

INTL190: Beyond the Drug War: Truth, Justice, and Human Rights in Mexico

Fall Quarter, 2020

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Virtual Office Hours: [By appointment \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

In this course you will learn:

- *How and why the human rights movement has played a central role in shaping modern Mexico.*
- *Why drug cartels may not offer the best explanation for the violence in Mexico today.*
- *How victims of the violence survive and resist it, and why human rights have failed to address the violence.*
- *How people are trying to make peace and build a new response to violence that goes beyond traditional human rights.*

There are four things you need to know to get started:

First, everything about how the course will run is explained here, in the syllabus.

Second, all the course content—where you'll learn about Mexico, human rights, the drug war, and ways to build peace—is organized in four asynchronous modules. You'll get to work through them at your own pace, but you'll need to complete them by the end of the session.

Third, the major assignment for the course is an 18-20 page research paper. Instructions for the paper are found on the syllabus, and you should know that there are three parts to this assignment that do have fixed due dates, and the first is coming up soon, so you'll want to get started right away.

Fourth, although this is an asynchronous online course, you should not feel that it is some faceless, impersonal educational exercise. I've been teaching about Mexico for a long time, and working on Mexico policy issues for even longer, and I want you to feel as though you still have access to that experience even though the course isn't meeting in a classroom. There will be drop-in discussion sections through zoom, and I'm always available for one-on-one meetings to discuss the writing assignment or material from the course. You can learn a bit more about me by clicking on my name on the syllabus.

Before we dig into the material for this course, there are five things you should know:

1. Most of the course will be asynchronous: that means no live lectures and no mandatory discussion sections. You'll be able to work at your own pace and on your own schedule on readings and reflection essays.
2. Even though you can work at your own pace on course content, there are **four writing assignments** that have fixed due dates. This is to help you finish the 18-20 page research paper that is the core requirement of the course.
3. There are no exams or quizzes, but there are four reaction and reflection assignments due by the end of the course.
4. Even though there are no mandatory online meetings, I will hold non-mandatory drop-in discussions of readings and offer online office hours by appointment. Even though the course is online, you should not feel that it is an entirely impersonal, faceless experience.
5. This is an intensive capstone course. There's a lot to cram in, and while the readings and movies are carefully selected, you will need to plan on reading about 50 pages per week, devoting at least three to five hours per week to movies and written reflections (this is about half of what in-person classes), and another five hours per week to research and writing for your paper.

The course has, effectively, two parallel tracks:

- In the first, you will learn about what causes violence in Mexico, the strategies for responding to that violence, and the role of human rights.
- In the second, you will learn to write an 18-20 page argumentative research paper through a series of assignments that will guide your process. By researching a topic related to contemporary Mexico, you will also deepen your understanding of a particular issue.

Track 1: Course Content

The material for the course is organized into four units, not including the introduction and conclusion. You will work through them using the [module panel](#) in Canvas.

[Introduction: Democracy and Human Rights](#)

Exercise: Read and annotate introduction to Crow, "The Party's Over: Citizen Conceptions of Democracy and Political Dissatisfaction in Mexico"

Drop-In Discussion: 10/7

[Unit 1: Creating Human Rights](#)

Readings: Dolores Trevizo, “Political Repression and the Struggles for Human Rights in Mexico: 1968–1990s”; Sergio Aguayo et. al. “Neither Truth nor Justice: Mexico's De Facto Amnesty”; Julie Erfani, “Politics of Death in the Drug War”

Reflection Question: *What are the major challenges for human rights in contemporary Mexico? What kind of human rights abuses are occurring? How are they similar or different from the past?*

Drop-in Discussion: 10/21

[Unit 2: Making the Drug War](#)

Readings: Monica Serrano, “The Making of a Humanitarian Crisis”; Jo Tuckman, “Narco Troubles”; David Shirk and Joel Wallman, “Understanding Mexico's Drug Violence”; Christy Thornton, “El Chapo and the Narco Spectacle” Alexander Aviña, “Mexico’s Long Dirty War” Dawn Paley, “Drug War as Neoliberal Trojan Horse”

Reflection Question: *Which of the three perspectives best explains the drug war? Why? To what degree is the drug war about things other than drugs? Why?*

Drop-in Discussion: 11/11

[Unit 3: Surviving Violence](#)

