact with colleagues in lower education to promote development of international studies components in public schools. I regularly speak in these forums, an association that will benefit from my participation in Southern Cone Explorations.

**The Instructor’s Background**

Having chaperoned American undergraduates to Cuba and Brazil under the auspices of the University of Pittsburgh’s Semester at Sea and Honors students from the State System of Higher Education in Pennsylvania to Ecuador, Dr. Daneshyar knows how to channel their enthusiasm into learning about a different society. He appreciates the immense size and diversity of Latin America, having visited Brazil as part of an international faculty development seminar held at the University of São Paulo, *Brazil: The Emerging Giant*. And, having taught courses on the Soviet economy and lectured at the Russian Diplomatic Academy, he also understands the enormity of the challenge facing Latin American societies: to maintain a balance between the domestic tranquility that the state needs to carry out its plans for economic development and the political freedom that the middle class demands.