Description of the Course

The study of Cuba's politics presents opportunities to address issues of universal concern to social scientists and humanists in general, not just Latin Americanists. When is it rational to be radical? Why have Cuban politics forced so many individuals to adopt extreme positions? What are the causes of radical revolutions? Is pre-revolutionary Cuba a case of too little development, uneven development or maybe too rapid development? What is the role of leaders: do they make history, are they the product of history, or are they the makers of unintended history? Was the 1959 revolution inevitable? Was it necessary? How are new (radical) states constructed? What are the roles of foreign actors, existing political institutions, ethnicity, nationalism, religion and sexuality in this process? How does a small nation manage to become influential in world affairs, even altering the behavior of superpowers? What are the conditions that account for the survival of authoritarianism? To what extent is the revolution capable of self-reform? What are the most effective mechanisms to effect regime change? These are some of the questions that this course will address.

Purpose of the Course

As with almost everything in politics, there are more than just two sides to the issue of Cuba. One aim of the course is to expose you to as many different views and approaches as possible.

Although I care deeply about the study of Cuba, this course is more about an approach to thinking and learning than it is about Cuba—even though you will surely learn a lot about Cuba. The course emphasizes the politics of Cuba—domestic and international. But we will also look at other aspects: the economy, society, culture, demographics, etc. In addition, the course will cover a diversity of approaches to the study of Cuba. Again, the course will expose you to the way that political scientists think about Cuba and its politics, but it will also introduce the works of historians, sociologists, fiction writers, propagandists, film makers, economists, and policy analysts. In this sense, the course will be interdisciplinary, both in its focus as well as its approaches.

Lectures

Some lectures, especially in the first half of the course, will be run as debates: one lecture will look at a set of political events from a particular point of view; the subsequent lecture will look at the same set of political events from an alternative point of view. The point is to expose you to alternative views. Some lectures will parallel the controversies that you will be reading about; others will present yet another
viewpoint not found in the readings. I will always let you know before every lecture whether I am using a debate format or not.

Student Responsibilities

Readings: If you are not prepared to read approximately 150 pages per week, you should not take this class. You are required to complete the reading assignments prior to class meetings.

The readings can be classified into two categories. The first consists of theoretical and/or interpretative readings. You are expected to identify and apply the argument contained in these readings. The other category consists of “primary sources” such as private correspondence, government documents, public speeches of politicians, and data charts, as well as memoirs about the events under study.

Most of the readings are contained in the College’s e-reserves (see link below). Only registered students will have access to the readings.


Films: You are required to watch the following movies:

I Am Cuba (USSR/Cuba)
Crisis in Central America: Cuba (USA)
Memories of Underdevelopment (Cuba)
A Successful Man (Cuba)
Strawberry and Chocolate (Cuba)
Before Night Falls (USA)
The Lost City (USA)

Requirements: Item Percent of Final Grade

Paper 1 15 percent
Paper 2 20 percent
Paper 3 or 4 40 percent
Participation 20 percent

Papers: All students are required to write four papers. Paper 1 will be 2-pages long. Paper 3 will be 4 pages long and will be graded. Papers 3 and 4 will be take-home papers. I will only grade either one of Paper 3 and 4. You will decide at the end of the course which paper (3 or 4) you would like me to grade. Topics for all papers will be distributed at least one week prior to the due date. Papers will be based on class material; no outside research is necessary. Each paper will count approximately 20-40 percent of your grade, with your strongest paper counting more than the others. There is no final exam.
Participation: In addition to lectures, readings, and films, this course relies heavily on class participation. Students should come to class prepared to discuss the readings and films. The format of the class will be a combination of lecture and discussion: on some days, I will mostly lecture, on other days, I will mostly lead a discussion. Class discussion provides a chance for you to talk about the readings, work through the arguments, evaluate events, and engage in lively exchanges. Attendance at class meetings is mandatory. Attendance, however, is not the same as participation. The latter is the extent to which you make a qualitative contribution to the discussion in progress. It entails addressing the issues raised by me and your fellow students, as well as raising your own issues when pertinent. Class participation will be decisive in borderline cases. **I will never call on you to participate in class.** Thus, you must take the initiative to participate.

Discussants: At the beginning of the semester, you will be assigned to one of six groups of “lead discussants.” On designated class meetings, lead discussants will be expected to participate more actively and be better prepared than the rest of the class. The List of Assignments indicates what days each group is expected to be take the lead. When it’s your turn to be a lead discussant, I will expect your participation to be stellar.

