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Drug Use, Abuse and Trafficking: A Course on the Violence of Drugs and Drug Policy

Course Description:

Drug use, abuse and trafficking continue to be one of the most complex and controversial issues of our times. With the so-called “drug war” almost universally regarded as a dismal failure, and drug overdoses and addiction, particularly to opioids causing increasing death toll throughout the United States, there is no clear path forward. All of this has been happening with conflicts in Mexico still raging over who will control the lucrative sale of narcotics to their neighbors to the north. Beginning in earnest in 2006, this conflict has led to over 250,000 deaths in Mexico alone, leading to intense debates about drug legalization, amnesty, international interference from the United States, corruption and the nature of violence as a whole.

This class will explore drug use broadly, as an important aspect of our culture, history and politics, focusing more on how our treatment of drugs (criminalizing possession, sale and use) impacts society as a whole. You will be expected to keep up with current events and follow the development of key issues throughout the semester. The major focus of this course is Mexico, partly because it is one of the longest ongoing conflicts in the world, but also due to its connection to the United States, El Paso and the border.

Goals:

- You will be able to list the key figures (Mexican Politicians, Cartel leaders), organizations (Cartels and Government Organizations), events and regional characteristics of the drug violence in Mexico.
- You will describe recent trends in pop-culture (movies, television and music) as it relates to public perceptions of and reactions to drug violence
- You will analyze the different historical factors that led to the current violence
- You will critique the different interpretations of why this conflict is happening and the various proposed solutions from policy makers, politicians, academics and journalists

Requirements:

- Attendance is mandatory!
- Reading is mandatory! There will be an online quiz or group exercise before every class that represents a significant portion of your grade
- Familiarity with Spanish is not required although it will be **highly advantageous** when searching for additional materials
- This is a reading and writing intensive course designed to challenge pre-conceived ideas and understandings
- The subject matter for this course will **include adult themes**. This is a blanket trigger warning for anyone worried about exposure to images, stories and often videos of violent events. Students are required to be respectful and mature while dealing with this sensitive topic. If, for any reason, anyone becomes uncomfortable in the class, please see me immediately.

Grading:

50 points - In class exercises, reading quizzes and participation

50 points - Mid term

40 points – Group or Individual Presentation

60 points - Portfolio

50 points - Final Essay

50 Points – Final Exam

300 points total

***Note* There are more possible points available in the class**

*All assignments may be written **in Spanish or English***

In class exercises and participation will include a professional development component, i.e. how does one present an argument? How to make a “good” power point. What are valid sources for an academic paper and how do you cite for direct quotes and paraphrases. These are universal skills that will be expected of each student.

Reading Quizzes – there will be an exercise or reading quiz **every class period**. These will likely be online and you will have time at the beginning of class to take the quiz. The total for all reading quizzes and exercises is greater than 50 possible points.

The Mid-Term will test understandings of the who, what and where of the drug violence and how it has formed over time. It will also cover your knowledge of concepts that we discuss in class.

Portfolio: Students will follow developments related to drug trafficking throughout the semester. This will require setting up google alerts and consistently searching for articles. You will hand in three installments of your portfolio during the semester and each portfolio will contain links and citations for your news article and brief (1-2 page write up describing the issues at hand). You will write an analysis of these events for your final paper.

Group Presentation In groups, you will explore one issues from your portfolio in depth. You will be required to find primary and secondary sources to analyze and draw conclusions. Topics may include legalization of drugs, U.S. intervention in Mexico, Free Trade, gun policies etc.).

