

# GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

Department of Geography  
Spring Semester 2020

## GEOGRAPHY OF LATIN AMERICA

GEOG 533 – 003  
Course Syllabus

**Instructor:** Ian S. Ward  
**Office:** Exploratory Hall, Rm 2222  
**Office Hours:** Monday, 2 - 4pm, or by appointment  
**Mailbox:** Exploratory Hall, Suite 2400 (MS 6C3)

**Class Location:** Robinson B122  
**Meeting Time:** 4:30 – 7:10pm M  
**Email:** iward@gmu.edu

### Course Overview:

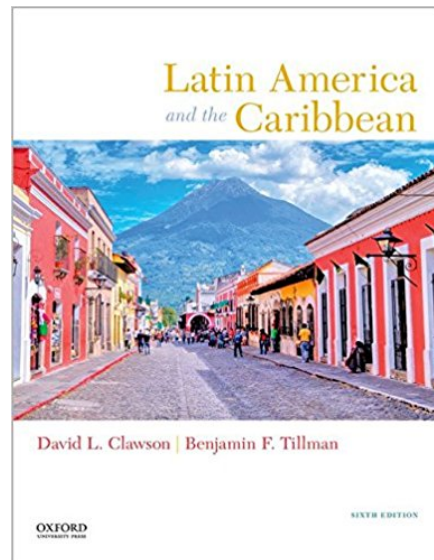
South of the U.S. border—spanning nearly 7,000 miles from Tijuana, Mexico to Ushuaia, Argentina—lies one of the great cultural realms of the world. Long seen as a land of mystery and intrigue, of great opportunity and vast economic potential, Latin America continues to draw the attention of scholars and travelers alike. A study of its physical geography reveals a portfolio of ecosystems that have created conditions for unprecedented biodiversity. Home to the largest contiguous rain forest and largest wetland in the world, the realm not only boasts arguably the wettest location on earth, but also the driest. Its massive rivers and mountain ranges rival the size and scope of the largest found anywhere in the world. The wide-ranging landscapes also yield enormous energy and mineral resources that, in some cases, are just beginning to be exploited for their economic value. From tiny island nations, to massive Brazil, the countries of the realm are composed of a mosaic of ethnicities that span the world. Mixed with rich indigenous cultures, the contributions brought by these relative newcomers have created a highly dynamic and energized society. Unfortunately, a legacy of colonialism, corrupt political dynasties, environmental degradation, education neglect, social stratification, crime, and illegal narcotics have created historical hardships that have been difficult for many nations here to overcome. Yet despite the many serious challenges that persist today, optimistic changes in social attitudes and governmental policy can be seen spreading across much of Latin America, making this one of the most fascinating times to better understand this area of the world. Using a holistic approach, this class aims to provide students a new frame of reference for analyzing and understanding the rich and complex geography of the Latin American realm.

**Course Objectives:** Based upon the readings, lecture notes, and independent study, students will be able to:

- 1) define the areas that comprise Latin America;
- 2) describe the realm in terms of physical characteristics such as climate or landforms;
- 3) describe the realm in terms of cultural characteristics such as language or religion;
- 4) explain specific geographic concepts such as core & periphery and culture hearths;
- 5) and demonstrate how these concepts help explain regional differences and spatial patterns of distribution.

## **Required Readings:**

- (1) Clawson, David L., *Latin America & the Caribbean*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Oxford University Press.



## **Recommended:**

- It is strongly recommended that students consider purchasing an atlas of their choice, preferably one with good coverage of Central and South America. A good choice is the *Goode's World Atlas, 23<sup>rd</sup> edition*, but there are certainly others. Shop around and explore what is available. Those from Nystrom, Hammond, National Geographic, and Rand McNally are also quite good.

## **Student Requirements:**

As a graduate level course, students are expected to read and write critically as well as conduct significant research outside the classroom. Students are responsible for all assigned reading and lecture material, as well as regular access to GMU's Blackboard system. An evaluation of the student's performance in the class will be based on exams, written assignments, oral presentations, and class participation (*see Grading Scheme and Policy for details*).