Readings: Selections from Javier Valdez Cárdenas, *The Taken*; Falko Ernst, “The Life and Death of a Mexican Hitman”; Oscar Balderas, “Parents Search in the Cemetery of the Zetas”

Reflection Question: *Valdez, Balderas, and Ernst all narrate different kinds of stories about violence. What differences do you see between them? Where do you think these differences come from? Why are stories like this important? Why do you think each author chose to write the stories they did, and in the way that they did?*

Drop-in Discussion: 12/2

[Unit 4: Building Peace](#)

Readings: Selections from Froylan Enciso and Fernando Nieto, *Planters of Peace*; Marcela Turati, “Women, Me, and the War”

Reflection Question: *Of the four peacebuilding strategies, which is most important and why? What components of violence does it respond to? How does it connect to the challenges victims face?*

Drop-in Discussion: 12/9

Reflection Assignments:

You must complete all four reflection assignments to pass the class. **All reflections must be complete by 12/14.**

Each reflection is 1/4 of your base class participation grade – you *may* earn extra class participation points for completing all four reflections and by participating in the drop-in discussions, however this is not necessary to earn full credit for class participation. Should you desire feedback on a reflection earlier in the quarter, please reach out to me, otherwise I will hold off on grading them until the end of the quarter.

A reflection response that earns full credit will:

- Demonstrate engagement with the readings, videos, and other course materials;
- Contain original thought and analysis, and not just summarize or restate ideas from the readings;
- Be approximately 250-400 words long;

Track 2: The Writing Assignment

The writing assignment has three components:

1. A [research report](#) due 10/19.
2. An [annotated bibliography](#) and proposed research question due 11/2.
3. A [prospectus](#) due 11/16.
4. A [final paper](#) due 12/18.

Specific instructions for each assignment can be found on their Canvas assignment page.

In its broadest strokes, the paper assignment is to research and write a capstone paper on a topic of your choosing related to contemporary Mexico. You will develop a focused research question based on scholarly research and an arguable thesis supported by secondary and primary sources. Your focus may be historical, contemporary, or theoretical (meaning you may use Mexico as a case study for an established theory) but most importantly your paper will be argumentative not descriptive. You are encouraged to use the course's central questions as guides and inspiration, but they are not specific enough to serve as research questions for this paper.

This is a research paper, and research is at its core:

- You must use the library to access scholarly sources.
- You must read and understand the arguments made by scholars about your topic
- You must develop a research question: this question will derive from your research and will not have a definitive answer, either in scholarly research or common sense.

- You must develop a thesis to answer this question, this thesis will be based on research and you will use scholarly sources to support the claims you make in your argument.
- You must present an alternative answer to the question (a counterargument) based on research: this should not be an invention, but rather based on arguments from scholars that you find in your research.

There are, unfortunately no shortcuts around the research, and you should plan to devote significant time at the start of the course to understanding the topic you choose. Jstor, Project Muse, and Google Scholar can all be helpful places to start, but remember that basic keywords will return basic results. You must read and engage with your sources: follow citations to figure out what other sources examine a topic; notice the language your sources use and try using more “expert” keywords; don’t be satisfied with the first 10 results.

The best papers will have specific topics that evolve from initial research. You might, at first, be interested in what causes violence, but if you stop with the first few sources you find about the drug war, your paper will likely provide general, unconvincing answers. It’s important to keep digging and figure out (and understand) how scholars have offered very specific answers to the question.

A note on the library: There are lots of online resources available, including librarians who will help you with your research via chat or email. Take advantage of this.

- Start here: <https://ucsd.libguides.com/getstarted> (Links to an external site.)
- For information about the VPN (to access JStor) and other resources you will need: <https://library.ucsd.edu/ask-us/services-during-covid-19.html>Links to an external site.
- For a INTL190 specific guide: [https://ucsd.libguides.com/INT190 Ending Drug War in Mexico](https://ucsd.libguides.com/INT190_Ending_Drug_War_in_Mexico) (Links to an external site.)

Academic Integrity:

All work for this course must be your own; plagiarism will not be tolerated and will be reported. This applies to all writing assignments. If you have any questions as to what constitutes academic misconduct, consult the UCSD Academic Integrity Office website:

<https://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu/>Links to an external site.

The final paper will be submitted via Turnitin.com.

Grading Breakdown:

Research Report: 5%

Annotated Bibliography: 10%

Prospectus: 20%

Final Paper: 40%

Participation (via reflection assignments): 25%