Final Essay: You will contextualize the issues you have been working on in your portfolio by connecting it to the bigger themes in class. Think, how can we interpret the arrest of the governor or former general in Mexico based on other work on corruption etc.? You will work in groups to comment and give feedback to each other's papers on the second to the last week in class. **It will be ten to fifteen pages, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font with standard margins and include ACADEMIC references.**

Classroom Ethics:

In addition to University of Texas El Paso guidelines, the class requires a level of maturity and sensitivity beyond what is normally expected. This is a difficult, personal and extremely sensitive topic, which requires the greatest level of respect both to the subject and to fellow classmates. I require that we avoid at all cost value laden judgments such as "good guys" and "bad guys." The purpose of this class is to display the complicated, interwoven nature of violence regardless of how difficult it is to understand. Critical dialogue and debate are essential for us to develop a complex understanding that acknowledges all perspectives. All classmates must be shown the utmost respect. I encourage any student that feels they have been disrespected, or if they are simply having problems with the subject matter, to please see me at once.

REQUIRED READINGS:

Bullosa, Carmen & Mike Wallace. *A Narco History: How the United States and Mexico Jointly Created the Drug War.*

Bobrow-Strain, Aaron. *The death and life of Aida Hernandez: a border story.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019.

All other readings will be provided on Blackboard in PDF format, or, you will be asked to download the texts from Google Scholar or the UTEP library. However, here are some recommended texts that could be helpful in your course work.

Campbell, H. (2009). *Drug war zone: frontline dispatches from the streets of El Paso and Juárez*. University of Texas Press.

Gibler, J. (2011) *To die in Mexico: dispatches from inside the drug war*. San Francisco, CA, City Lights Books

Slack, J. (2019). *Deported to Death: How Drug Violence is Changing Migration*. University of California Press.

Student responsibilities and obligations:

Regular class participation is expected of all university students. Due to the unique circumstances of this semester in person attendance is not required, however, when attending online lectures, you must participate and ask questions. If this system is being abused, we may reassess during the semester. Attendance is excused, however, on religious holidays for students affiliated with that religion.

Reasonable behavior is also expected of all students. "Reasonable behavior" includes:

No cell phone use. Please turn them off before you enter class.

No email or internet use in class.

No talking over the instructor or other classroom activity.

No reading other materials during class.

Being polite and civil in the classroom.

If you fail to abide by such basic behavioral guidelines you may be asked to leave the classroom. Students found using their cell phones or laptops for nonacademic purposes will have a private meeting with a member of the teaching team. Students who commit a second violation will have their participation grade reduced.

Academic Honesty Statement

The course will follow the University of Texas at El Paso's policies on academic honesty. These policies can be found at <http://studentaffairs.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=4386>

Academic dishonesty is prohibited and is considered a violation of the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures. It includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, and collusion. Cheating may involve copying from or providing information to another student, possessing unauthorized materials during a test, or falsifying research data on laboratory reports. Plagiarism occurs when someone intentionally or knowingly represents the words or ideas of another person's as ones' own. And, collusion involves collaborating with another person to commit any academically dishonest act. Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Violations will be taken seriously and will be referred to the Dean of Students Office for possible disciplinary action. Students may be suspended or expelled from UTEP for such actions.

Academic dishonesty is an assault upon the basic integrity and meaning of a University. Cheating, plagiarism, and collusion in dishonest activities are serious acts which erode the University's educational and research roles and cheapen the learning experience not only for the perpetrators, but also for the entire community. It is expected that UTEP

students will understand and subscribe to the ideal of academic integrity and that they will be willing to bear individual responsibility for their work. Materials (written or otherwise) submitted to fulfill academic requirements must represent a student's own efforts. Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. **EVERYTHING YOU HAND IN WILL BE RUN THROUGH PLAGIARISM SOFTWARE WHICH TELLS ME EXACTLY WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR PAPER IS NOT ORIGINAL.** *I will be forced to take action against anyone who fails to cite sources adequately.*

All material submitted must be the student's own work. Ideas and expressions cited from the work of others must be credited appropriately. Avoid plagiarism by giving credit where credit is due, using quotation marks when using words directly from another source, and preferably putting things in your own words. I prefer your own phrasing, even if it is imperfect, to a beautifully phrased statement that is borrowed from some other source. Violations will be referred to the Dean of Students Office for possible disciplinary action. Students may be suspended or expelled from UTEP for such actions.