Extensions: The policy is simple: No extensions will be granted (except in extreme circumstances, such as serious medical emergencies). Late papers will be marked down.
# Schedule of Assignments

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Class discussion</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tue Sep 6</td>
<td><strong>1. Introduction: Extremism in Politics</strong></td>
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| Thu Sep 8 G-1 | **2. Cuba on our minds, today and in the 1950s**  
| Tue Sep 13 G-2 | **3. The Necessary Revolution (Socio-Economic Structuralism)**  
| Thu Sep 15 G-3 | **4. The Unnecessary Revolution**  
| Tue Sep 20 G-4 | **5. The Necessary Revolution, part II**  
Discussion of Film: *I Am Cuba*. Watch only: Chapters 1-9 (0:00-39.55), 17-21 (1:00-1:47), 22-25, 27-34 (1:50-End) | Film: *I Am Cuba* |
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Thu Sep 22</td>
<td><strong>No Class</strong></td>
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<td>Thu Sep 29</td>
<td><strong>No Class</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 3</td>
<td><strong>Part II. The United States and Radicalism Abroad</strong></td>
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<td>Oct 4</td>
<td><strong>Paper 2 Due Oct 12</strong></td>
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<td>Oct 6/11</td>
<td><strong>No Class</strong></td>
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<td>Oct 13</td>
<td><strong>Film: Crisis in Central America</strong></td>
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| Tue Oct 18 | G-5   | **11. Constructing a Radical State: When is it rational to be radical?**  
| Thu Oct 20  | G-1   | **12. The Alliance with the USSR and the Bay of Pigs Fiasco: Why did the United States Hesitate?**  
Alexeev, Aleksandr. Cuba after the Triumph of the Revolution.  
Discussion of Film: *Crisis in Central America: Cuba* | 
| Tue Oct 25  | G-2   | **13. The Cuban Missile Crisis**  
**Guest Lecture by Prof. Bill Taubman (invited)**  
William Taubman.  
| Thu Oct 27  | G-3   | **14. The “New Man:” We will be like Che (Seremos como el Che)**.  
Film: *Memories of Underdevelopment* | 

**Part III. Labor, Gender and Sexuality in a “Worker’s Paradise”**
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<th>Reading/Note(s)</th>
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                              211-234, 290-294.                                                    |
| Mon Mar 29 |       | Film: *Strawberry and Chocolate*                                      | **Mon Mar 29**                                                              |
                              Americas Watch, pp. 1-68.                                           |
| Tue Nov 8  | G-1   | **17. Discussion of Memories and Strawberry**                         | **Wed Mar 31**                                                              |
                              A Student, Havana, Fidel Castro, Good-bye to the Chicken Farm, My  
                              Discussion of *Before Night Falls*                                   |
| Thu Nov 10 | G-2   | **Part IV. Coping with Extreme Circumstances**                       | **Paper 3**                                                                 |
| Thu Nov 17 | G-4   | **19. Cuba’s Special Period: Surviving Extreme Circumstances**       | Facio, Elisa. 2000. *Jineterismo During the Special Period*. In Eloise Linger  
                              and John Cotman, eds. *Cuban Transitions at the Millenium*. Largo, MD:  
                              International Development Options, pp. 55-74.                       |
|           |       | **Paper 3**                                                           | **Film: Bitter Sugar**                                                      |
                              Haney and Vanderbush, pp. 53-109.                                     |
<p>|           |       | <strong>Paper 3</strong>                                                           | <strong>Film: Bitter Sugar</strong>                                                      |
|           |       | <strong>Discussion of film:</strong> <em>Bitter Sugar</em>                                | <strong>Discussion of film:</strong> <em>Bitter Sugar</em>                                       |
| Thu Nov 17 |       | <strong>20. The Non-Transition: Explaining (Non)Democratization</strong>          | <strong>Discussion of film:</strong> <em>Bitter Sugar</em>                                       |
|           |       | <strong>Paper 3</strong>                                                           | <strong>Film: Bitter Sugar</strong>                                                      |
| Nov 22, 24|       | <strong>Thanksgiving</strong>                                                      | <strong>Thanksgiving</strong>                                                            |</p>
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<tr>
<td>Thu Dec 1</td>
<td>22. Change in Cuba today...                                            Debate between Omar Everleny Pérez and José Antonio Ocampo, <em>Americas Quarterly</em> (Spring 2011), pp. 24-27. Reading TBA.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thu Dec 8</td>
<td>24. Reading TBA                                                        Domínguez, Alzugaray and Ritter in Domínguez and Hernández.</td>
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