

Political Economy of Migration

LACB 3000 (3 Credits)

Mexico: Migration, Borders, and Transnational Communities

This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description

This course focuses on structural causes of inequality and migration rooted in national and international economic policies and practices. Students will first be introduced to major theories of development that influence economic policy and then apply those theories to a deeper examination of how the global economy affects Mexico. The course narrows its focus from the global level to the national level in Mexico and then to the local level in Oaxaca. As a result, students will be able to connect local realities to trends in the global economy. In the latter part of this course, students will incorporate emerging studies on climate change, migration, and border enforcement as an additional structural cause linked to international economic policies. Finally, the course brings attention to the rich and inspiring grassroots movements in Oaxaca pursuing alternative forms of economic development.

Learning Outcomes

The Political Economy of Migration course comprises 45 class hours of instruction (3 credits). Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- *Compare and contrast* theories of economic development, how these explain global poverty and inequality, and how these propose to address them;
- *Describe* major changes in the global economy and their relationship to how Mexico approaches economic development;
- *Define* neoliberalism and *describe* specific examples of major changes to Mexico's economy and constitution as a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).
- *Describe* specific ways in which Oaxacans have been affected by national and international economic development policies that lead to greater levels of migration;
- *Analyze* the potential role of climate change in displacement and migration and the emerging challenges and responses from local, national, and international communities;
- *Articulate* how economic policies structurally cause or exacerbate conditions leading to increased migration;
- *Illustrate* ways in which Oaxacan communities are addressing development needs through alternative grassroots movements;

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English and Spanish, with readings, lectures, and discussions happening in either or both languages depending on the context.

Instructional Methods

SIT's teaching and learning philosophy is grounded in the experiential learning theory developed by Kolb (1984; 2015) and informed by various scholars, such as Dewey, Piaget, Lewin, among others. Experiential learning theory recognizes that learning is an active process that is not confined to the formal curriculum; "knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 2015, p. 49). Learning involves both content and process. Learning is holistic and happens through various life experiences upon which students draw to generate new ways of knowing and being. Learning involves a community and is a lifelong endeavor. Learning is transformational. The suggested four step-cycle of a *concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation* embedded in the experiential learning model is not linear and might not always happen in that specific order, as any learning is highly context dependent. These stages of taking part in a shared experience; reflecting on that experience by describing and interpreting it; challenging their own assumptions and beliefs to generate new knowledge; and ultimately applying new knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes in a variety of situations and contexts are important for students to engage in to become empowered lifelong learners.

Course Schedule

**Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs.*

The following modules occur during the first four weeks of program time in Oaxaca.

Module 1: Introduction to Development & Inequality

There are a great number of measurement tools, theories, and practices often managed by "developed" nations aimed at improving people's quality of life around the world. This module will examine the historical context that shaped the predominant development paradigms guiding practices today and use a critical lens to understand how and why development has and has not succeeded in decreasing poverty and inequality. This module will provide students with important new analytical frameworks that can be used as a foundation for understanding contemporary economic, environmental, and political issues related to inequality and migration in Mexico and beyond.

Cammack, P. (2014). *Global Politics: A new Introduction* (Edkins, J., & Zehfuss, M., Eds.). London: Routledge.

- Chapter 19: "Why are some people better off than others?"

Peet, R., & Hartwick, E. (2015). *Theories of Development: Contentions, Arguments, Alternatives* (3rd ed.). New York: Guilford.

- Chapter 1: "Introduction: Growth versus Development"

- Chapter 3: “From Keynesian Economics to Neoliberalism”

Robbins, P., Hintz, J., & Moore, S. A. (2014). *Environment and Society: A Critical Introduction*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

- Chapter 7: “Political Economy”

Module 2: Mexico in the Global Economy

Students will apply development concepts from the first module to an examination of how global economic processes influence changes in Mexico. Likewise, students will consider the ways in which the Mexican state leverages shifts in the global economy to institute change at home. Through an exploration of historical changes leading to the present moment, this module will allow students to place contemporary realities of Mexico, and specifically Oaxaca, in the context of historical economic and environmental change. As a result, students will have a strong grasp on the specific ways in which economies evolve for financial, social, political, and environmental reasons.

Weaver, F. S. (2000). *Latin America in the World Economy Mercantile Colonialism to Global Capitalism*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

- Chapter 5: “Import Substitution and Semi-Industrialization in Latin America, 1930-1970s”
- Chapter 7: “Debt, Democracy, and Uncertain Transformations: Latin America in a New World”

Morton, A. D. (2011). *Revolution and State in Modern Mexico: The Political Economy of Uneven Development*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, Inc.

- Chapter 2: “Mexican Revolution, Primitive Accumulation, Passive Revolution”
- Chapter 3: “Capital Accumulation, State Formation, and Import Substitution Industrialization”

Module 3: Mexico and Central America in the the Neoliberal Era

This module focuses on economic changes beginning in the 1980s that contributed to the spike in unauthorized migration to the United States when close to 1 million people were apprehended by the US Border Patrol per year. These economic policies, commonly referred to as “neoliberal”, included broad privatization, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). In this module, students will develop a comprehensive understanding of the contemporary economic moment and how it influences migration patterns.

