Professor: Dr. Alexander V. Stehn (alex.stehn@utrgv.edu)
Please call me Prof. Stehn, Dr. Stehn, or Alex

Office hours in ELABS 359: MW 3:05-4:15pm (or email for an appointment)

Course Description: To get an idea of how this historically-informed introduction to Latin American Philosophy will work, consider the question of what people mean when they say that Christopher Columbus “discovered” America. Could Columbus truly discover a “New World” if roughly 50 million people already lived there? Instead of speaking about the “discovery” of “America,” should we conceptualize these events and their legacies as: 1) the European invention of America, 2) the European conquest of millions of native peoples, and/or 3) the European colonization of more than one quarter of the Earth’s lands (none of which were called “America” by the various peoples who had lived there for at least 15,000 years)? What is America (or Latin America)? Who are the Americans (or the Latin Americans or Amerindians)? What are their philosophies? Is the story of America (or Latin America) a story of civilization and progress, a story of colonialism and violence? What does Latin American Philosophy have to teach us here today in the South Texas-Northern Mexico borderlands? These are the kinds of questions that we’ll ask as we study over 500 years of Latin American Philosophy.

More specifically, we’ll study the birth of philosophy among the Nahatl-speaking Aztecs or Mexica. Next, we’ll read the first recorded philosophical debate between Spanish missionaries and Aztec elders in 1524, then compare this to the famous philosophical debate held in Spain from 1550-1551 between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda concerning the “Indians” knowledge, rationality, religion, capacity for self-government, and human rights. We will end our study off the colonial period with the writings of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, considered the “first feminist of America,” and reflect upon how gender (alongside race, class, and language) structured everyday life in colonial América. Next, we’ll turn to the philosophical basis of struggles for national independence as they relate to the construction of Latin American identity across the national boundaries that we recognize today. For example, we will read Simón Bolívar’s call for national liberation and the cultivation of Pan-American unity, José Martí’s reflections on “Our America,” and José Carlos Mariátegui’s vision of indigenous socialism for Indo-America. After Spring Break, we will study 20th and 21st century Latin American and Latino/a philosophies of liberation and/or decolonization in four different contexts: 1) Paulo Freire’s pedagogy designed to empower and humanize the illiterate Brazilian poor, 2) Rigoberta Menchú’s testimonio and struggle to improve the lives of indigenous Guatemalans, 3) the Zapatista’s revolutionary attempt to liberate indigenous Mexicans in Chiapas, and 4) Gloria Anzaldúa’s attempt to theorize and overcome the many forms of colonialism and oppression that structured her life growing up in the Rio Grande Valley.

Required Texts:
Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza [ISBN: 978-1879960855]
All other readings will be made available electronically on Blackboard

Recommended Text (provides helpful historical background):
John Charles Chasteen, Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America (any edition)
Grading breakdown:
10%—Attendance
20%—Pop Quizzes & Pop Reflections
20%—Myth of Discovery Essay
10%—Film Exercise
20%—Oppression/Liberation Essay
20%—Digital Testimonio OR Written Autohistoria-Teoría

Attendance: I expect you to regularly attend and participate fully in this class. You should commit to missing a maximum of 4 classes, except in the most serious and exceptional cases (e.g., prolonged illness that requires extensive hospitalization). By keeping this commitment, you will earn 10 points (out of a possible 10) for the attendance portion of your final grade; students who miss more than 4 classes will lose 1 grade point (out of a possible 10) for each absence. I do not drop students for nonattendance.

Please Note: If you miss class, you are responsible for contacting a classmate to get notes and find out about assignments that you may have missed. If you email me to ask routine questions answered by the syllabus or Blackboard, I will simply refer you to these resources. However, if you have any questions about the course material, please come to my office hours, or email me if that is not possible, and I will help you understand the material and succeed in the course to the best of my ability.

Class Participation: Philosophy classes work best as sites of thoughtful discussion based on careful reading. Before each class, you are expected to carefully read the assigned text while reflecting upon what it means and why it matters, so that you will be ready to actively participate in class. At the very least, students are welcome to attend class when they bring a copy of the assigned reading. The focus of each class will be a discussion of that day’s assigned reading.

