

**BOSTON UNIVERSITY**  
**Department of International Relations**  
**Department of Political Science**  
**Fall 2013**  
**IR 766/PO 768: Latin American Contemporary Issues Seminar**  
**W 5:00-6:20 PM**  
**154 Bay State Road (BSR), Room 102**

**Professor David Scott Palmer**  
**Office: 154 BSR, Room 406**  
**Office Hours: TH 10:30-1:00, and by appointment**  
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### **Course Rationale, Goals, and Organization**

This 2-credit seminar is required for graduate students in the Latin American Studies M.A. (LASMA) but is open to all who are pursuing other graduate programs and to upper level undergraduates with an interest in current events and broader contemporary issues in Latin America.

Our goals for the seminar are the following: 1) To gain a better understanding of the most important developments in or affecting the region as they are occurring; 2) To become more knowledgeable about contemporary Latin American issues, and particularly with one that you find of special interest; and 3) To help you relate current events and issues in the region to the broader contexts and frameworks offered in your other LASMA, International Relations, or Political Science courses.

We will meet each week to consider the most important events that have been occurring and to discuss some of the larger related issues. Our goal is to build our awareness of regional and specific country developments as part of the process of sharpening our skills as analysts of Latin America.

Key issue areas summarized below are intended to guide us in discussions and to highlight major concerns as expressed in writings about contemporary Latin America. You will want to select one specific issue area from them to explore more deeply during the seminar in your weekly review of current events (although you are certainly free to pursue some other issue area of particular interest to you).

1. Economic issues:
  - a. Effects of the recession in the “developed” world
  - b. Role of China and implications of a pivot towards Asia
  - c. Trends in poverty and income inequality reduction
  - d. Patterns of competing development models of economic liberalization vs. state expansion
  - e. The tension between economic growth and environmentally sustainable development
2. Political issues:
  - a. Recent and upcoming elections, outcomes, and implications
  - b. Trends within “left populist” governments and political groups
  - c. Ex-guerrilla groups as political parties in power or seeking to gain power
  - d. Levels of democratic consolidation and criteria for them
  - e. Political parties/organizations capacities and challenges
3. Governance issues:
  - a. Trends in social welfare programs
  - b. Citizen security challenges
  - c. Tax collection capacities and patterns
  - d. Judicial reforms and trends
  - e. Civil-military relations and degree of subordination to civilian authority
4. Social issues:
  - a. Criminal activity and its corrosive effects
  - b. Drug production and trafficking
  - c. Corruption
  - d. Civil society organizations and capacities
  - e. Ethnic groups and their search for access, respect, and redress
5. International relations issues:
  - a. Regional and sub-regional organizations; goals, dynamics, achievements
  - b. Territorial and maritime border disputes
  - c. Free trade agreements between the United States and Latin American countries
  - d. Immigration and remittances
  - e. “Intermestic” challenges within and between the United States, Mexico, and Central America
  - f. Cuba’s changing role in the region

## **Readings**

The basic reading for the seminar is the *Latin American Weekly Report (LAWR)*. This on-line publication covers current developments in the region, largely with a country focus. It has a solid reputation for balance, comprehensiveness, and accuracy. You will sign up for a 10-week subscription at a special student rate (\$25).

You will also have the option of subscribing to the print or digital editions of *The New York Times*, also at a special student rate as low as \$3 per week.

In addition, you will want to explore on-line or hard copy sources relating to the specific current issue you have chosen to explore more deeply in the seminar and to share with the rest of us. In our first meetings, we will exchange information about some of these sources, and I will provide you with several that are fairly specialized within the Latin America analyst community.

## **Seminar Organization**

Questions for discussion:

1. What's been happening in Latin America this past week? 15-20 minutes of exchange on events and their larger significance.
2. What interesting source(s) have you found that add information and insight to "your" issue of special interest? A summary presentation by each of you drawn from the 1 page paper you have prepared on the source(s).
3. What other issue developments merit discussion as well?

In addition, we will take advantage of specialists from time to time who can join us for part of the seminar to share their knowledge of a particular Latin American issue.

## **Evaluation**

Your grade will be based equally on the quality of both your participation and your brief written assessments, which you will turn in at the end of each seminar meeting.