## **Examinations and Examination Policies:**

- 1) Two examinations (one Midterm and one comprehensive Final) will be administered during the course of the semester (see attached schedule for dates). The combined scores of these two exams will account for 35% of the overall grade.
- 2) **NO MAKEUP EXAMS WILL BE GIVEN** except under the most extraordinary circumstances. Make-up arrangements must be made in writing in advance of the exam. A physician must document medical absences; this is available for all students through the University Health Clinic. Please make sure that you plan ahead to provide extra time to arrive early on exam days.
- 3) The Final Exam will not be administered early or later; please plan ahead.
- 4) Exams begin and end as indicated in the class schedule: no additional time for late arrivals.
- 5) Exams will **NOT** be issued to those individuals arriving after the first person in the classroom has finished their test and has left the room.
- 6) Examinations will be a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and essay. Please be sure to bring a couple of #2 pencils, a good eraser, a pen, and a Scantron form with you on the day of the exam as none will be provided by the instructor.

- 7) No books or notes of any kind may be used during any examination in this class.
- 8) Once your exams and projects have been graded and returned to you, please retain them for your records. Do not lose track of them until after your final grade has been posted.

### **Academic Integrity:**

Academic integrity is essential and each individual is expected to do his or her own work; violations of the University Honor Code will not be tolerated and will result in course failure. A description of the University Honor Code is available for review in the University Catalog and on our class Blackboard page.

### **Classroom Expectations:**

- 1) NO LAPTOPS or TABLETS are to be used by students during lectures and films.
- 2) CELL PHONES should be SILENCED before class begins.
- 3) REFRAIN FROM TEXTING, please. Not only is your full and undivided attention requested, but your active participation in class discussion is highly encouraged.
- 4) BE ON TIME - Students are expected to be on time for class. Should circumstances arise that make you late, please do not disrupt the class as you enter; take the first aisle seat that is available and do not walk across the room.
- 5) KEEP THE ROOM CLEAN. If you pack it in, pack it out; leave your seat better than you found it.
- 6) GET INVOLVED – Whether or not you’ve had personal experiences in Latin America, you will undoubtedly have questions, comments, and maybe some personal experiences that you’ll want to share during the semester. We want to hear from you. If you are hesitant about asking a question in class, that’s ok, but do not discard the question. Come see me during the class break, during office hours, or send me an email.

### **Blackboard:**

This course will utilize Blackboard for posting class information and material. Please refer to it periodically (once every few days) for updates and new postings. Our page can be accessed using the URL: <https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu/>. Final grades will be posted on Patriot Web.

### **Note Taking:**

- Lectures will be accompanied by the use of electronic slides, maps, and photographs. You are not required—nor is it necessary—to copy the contents of these slides word-for-word, but it is strongly recommended that you take note of the details discussed on them. Most slides will be made available on Blackboard for students to print on the morning of each class. These PDF documents will include room for students to take some notes, but please keep in mind that not all slides will be included in these sets. Students may come by during office hours to review and discuss any class material with me, including having the chance to see ALL of the slides presented in class. I STRONGLY encourage you to stop by and meet with me ESPECIALLY if you’ve missed a class or find that you are having a little difficulty with any element(s) of the class.
- If at any point during the lecture you feel that I am changing slides too fast, please let me know and I will slow down.

### **Chapter Analysis:**

The class will be reading the first chapter of the book *Brave Companions: Portraits in History*, by David McCullough. This is a very short piece entitled “Journey to the Top of the World” (pp. 3-19) and focuses on the famous explorer and bio-geographer **Alexander von Humboldt**.

The chapter will be available to you on Blackboard under *Reserved Reading*. The book, which is a collection of well-written short stories by McCullough, is also available at several sites online and in most major bookstores.

Chapter Analysis - Expectations:

- 1) The format for the journal will be 2-pages maximum, double spaced with one-inch margins and using a 10 or 12 pitch font.
- 2) For the basis of your analysis, I suggest addressing the following questions:  
How did Alexander von Humboldt change the way outsiders looked at Latin America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century? What were some of his notable achievements? How does McCullough make a compelling case that this was one of the world's greatest scientists and adventurers?
- 3) Use specific examples from the chapter to support your arguments.

