Course Overview

Even a cursory read of major newspapers or a listen to news commentators would suggest that Latinos are among the most desired votes in national and state politics, perhaps more for their potential future role than for their reliable current contributions to politics. In order to capture this growing electorate, parties, candidates, and leaders are experimenting with new outreach strategies. The Latino position in national, state, and local politics has both substantive and symbolic dimensions. Even at the symbolic level, the outreach represents a significant improvement over the neglect that Mexican Americans and other Latinos long experienced in U.S. politics prior to the contemporary era. In this course, we will examine the foundations and contradictions of contemporary Latino politics.

This course also examines the role of Latino communities in shaping state and national politics in the United States. After we review the political history and political organizational strategies of Latinos, we will examine their contemporary modes of political organization; analyze public policy issues that concern them; evaluate the successes and failures of Latino empowerment strategies; and measure the electoral impact of Latino votes. Though this careful examination of Latinos in U.S. politics, we will develop a richer understanding of contemporary U.S. politics and will be able to develop some hypotheses about its trajectory in the 21st Century.

Course Readings

Readings are taken from two sources. I will ask that you read three books as well as articles/book chapters available on the class website. The books are available from local bookstores. I identify readings on the website with a "**." The books are:


Course Requirements and Grading

I will evaluate your performance in the class in two ways. These include: 1) three analytical essays on course readings and lectures and 2) a midterm during Week 9. Please note that your grade will be awarded based on the highest three grades from these four assignments.

Essays: I will assign three analytical essay questions throughout the semester. Each essay should be between six and eight pages. The questions are posted to the class web site.

These essays will ask you to evaluate arguments made in course readings and themes raised in class discussions. You will be able to answer the essay prompt based on the course readings; I do not expect you to do additional research.

The essays will be due by 5 pm on (Essay #1) Tuesday October 13, (Essay #2) Tuesday November 17, and (Essay #3) Friday December 4.

Essay should be posted to Drop Box in EEE on the due date. Prior to submitting the essay to Drop Box, I will also require that you submit it to TurnItIn.com for review. I will provide more specific instructions about using TurnItIn.com prior to the submission deadline for the first essay.

Midterm exam: The midterm exam is on November 24 (Week Nine). The exam will include short answer and essay questions that will ask you to analyze and synthesize class readings, discussions, and lectures. We will discuss the exact format prior to the exam and I will welcome your input on how to design an exam that best tests your knowledge of the material.

Grading: You will be required to complete three of these four assignments and each will be worth 1/3 of your final grade for the class. You may complete whichever three you prefer and I would encourage you to pick assignments that do not conflict with assignments in other classes. You may skip the final essay if you have completed the two previous essays as well as the midterm and are satisfied with the grades that you have earned on these assignments. If you are dissatisfied with a grade that you receive on one of these assignments, you may complete all four assignments; I will only count three highest grades when I calculate your final class grade.

Extra Credit: I will bring to your attention opportunities to attend events on campus that relate to Latino politics. I can’t predict in advance how many of these events there will be or when they will occur. If you hear of an event that you think might be relevant, please bring it to my attention. To earn extra credit, I will require that you attend the event and write a description of no more than one page summarizing the key points. You will submit these to Drop Box. The write-ups are due on the final day of classes for Fall (December 4) by 5 pm.

You can earn up to one point of extra credit (1 percent of your final grade) for each of these summaries that you submit, up to a maximum of 3 points. That said, I can’t guarantee that there will be three such events.
Course Schedule and Assigned Readings

September 24
1) Introduction to Class and Overview of Course Requirements
2) How do you Start (Political) History? Consequences for Latino Politics to When you Begin the Story?

Part One: Roots of Collective Political Demand Making

Week One (September 29 and October 1) – War, Destruction and Rebirth – The Roots of the Mexican American Experience
Gutierrez, introduction and Chapter Introduction, chapters 1-3 (pp. 1-116)

Video shown in class: The Lemon Grove Incident (available at the Library: LC2688.L47 L466 1985).

Week Two (October 6 and 8) – Pluralist Organizing in Pre-Civil Rights Era Mexican American Communities and its Limits (1940-1975)
Gutierrez, chapter 4-6 and epilogue (pp. 117-216)


Week Three (October 13 and 15) – Colonialism, Puerto Rico, and the Emergence of Puerto Rican Ethnic Identity


Analytical Essay #1 Due Tuesday October 13 by 5 pm.
Week Four – [October 20] Cuban Émigrés and a Different Path to Latino Ethnic Identification and Politics

[October 22] From Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, and Cuban to Latino: Community and Competing Conceptions of Politics


Part Two
Latinos and the Politics of Pan-Ethnicity

Week Five (October 27 and 29) – The Legal and Organizational Foundations of the Politics of Latino Pan-Ethnicity

Barreto and Segura, chapters 1-4 (pp. 1-78)


Week Six (November 3 and 5) – Latino Electoral Participation: Opportunities and Limits & Mobilizing Latino Electorates: Candidates, Campaigns, and Issues

DeSipio and de la Garza, chapter 5 (pp. 173-202)


Week Seven (November 10 and 12) – Latinos and National Elections: Lessons from the Past/Lessons for the Future with an Eye to 2016

Barreto and Segura, chapters 5-8 (pp. 79-172)


** Part Three  
** Looking to the Future:  
** Issues, Latino Empowerment, and Inter-Group Cooperation  

** Week Eight (November 17 and 19) ** – Latino Policy Agendas, Voting Rights, and Immigration Policies  
Barreto and Segura, chapters 9-12 (pp. 173-229)  
DeSipio and de la Garza, Introduction, chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 1-96)  

*Analytical Essay #2 due Tuesday, November 17 by 5 pm.*

** Week Nine (November 24) ** – Midterm  

** Week Ten (December 1 and 3) ** – Immigration, “Immigration Reform,” and the Restructuring of Latino Politics  
Review Gutierrez, chapter 6.  
DeSipio and de la Garza, chapters 3, 4 and 6 (pp. 97-172 & 203-223)  
Barreto and Segura, chapter 13 (pp. 231-234)  

*Analytical Essay #3 due Friday, December 4 by 5 pm.*