In this class, se habla inglés, español, tex-mex, Spanglish, etc. We can all translate for each other if necessary. Since I will be providing many of the course readings in both English and Spanish, you are encouraged to write and speak in the language that you think or communicate best in. There are also ways of participating outside of class, including attending office hours or sending me your thoughts via email. Blackboard can be used for commenting on the readings, asking questions, and having discussions that extend beyond the classroom.

Pop Quizzes & Pop Reflections: To encourage the habit of regularly reading the assigned texts and arriving to class on time, we will occasionally begin with a brief, closed-book quiz, followed immediately by a discussion of the answers. Alternatively, we may begin with a question that you must reflect upon in writing while referencing the reading (open-book). There are no make-ups for pop quizzes or pop reflections, since your lowest two grades will be dropped.

Myth of Discovery Essay: In this essay, you will reflect critically upon how the myth of the European discovery of America served to invent/conquer/colonize Latin America and its indigenous peoples in order to create a “new world”. You will also explore what you have uncovered about Latin America and the diversity of its peoples.

Film Exercise: Poets, novelists, and film-makers have played key roles in developing Latin American philosophy. In this assignment, you will develop your philosophical skills of analysis, synthesis, and interpretation by watching a film and reflecting on its meaning, value, and significance in relation to one of the course readings.
Oppression/Liberation Essay: In this essay, you will reflect critically upon the understandings of oppression and liberation developed by one of philosophers that we have read.

Digital Testimonio OR Written Autohistoria-Teoría: For your final, you will create a 3-5 minute digital testimonio/narrative relating one of the topics discussed in class to your own experiences or those of your family. Alternatively, you may write what Gloria Anzaldúa called an autohistoria-teoría (“a personal essay that theorizes”) that develops one or more of the topics discussed in class by drawing upon your own experiences.

Policy on Extensions & Late Work: All assignments, including papers, are to be completed by the date indicated on the syllabus. I do not mind granting extensions, provided that you let me know well in advance about your scheduling conflict. To ask for an extension, email me (alex.stehn@utrgv.edu) as soon as possible (a minimum of 24 hours) before the due date, briefly let me know why you need an extension, and be sure to propose a specific new due date. Otherwise, your request will likely be denied.

Scholastic Integrity: As members of a community dedicated to Honesty, Integrity and Respect, students are reminded that those who engage in scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and expulsion from the University. Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, plagiarism (including self-plagiarism), and collusion; submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person; taking an examination for another person; any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student; or the attempt to commit such acts. Since scholastic dishonesty harms the individual, all students and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced (Board of Regents Rules and Regulations and UTRGV Academic Integrity Guidelines). All scholastic dishonesty incidents will be reported to the Dean of Students. Instead of facing these serious consequences, please ask me for help if you are ever confused about what constitutes scholastic integrity or if you are tempted to violate this policy for any reason.

Core Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes: Upon completion of this course, students will have demonstrated mastery of the core curriculum objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication Skills, Personal Responsibility, and Social Responsibility. These objectives for core curriculum classes in Language, Philosophy and Culture are set forth by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). Each associated learning outcome (as defined by UTRGV) is listed here with a brief description of how the outcome will be accomplished and assessed in this course:

CRITICAL THINKING: Students will demonstrate comprehension of a variety of written texts and other information sources by analyzing and evaluating the logic, validity, and relevance of the information in them to solve challenging problems, to arrive at well-reasoned conclusions, and to develop and explore new questions.

Thinking about Latin American Philosophy offers an ideal opportunity to develop critical thinking skills. Every course text aims to present logically valid arguments (supported by true or at least plausible premises) that carefully consider all of the relevant information to solve both theoretical and practical problems, arrive at well-reasoned conclusions, and explore new questions. In other words, Latin American philosophical texts are a model for critical thinking. Learning to read, interpret, evaluate, speak, and write about these texts—in the very same critical spirit they were written in—provides ample opportunity to develop critical thinking skills. Critical thinking in the form of reading, interpretation, and evaluation will be assessed by pop quizzes and pop reflections. Critical thinking in the form of writing, interpretation, analysis, and creative response will be assessed by two essays, one film response, and the digital testimonio or written autohistoria-teoría.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS: Students will demonstrate the ability to adapt their communications to a particular context, audience, and purpose using language, genre conventions, and sources appropriate to a specific discipline and/or communication task.
This course is reading, writing, and discussion intensive, so much of the course will be dedicated to learning how to read, write, and discuss things in a philosophical way. In the context of class discussions, students will speak to their classmates and professor to communicate their interpretations of the text and evaluation of its major claims. In their written essays and film response students will present well-reasoned and well-organized analyses of philosophical theories, apply these theories to particular cases or problems, and demonstrate knowledge of the relevant information necessary to communicate, develop, and support their own philosophical positions. Regardless of whether students choose to record a digital testimonio or write autohistoria-teoría, they will be further honing their oral or written communication skills.

**PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY:** Students will demonstrate an awareness of the range of human values and beliefs that they draw upon to connect choices, actions, and consequences to ethical decision-making.

Through class discussions and major assignments, students will develop and demonstrate an awareness of how their own values and beliefs correspond or conflict with the various positions taken by philosophers in the course readings. Emphasis will be placed on the ways that factors such as geographical location, ethnicity, religious background, social class, language, gender, and sexuality form a matrix in which we make ethical choices. Students will also be responsible for advancing their own understanding of ethics beyond that of a naïve relativism or ethnocentrism in order to develop a more reflective understanding of how philosophers seek to include various and sometimes competing moral demands and cultural values in broader theoretical frameworks. More generally, by being asked to give reasons for why they believe what they believe, students will develop a greater sense of their personal responsibility to articulate, defend, and sometimes actually change their ethical positions and behaviors as they are introduced to key figures in Latin American Philosophy. Students will articulate their growing sense of personal responsibility in the first essay as well as their final digital testimonio or autohistoria-teoría.

**SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:** Students will recognize and describe cultural diversity, the role of civic engagement in society, and the link between ethics and behavior.

Students will demonstrate increased awareness of cultural diversity, both in terms of how it poses a problem to any philosophical attempt to develop an overarching theory and in terms of how any ethical or political solution to practical problems must successfully understand and navigate the diversity of values and cultures in the world. The course is structured to present the philosophical development of thinking about social responsibility as it emerges over 500 years of Latin American Philosophy. Students will articulate their growing sense of social responsibility in the second essay as well as their final digital testimonio or autohistoria-teoría.

**Students with Disabilities:** Students with a documented disability (physical, psychological, learning, or other disability which affects academic performance) who would like to receive academic accommodations should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) as soon as possible to schedule an appointment to initiate services. Accommodations can be arranged through SAS at any time, but are not retroactive. Students who suffer a broken bone, severe injury or undergo surgery during the semester are eligible for temporary services. **Brownsville Campus:** Student Accessibility Services is located in Cortez Hall Room 129 and can be contacted by phone at (956) 882-7374 (Voice) or via email at ability@utrgv.edu. **Edinburg Campus:** Student Accessibility Services is located in 108 University Center and can be contacted by phone at (956) 665-7005 (Voice), (956) 665-3840 (Fax), or via email at ability@utrgv.edu.

**Sexual Harassment, Discrimination, and Violence:** In accordance with UT System regulations, your instructor is a “Responsible Employee” for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and so must report any instance, occurring during a student’s time in college, of sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, domestic violence, or sexual harassment about which she/he becomes aware during this course through writing, discussion, or personal disclosure. More information can be found at www.utrgv.edu/equity, including confidential resources available on campus. The faculty and staff of UTRGV actively strive to provide a learning, working, and living environment that promotes personal integrity, civility, and mutual respect that is free from sexual misconduct and discrimination.

**Mandatory Course Evaluation Period:** Students are required to complete an ONLINE evaluation of this course, accessed through your UTRGV account (http://my.utrgv.edu); you will be contacted through email with further instructions. Students who complete their evaluations will have priority access to their grades. Online evaluations will be available April 11–May 2.
**IMPORTANT NOTE:** This syllabus was composed in good faith, with a schedule that will guide us throughout the term. Still, the professor may come to believe that reasonable adjustments are necessary. Any changes will be explained and communicated as far in advance as possible during class time or on Blackboard. Students are responsible for knowing about and adapting to any changes.