**Map Exercise:**

Students will be required to participate and complete an in-class map exercise on February 24<sup>th</sup> during the regularly scheduled class time (4:30-7:10PM). The exercise will take place in Exploratory Hall (*2nd floor in front of the Department of Geography and Geoinformation Science*) and will provide students with an opportunity to examine a variety of cartographic work covering Latin America. A series of activities and questions will serve as a guide through the exercise. Students will work in pre-arranged groups, but will submit their own exercise packets for individual grading. Students should bring a couple of pencils, pens, and a ruler to the exercise. Please note that due to the logistical difficulties in preparing an event of this size, make-up opportunities will not be available.

**Map Quiz:**

A map quiz will be administered that is designed to provide an evaluation of each student's understanding of the locations of countries, cities, and physical features. A complete list of everything that may be asked on the quiz will be made available to students no later than Week 2. Copies of the maps that will be used in the quiz will also be made available on Blackboard. It is strongly suggested that these be printed and used in preparing for the quiz.

**Journals and Participation:**

Each student will be required to complete one written journal during the course. The class will be divided into 8 groups named after notable animals found throughout Latin America: ***Boto, Piraña, Coatí, Chinchilla, Jaguar, Guanaco, Arapaima, and Tucán*** – *please see attachment for your assigned group*. The purpose of this is for scheduling assignment submission and organizing class discussions / activities. On the day that their group is listed in the schedule, students will have the opportunity to submit a 2 to 3 page journal summarizing one published news article related to the geography of Latin America printed within 1 to 2 weeks of the due date. **No trivial topics please** (ie: 'Evo Morales gets a haircut', or 'Beachgoers Find a Blue Lobster in Rio de Janeiro'). The articles you choose must have real geographic relevance. Each submitted journal will represent an individual's own work – not that of the collective group. However, group members must coordinate so as not to overlap topics, or re-cover topics presented from prior weeks (check your notes and Blackboard). Acceptable sources may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- (a) Journal of Latin American Studies
- (b) Foreign Policy - (This magazine will have "FP" on cover)
- (c) Current History
- (d) The Economist

- (e) Latin American Weekly Report
- (f) most major news outlets

Sources may be in Spanish or Portuguese, but journal submissions must be in English. Journals MUST be turned-in according to the schedule of your group – *see class schedule*. You will not be allowed to change due dates. Students will be assigned to groups on the first day of class.

*Journal Expectations:*

- 1) All topics must have geographic relevance to Latin America.
- 2) You will be responsible for coordinating topics within your group so as to ensure a balanced array of topics with no overlap. It's important to also check your notes and Blackboard to avoid overlap from previous weeks. Identical topics from current or previous weeks will result in a grade reduction.
- 3) Please "CC" me on all email communications within your group, and be sure to include the name of your group in the subject heading. **An email to your group and myself stating your choice of an article (with URL link) should be sent out no later than the Thursday before your group presents.**
- 4) Every journal that is submitted for grading must have a citation for the news source at the top of the first page. Information in the citation should include the author(s), name of article, name of the journal or news publication, date of the article, page number, and website address if applicable. The style you wish to use for your citation is entirely up to you, just so long as all of the required information above is included.
- 5) The format for the journal will be 2 to 3 pages maximum, double-spaced with one-inch margins and using a 10 or 12-pitch font.
- 6) The journal should include basic information about the topic (summary), discussion on how it may relate to the class and textbook, and analysis on its geographic implications to the realm.
- 7) The first 15 to 20 minutes of each class will be devoted to an open discussion on the topics you have read. Student participation during this segment of the class will be noted. Each student's presentation of the topic should be very, very brief (2 to 3 minutes max, with 2 minutes of questions and answers). State your name, name of the article, source, and a brief overview of the issue point-by-point. Your personal opinions on the topic should not be a component of your presentation or write-up, but may be offered during the Q&A session.
- 8) Unless otherwise noted, all group presentations will be conducted at the beginning of class.

\* Please note: Participation is greatly encouraged during each of the classroom presentations.

