

UTRGV Phil 1305: Introduction to Latin American Philosophy Spring 2017
Section 01: T/R 1:40-2:55, Education Complex 2.102C (room might change)

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 12:30-1:30 and Thursdays, 3:15-4:15pm (and by appointment)
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Required Texts: none; all readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Course Description

The story of Latin America is a story of struggle—interior and exterior—involving invasion, conquest, and resilience. Latin America can be seen as a product of a tug of war between Europe and the U.S., intellectually and physically struggling for an identity (or set of identities) since its “discovery.” Until recently, whether or not there was a genuine “Latin American philosophy” was an open question, though as the years pass it is more widely recognized that philosophy has always been done in Latin America. Concurrent with fighting for and winning independence for the various countries that comprise it, Latin America has gained the legs on which it now stands intellectually. This course takes a philosophical look at Latin America, exploring themes including: civilization and barbarism, the fetishization of Europe and the US, liberation theology, Mexican and Mexican-American identity, racism in Latin America and the U.S.

Course Promises

This course focuses on the ideas, values, beliefs, and philosophies of Latin America, which expresses and affects their and our experience. In order to understand the human condition across cultures, we will begin by discuss who counts as a native and who counts as a foreigner. Reading Julio Cortazar’s “Axolotl” will put us in a good position to discuss the inside/outside rhetoric that functioned to enslave Native peoples in Latin America in the 16th Century. We will discuss the criteria for barbarism and civilization, and read how some early intellectuals like Bartolome de las Casas and Simón Bolívar began to challenge the categories.

Next, we will read accounts of racial pride coming from Latin America, with its correlate prejudices against darker-skinned Native peoples and, at times, against fledgling countries like the U.S. around the turn of the 20th Century. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, José Martí, José Enrique Rodó, José Vasconcelos, and José Carlos Mariátegui all contribute to the discussion connecting one’s intellectual pursuits with one’s lived experience. In particular, Latin America had to struggle to get free from Spain’s rule, both literally and figuratively, without simply falling into the hands of the U.S.

In the second half of the semester we will turn to Mexico and Mexicans in the U.S. We will begin with a recap of the first half of the semester, then turn to Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, an intellectual Hieronymite nun. Next we will read Octavio Paz, a Mexican author who attempts to describe what it means to be Mexican. We can debate whether Paz is right or wrong about his observations and analyses of the Mexican people. Jose Vasconcelos and Gloria Anzaldúa both think that brown is beautiful. We will end with some contemporary Mexican-American authors. By the end of the semester, you will know more about the history of Latin America as a history of ideas—ideas about freedom, oppression, identity, reputation, war, class, and race. On our last day we will have a fiesta with food from Latin America.

My Philosophy on Philosophy

Philosophy in Greek means “love of wisdom,” and during this semester we will discuss what this entails. We will think critically about questions that you have most likely already considered. I believe that every child is naturally a philosopher—we ask all kinds of big questions about the world. If you have ever asked yourself whether God exists, or about what happens when we die, then you have the heart of a philosopher. As we grow up, we often get dissuaded from asking these questions because they are difficult, and usually have no clear answer. As a result, we lose that sense of wonder about the world, but in this class you will have the opportunity to think about things for thinking’s sake.

Reading Practice

There will be reading for homework (on Blackboard) every night; your job is to read the texts before class and then reread them after we have talked about them. The more you read a passage, the easier it becomes to understand. Reading aloud is a good option, and reading together is great. You sometimes have to read the same paragraph four times to figure out what the author is saying. This is not because the author can’t write and it’s also not because you are “no good at it”; it’s because we as a society have forgotten how to read hard texts.

Text Policy: Whoever brings their text to class can be part of the class for the day. The text means paper: print-outs from Blackboard or books. No computers. If you don't have the text, you will be marked absent.

Our Community

In the classroom, we will think together and talk to each other, as though we like each other. This means I expect you to come to class and have something to say about what you have read. I have a strict **attendance policy**: You have 4 days for which you will not be penalized for missing class. These are your “sick days” to do what you please with. You may use your sick days for athletics, religious holidays, university activities, military service, illness, or any other reason. You do not need to bring me a doctor’s note. Apart from these four “free” sick days, your attendance grade will be averaged and will count for 10% of your final grade. If you are perpetually late to class, you will start getting half-credit for attendance.

En esta clase, se habla inglés, español, tex-mex, Spanglish, etc. You are encouraged to write and speak in the language that you think in. The most important thing to me is that this class get you to think critically, and for that to happen it must be relevant to your life. Your assignments should reflect that relevance, and should not feel like busy work.

Late Work and Email

Late work will be accepted within a reasonable time frame, for a reduced grade, upon approval from me. If you have consistent trouble turning work in on time, please come and talk to me during office hours. If you email me and I don't email back, then I haven't received it. Use: mariana.alessandri@utrgv.com, not blackboard.

Cell Phone and Computer Use

All cell phones and computers must be powered off at the beginning of class.

Policy Summary

1) Show up, 2) bring your daily reading, 3) put away your phone, and 4) don't plagiarize.

Summary of Grading

Attendance	10%
Civilization and Barbarism Essay (due Jan 31)	20%
Class Discussion Leadership	10%
Narrative Draft (due Feb 28)	10%
FESTIBA Presentation (Feb 28 & Mar 2)	10%
Mexican-American Philosophy Essay (due Apr 18)	20%
Digital Testimonio (due May 7)	20%
TOTAL	100%

Attendance (10%)

See above section on “Our Community.”