**Tentative Schedule:** (*Indicates text is also available in Spanish on Blackboard*)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading/Source</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wed, 1/17</td>
<td>Three Brief Introductions to Latin American Philosophy</td>
<td>Intro to the Course via Syllabus</td>
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<td>Wed, 1/24</td>
<td>The Discovery, Invention, Conquest, and/or Colonization of América</td>
<td>Enrique Dussel, <em>The Invention of the Americas</em> Ch. 2 (1992)*</td>
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<td>Mon, 1/29</td>
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<td>Enrique Dussel, <em>The Invention of the Americas</em> Ch. 3-4 (1992)*</td>
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<td>Wed, 1/31</td>
<td>Aztec Philosophy</td>
<td>Miguel León-Portilla, “The Birth of Philosophy Among the Nahuas” (1963)</td>
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<td>Mon, 2/05</td>
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<td>Miguel León-Portilla, <em>Aztec Thought &amp; Culture</em> (1963)</td>
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<td>Wed, 2/07</td>
<td>Spanish Philosophical Debates With vs. About the &quot;Indians&quot;</td>
<td>Bernardino de Sahagún &amp; Aztec Elders, “Colloquies of the Twelve” (1524)</td>
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<td>Mon, 2/12</td>
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<td>Bartolomé de las Casas, <em>In Defense of the Indians</em> (1550)</td>
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<td><strong>ASSIGNED:</strong> Myth of Discovery Essay</td>
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<td>Wed, 2/14</td>
<td>The Status of Women in Mexican Society (Aztec vs. Spanish)</td>
<td>Bernardino de Sahagún &amp; Aztec Elders, <em>Florentine Codex</em> Bk 6, Part VII (1569)</td>
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<td>Mon, 2/19</td>
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<td>Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, “Reply to Sor Philothea” (1691)*</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Political Independence from Spain &amp; Problems of “Latin American” Identity</strong></td>
<td>Simón Bolívar, “Jamaica Letter” (1815) &amp; “Address at the Congress at Angostura” (1819) Sarmiento, <em>Civilization &amp; Barbarism</em> (1845) &amp; Alberdi on “The Civilizing Action of Europe” (1853)</td>
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<td><strong>DUE:</strong> Myth of Discovery Essay (Bring to Class &amp; Upload to Blackboard)</td>
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<td>Wed, 2/28</td>
<td>José Martí, “Our America” (1891)* &amp; “My Race” (1893)*</td>
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<td>Mon, 3/05</td>
<td>José Enrique Rodó, <em>Ariel</em> (1900)</td>
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<td><strong>ASSIGNED:</strong> Film Exercise (can be turned in any day BEFORE the last day of class)</td>
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<td>Wed, 3/07</td>
<td>José Carlos Mariátegui, “The Problem of the Indian” (1928)*</td>
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<td><strong>SPRING BREAK (March 12-18)</strong></td>
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Liberation Theology & Philosophy of Liberation
Mon, 3/19  Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Toward a Theology of Liberation” (1968)*

Liberation Pedagogy
Mon, 3/26  Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Ch. 1 (1968)

**ASSIGNED: Oppression/Liberation Essay**

Indigenous Consciencization and Resistance
Mon, 4/02  Rigoberta Menchú, *My Name is Rigoberta Menchú & así me nació la conciencia* (1982)*
Wed, 4/04  Rigoberta Menchú, *My Name is Rigoberta Menchú & así me nació la conciencia* (1982)*

Indigenous Liberation
Wed, 4/11  SupGaleano, “Trump, Ockham’s Razor, Schrodinger’s Cat, and the Cat-Dog” (2017)*

**DUE: Oppression/Liberation Essay (Bring to Class & Upload to Blackboard)**

Bringing Everything Together: Ongoing Histories of Oppression & Rebellion in the RGV

**ASSIGNED: Digital Testimonio OR Written Autohistoria-Teoría**

Wed, 4/18  Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) Preface-Ch. 2
Mon, 4/23  Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) Ch. 3-4
Mon, 4/30  Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) Ch. 7

**DUE: Last Chance to turn in Film Exercise (Bring to Class & Upload to Blackboard)**

Wed, 5/02  Celebration of Learning & Review

**DUE: Final Digital Testimonio OR Written Autohistoria-Teoría (upload to Blackboard)**

Sec 02  Due Monday, May 7th no later than noon
Sec 01  Due Wednesday, May 9th no later than 9:45am