**Project (Paper and Presentation):**

*Overview:* This course focuses on a variety of geographical issues stretching across the realms of Middle and South America. You will be asked to take a close look at one of these topics, or perhaps another of your choosing related to the geography of Latin America. Working individually, each student will prepare an overview and analysis of the issue and present their findings in a research paper and an in-class presentation. Participants must submit their proposal for a research topic in writing for approval by March 2<sup>nd</sup>, preferably earlier. **Remember, the focus must be geographical and have a clear spatial component to it.** Topics for the paper may be found in the following areas:

- |                               |               |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| Political / Boundary disputes | Colonialism   |
| Environmental degradation     | Bio-geography |
| Economic issues / trends      | Urbanization  |

Exploitation of Natural Resources  
Population trends  
Climate and Weather  
Narcotics / War on Drugs  
Geoarchaeology

Transportation  
Agriculture / Fishing  
Culture  
Tourism  
Energy

*The Paper:* The format of the paper will be double-spaced, with one-inch margins, and a 10 or 12 pitch font. The length of the paper will not exceed 12 pages, not counting maps, illustrations, end-notes, and bibliography. Remember that a few well-written pages are much more effective than reams of unnecessary filler. A separate cover page (with the paper title, your name, student ID number, course title and number) and bibliography will not count against the page total. References will be cited using an APA format. All papers are expected to contain at least one relevant map to support the text. Papers will be submitted using the following approximate format using subheadings to delineate the sections:

- 1) **Title Page**
- 2) **Table of Contents**
- 3) **A two to three page Overview.**
- 4) **A seven to eight page Analysis.**
- 5) **A two page Conclusion** (to include ‘future trends’ or predictions)
- 6) **Bibliography**
- 7) **Figures and Tables**

This is an exercise in reasoned analysis, not advocacy. Your purpose is not to argue one side or the other, rather you are expected to provide a careful and dispassionate analysis of a geographic topic. Do not let preconceived ideas or emotions cloud your judgment.

*The Presentation:* Student presentations will occur on April 20<sup>th</sup>. This portion of the assignment will account for approximately 20% (80 points) of the overall grade of the project. Please note that there are no make-up opportunities for those who miss the day. Each presenter will be given 20-minutes maximum to discuss his or her research. Each presenter must also prepare a one-page handout for distribution to the class, which is to include highlights and important information from your research. Test questions will be drawn from these summaries.

*Overall Evaluation:* The projects will be graded on the following grounds.

- **Mechanics** - including following the format, spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- **Organization and Logic** - including cohesive, logical development of your topic.
- **Intellectual Rigor** - including support for your statements, no vague generalities.
- **Class Presentation** – including effectiveness, impact, content, and style of both the oral presentation and the one-page handout distributed to classmates.

#### **Late Policy on Written Assignments:**

- (a) **Chapter Analysis & Journal** - No late journals will be accepted.
- (b) **Project** - a maximum of a two week extension with a minimum of a one letter-grade deduction each week it is late beginning at the end of class the day it is due. No extension will be provided for the in-class presentation component.

To receive the highest credit possible, assignments must be turned in on-time (at the beginning of class the day it is due). It is best to begin work on assignments as soon as possible to allow yourself plenty of time to prepare a neat and thoughtful product.

**Graduate / Undergraduate Requirement Comparison:**

<b>Requirement</b>	<b>GGS 533</b>	<b>GGS 316</b>
Midterm Exam	<b>Enhanced</b>	YES
Final Exam	<b>Essay</b>	YES
Semester Project (Term Paper)	<b>YES</b>	NO
Book Review	<b>NO</b>	YES
Journal	YES	YES
Chapter Analysis	YES	YES
In-class Map Exercise	YES	YES
Map Quiz	YES	YES

**Privacy:**

Students must use their MasonLive email account to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See <http://masonlive.gmu.edu> for more information.

**Disability Accommodations:**

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474, <http://ods.gmu.edu>. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS.