Essays (20% each)

You will write two 3-4 page essays this semester, relating your experience to the readings. More information on this later.

Class Discussion Leadership (10%)

Each class period two people will briefly present an outline of the reading (5-10 minutes total, divided between the two presenters), focusing on the author’s argument and support. Each presenter-pair must bring a one-page handout for everyone in the class, focused around an answer to this question: what is the author trying to convince us of? What is his/her support for the claims? You will be graded individually.

Narrative Draft (10%)

Your narrative will serve as the base of your digital testimonio. It should be personal and relate to the readings. It is due Feb 28. The narrative will be graded on clarity, depth, and how personal it is.

FESTIBA Narrative Presentations (10%)

On Feb 28th or Mar 2, you will present your narrative to the class. Your read narrative should be about 3 minutes, and you will be graded on how well you present it. We will have had a workshop on writing narratives the week before.

Digital Testimonio (20%)

As a final project you are required to create a 3-4 minute digital testimonio/story based around on one of the topics discussed in class as it relates to your lived experiences or that of your family. You will be given the appropriate training in how to create a digital testimonio, as well as see an example. During our first DT workshop, we will do an in-class writing exercise to help you get the narrative of your testimonio going. Then you will complete it outside of class and present it either on Feb 28 or Mar 2. The narrative should be personal, and it should somehow relate to the topics we have discussed. Your final digital testimonio grade will be based on your written and recorded narrative, your collected images related to the narrative, how well your music correlates to your video, and how it all flows together. You will be required to show your work-in progress during the second digital storytelling workshop and the class will give you feedback. You are welcome to talk to me during office hours if you want more feedback or help. On the day of the final (May 9) we will have a public presentation of each student's digital testimonio. **Due May 7 at midnight, uploaded to YouTube.**

Grading scale

A = Excellent (90-100) – If you receive an A in this class, it means you have not only met all of your requirements but have done so very well. You have dedicated yourself to this class, meaning that you have been here (on time) every required class period, you have carefully done your reading for the day, you have written careful essays, you have learned to express yourself in written and oral form, and you are a great classmate.

B = Good (80-90) – If you receive a B in this class, it means that you have met all of the requirements, and that you have done so consistently. If you earned a B it will mean that you are able to follow the lines of philosophical argument, but haven't put in the requisite energy and focus it takes to get an A in a philosophy class.

C = Satisfactory (70-80) – If you receive a C in this class, it means that you have met most or all requirements of this class. You may be good at memorizing, but that won't be enough in this class.

D = Below Average (60-70) – If you receive a D in this class, it means that either you were a poor community member or you performed below average on your assignments (or perhaps you failed to turn in one or more assignments).

F = Failure (below 60) – If you receive an F for this class, it means that either you missed too many classes, or you did not meet the requirements on this syllabus. If you receive an F, you will have another opportunity to succeed when you retake the course. Most people who fail stop coming to class pretty early on and don't turn in their assignments. It's easy to avoid failing this class.

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, 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.

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 in an environment free from sexual misconduct and discrimination.

Course Drops

According to UTRGV policy, students may drop any class without penalty earning a grade of DR until the official drop date. Following that date, students must be assigned a letter grade and can no longer drop the class. Students considering

dropping the class should be aware of the “3-peat rule” and the “6-drop” rule so they can recognize how dropped classes may affect their academic success. The 6-drop rule refers to Texas law that dictates that undergraduate students may not drop more than six courses during their undergraduate career. Courses dropped at other Texas public higher education institutions will count toward the six-course drop limit. The 3-peat rule refers to additional fees charged to students who take the same class for the third time.

Students with Disabilities

If you have a documented disability (physical, psychological, learning, or other disability which affects your academic performance) and would like to receive academic accommodations, please inform your instructor and contact Student Accessibility Services to schedule an appointment to initiate services. It is recommended that you schedule an appointment with Student Accessibility Services before classes start. However, accommodations can be provided at any time. **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.

Mandatory Course Evaluation Period

Students are required to complete an ONLINE evaluation of this course, accessed through your UTRGV account (<https://my.utrgv.edu/home>); 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 12-May 3.

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. Student learning outcomes will be regularly assessed to determine whether THECB objectives are being met by students completing core curriculum classes.

1. **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.
2. **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.
3. **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.
4. **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:** Students will recognize and describe cultural diversity, the role of civic engagement in society, and the link between ethics and behavior.

Learning Objectives for Philosophy Degree: This course may also be taken to fulfill a requirement for a B.A. in Philosophy. Students who graduate with a degree in philosophy from UTRGV are expected to have attained a certain level of intellectual development which is characteristic of the intense study of philosophy. The goals for all philosophy classes that count towards the major in philosophy include, in combination with the particular goals for the course, the following objectives:

1. **CRITICAL THINKING AND READING:** Students will demonstrate well-developed critical thinking and reading skills orally and in writing.
2. **HISTORY:** Students will describe the history of Philosophy, by identifying and distinguishing between the major historical and conceptual divisions of philosophy, the positions within those divisions, and major thinkers who contributed to those periods and specializations.
3. **COMMUNICATION:** Students will exhibit well-developed oral and written communication skills; will respond effectively to questions and criticisms of presented material.
4. **ALTERNATIVE POINTS OF VIEW:** Students will demonstrate the capacity to accurately present, analyze and evaluate historically underrepresented philosophical concerns, positions and traditions.
5. **PERSONAL, CIVIC, AND/OR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** Students will articulate and evaluate their various activities, identities, values, and goals in order to develop a flexible strategy for ongoing personal growth, community engagement, and/or professional achievement.