Dickinson, E. (2017). *Globalization & Migration: a world in motion*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

- Chapter 3: The Global South

Morton, A. D. (2011). *Revolution and State in Modern Mexico: The Political Economy of Uneven Development*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, Inc.

- Chapter 4: “Neoliberalism and Structural Change within the Global Political Economy of Uneven Development”
- Chapter 7: “Uneven Agrarian Development and the Resistance of the EZLN”

Bacon, D. (2014). *Right to Stay Home: How US Policy Drives Mexican Migration*. Boston: Beacon Press.

- Chapter 1: "From Perote to Tar Heel"

Module 4: Root Causes of Migration in Oaxaca

In Module 4 students will focus on the specific ways neoliberal economics has affected communities in Oaxaca. Students will compare and contrast findings in the readings with the analyses of local community members and experts who can provide nuanced perspectives about the ways in which international economic policies have affected their livelihoods and whether they influenced their decisions to migrate to the United States.

Bacon, D. (2008). *Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants*. Boston: Beacon Press.

- Chapter 2: "Why Did We Come?"
- Chapter 3: "Displacement and Migration"

Bacon, D. (2014). *Right to Stay Home: How US Policy Drives Mexican Migration*. Boston: Beacon Press.

- Chapter 2: "Cursed by Gold or Blessed by Corn"

Wright, A. L. (2005). *The Death of Ramón González: The Modern Agricultural Dilemma*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

- Chapter 6: "Technology and Conflict"

****Course breaks for 10-14 day Southern Border Excursion****

The following modules occur during the final three weeks of program time in Oaxaca prior to the independent period.

Module 5: Climate Change and Migration

In this module, students will integrate the role of climate change into their analysis of the structural causes of migration. Climate change directly results from carbon emissions in an industrial, growth-based global economy based where there remains considerable inequality in which nations contribute the most to climate change and which nations will be most affected by rising global temperatures. Students will grapple with the challenges of identifying migration specifically resulting from environmental changes, the debates around whether to create an official category for climate "refugees", and the role of increasing efforts to seal international boundaries in anticipation of more migration from climate change.

White, G. (2011). *Climate Change and Migration: Security and Borders in a Warming World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Chapter 1: "Climate-Induced Migration: An Essentially Contested Concept"

Barnett, J. and Webber, M. (2012). *Climate change and displacement: multidisciplinary perspectives* (McAdam, J., Ed.). Oxford: Hart Publishing.

- Chapter 3: "Migration as Adaptation: Opportunities and Limits"

Miller, T. (2017). *Storming the wall: climate change, migration, and homeland security*. San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books.

- Chapter 1: “On the Front Lines of Climate and Borders”

Module 6: Oaxaca and Opportunities for the Future

In this module, students will focus on efforts to address poverty and inequality being carried out in Oaxaca by local and international NGOs and the federal and state governments. Students will also examine development visions from the bottom up as they learn from urban and rural grassroots movements pioneering alternative projects aimed at establishing viable futures for their communities. Students will discuss and apply their knowledge of economic development to these different approaches and consider the potential they have for reducing people’s need to migrate.

Esteva, G., Babones, S. J., & Babcicky, P. (2013). *The Future of Global Development: A Radical Manifesto*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

Description of Assignments:

Participation: All students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss assigned readings, to listen attentively to any lectures, to seek to understand the perspectives of their peers, to share thoughts and opinions about the topics of the course, and to otherwise engage in healthy exploration of the course themes in order to contribute to the collective learning of the group. (10%)

Oral Presentation: In pairs or small groups, students will present an economic development theory, an example of how it was applied in Mexico, and the short and long-term results of its application. (20%)

Paradigms Journal: Students will be introduced to numerous new concepts, paradigms, and theories throughout this course. Each student will keep a journal in which they record these new paradigms, define them, and critically reflect on their significance and value. Journals will be submitted four times over the course of the semester. (20%)

Futures Presentation: With their choice of medium, students will make presentations about possibilities for what sustainable, viable futures could look like for communities in Oaxaca and beyond. Students will draw from course readings and discussions, guest lectures, site visits, and other activities during the program. In their presentations, students will need to identify key problems and obstacles as well as concrete opportunities. (20%)

Final Essay: In the final essay, students will draw from their learning throughout this course to compare and contrast the economic challenges and local strategies of two communities visited in Oaxaca during the excursions. Students will need to consider historic economic changes stemming from global and national economic policies, environmental changes, the role of migration and remittances, cultural and consumption changes, and current efforts the communities are implementing to create viable futures. It is important that students take good notes during the excursions and begin this essay early in the semester as the excursions are spread out. (30%)

Assessment:

Participation	10%
Oral Presentations	20%
Paradigms Journal	20%
Futures Presentation	20%
Final Essay	30%

Grading Scale

94-100%	A
90-93%	A-
87-89%	B+
84-86%	B
80-83%	B-
77-79%	C+
74-76%	C
70-73%	C-
67-69%	D+
64-66%	D
below 64	F

Expectations and Policies

- Show up prepared. Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.
- Have assignments completed on schedule, printed, and done accordingly to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.
- Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating).
- Respect differences of opinion (classmates', lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.

SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Disability Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.