**Grading Scheme and Policy:**

Your combined score of the following will determine your grade in this course:

Semester Project	—————>	40%	=	400 points
Midterm Exam	—————>	25%	=	250 points
Final Exam	—————>	10%	=	100 points
Map Quiz	—————>	10%	=	100 points
Journal	—————>	5%	=	50 points
Map Exercise	—————>	5%	=	50 points
Chapter Analysis	—————>	5%	=	50 points
			=	<hr/> 1,000 points

### **Point Translation:**

920 - 1000 = **A**  
900 - 919 = **A-**  
880 - 899 = **B+**  
820 - 879 = **B**  
800 - 819 = **B-**

780 - 799 = **C+**  
700 - 779 = **C**  
600 - 699 = **D**  
0 - 599 = **F**

### **Key Dates:**



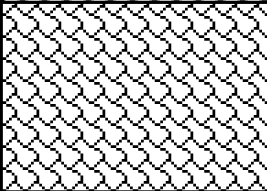
1 / 27 Class begins  
1 / 28 Last day to add course  
\* must be enrolled for a grade!  
2 / 5 Last day to drop with no tuition liability  
2 / 10 **CHAPTER ANALYSIS DUE**  
2 / 24 Last day to drop without dean's permission  
2 / 24 **MAP EXERCISE**

3 / 2 **MAP QUIZ**  
3 / 9 **No Class – Spring Break**  
3 / 30 **MIDTERM EXAM**  
4 / 20 **PROJECT PRESENTATION**  
5 / 4 **SEMESTER PROJECT DUE**  
5 / 4 Last day of class  
5 / 11 **FINAL EXAM 4:30 – 7:15PM**




Tentative Class Schedule

(as of 27 January 2020)

WEEK	DATE	TOPIC	READINGS & GROUPS
1	1 / 27	INTRODUCTION Discussion of the class / Why Geography? Perceptions of Latin America The Geography of Latinos in the U.S.	Chapter 1 
2	2 / 3	DEFINING REGIONAL ANALYSIS The Elements of National Power PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY Landform Regions of South America	Chapters 2 / 3 See reserve readings from the Blackboard
3	2 / 10	<b>Chapter Analysis Due</b> PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY Landform Regions of South America	Chapters 3 See reserve readings from the Blackboard
4	2 / 17	PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY Landform Regions of Middle America Weather & Climate	Chapter 3 / 4 <b>Boto</b>
5	2 / 24	<b>In-Class Map Exercise</b> <i>Meet in Exploratory Hall, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor</i>	Chapter 5 <b>Piraña</b>
6	3 / 2	<b>MAP QUIZ</b> PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY Natural Hazards	Chapter 6 
7	3 / 9	<b>NO CLASS</b> <b>(Spring Break)</b>	
8	3 / 16	CULTURAL PATTERNS Ancient Civilizations The “Age of Reconnaissance” Iberian Heritage, Conquest, Institutions	Chapter 7 <b>Coatí</b>
9	3 / 23	CULTURAL PATTERNS The Columbian Exchange Land Claims, Treaties, & Policies Revolution & Independence	Chapter 8 <b>Chinchilla</b>

Tentative Class Schedule

(as of 27 January 2020)

WEEK	DATE	TOPIC	READINGS & GROUPS
10	3 / 30	<b>MIDTERM EXAM</b>	<b>STUDY!</b>
		CULTURAL PATTERNS Latin America as a Cultural Region	
11	4 / 6	REGIONAL ANALYSIS Mexico	Chapters 8 / 11
			<b>Jaguar</b>
12	4 / 13	REGIONAL ANALYSIS Central America & the Greater Antilles	Chapters 11
			<b>Guanaco</b>
13	4 / 20	REGIONAL ANALYSIS Northern South America Andean South America / Brazil <b>Graduate Project Presentation</b>	Catch up on readings
			<b>Arapaima</b>
14	4 / 27	<i>* Undergrad Discussion on "Chasing Che" book</i> REGIONAL ANALYSIS Brazil Southern Cone	Chapter 12
			
15	5 / 4	<b>Semester Project Due</b>	Chapter 13
		REGIONAL ANALYSIS The Southern Cone	<b>Tucán</b>
16	5 / 11	<b>FINAL EXAM</b>	<b>STUDY!</b> Exam Time: (4:30pm to 7:15pm)