Academic Assistance and Disability Statement

In Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, if a student needs an accommodation then the Center for Accommodations and Support Services located at UTEP need to be contacted. If you have a condition that may affect your ability to perform successfully in this course, you are encouraged to discuss this in confidence with the instructor and/or the director of the Center for Accommodations and Support Services. You may call (915) 747-5148 for general information about the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the rights that you have as a UTEP student with a disability. You also can visit the CASS website at <http://sa.utep.edu/cass/> or the CASS office in Room 106 East Union Building. Individuals with disabilities have the right to equal access and opportunity. It is the student's responsibility to contact the instructor and the Center for Accommodations and Support Services at The University of Texas at El Paso.

Tentative Schedule:

MODULE1 – INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the course, discussion of goals

Wednesday 01/18 – *Intro, goals and syllabus discussion*

Monday 01/23 – John Gibler, 2011, *To Die in Mexico*

Wednesday 01/25 – Slack – *Deported to Death Chapter-1 - 2*

MODULE2 – HISTORY AND POLITICS

History and Policy

Monday 01/30 – A Narco History – Chapter 1 - 3

Wednesday 02/01 – A Narco History – Chapter 4 - 6

Monday 02/06 – Narco History Chap - 7-9

Wednesday 02/08 – Narco History Chap 9-12

MODULE3 – Policing the Narcostate

How drugs move: From the fields to your doorstep!

Monday 02/13 – Dealing Drugs – Philippe Bourgois, 1989, Crack in Spanish Harlem

Wednesday 02/15 – Quinones – Dreamland

Drug Production and History

Monday 02/20 – **Mid-Term 1**

Wednesday 02/22 – Fentanyl Inc.

Gender, Drugs and Migration

Monday 02/27 – Bobrow Strain – Aida Hernandez – Prologue, Part 1 -2

Wednesday 03/01 – Bobrow Strain – Aida Hernandez – Part 3 – 4, Epilogue

MODULE 4 – POPULAR CULTURE AND EL NARCO

Living with Drug Violence: Faith, Followers and Revelers

Monday 03/06 – Price, *On Sinners and Saints: Malverde*

Wednesday 03/08 – Michalik, *Santa Muerte*

MODULE5 – HOW DO DRUGS AND VIOLENCE INTERACT WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD?

Monday 03/13 – Spring Break

Wednesday 03/15 – Spring Break

Impacts of Drugs and Violence continued...

Monday 03/20 – Fontes, O’Neil – La Visita: Prisons in Guatemala **Turn in Portfolio #1**

Wednesday 03/22 – Presunto Culpable – Film

MODULE6 – WHAT CAUSES DRUG VIOLENCE AND HOW CAN WE STOP IT?

Prisons and Incarceration

Monday – 03/27 – Shane Bauer Prison Guard

Wednesday – 03/29 – Shane Bauer Prison Guard

Causes of Drug Violence

Monday – 04/03 – La Noche de Iguala – Anabel Hernandez

Wednesday – 04/05 – Agnew – Femicides and Cartel Violence

Monday 04/10 – Gendered Violence – Howard Campbell, *Female Drug Smugglers*,

Wednesday 04/12 – Zizumbo - *Auto-Defensas* - **Turn in Portfolio #3**

Conceptualizing Violence

Monday 04/17 – Perspectives on Violence – Bourgois and Scheper Hughes

Wednesday 04/19 – Michael Taussig – Loic Wacquant

MODULE7 – WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Recovering from Violence: Where do we go from here?

Monday 04/24 – Oglesby Ross - Genocide

Wednesday 04/26 – Lessing – Making Peace in Drug Wars

Week 15 - *Recovering continued*

Monday 05/01 – TBA

Wednesday 05/03 - Last day of class

FINAL EXAM – Date - TBA

Draft Syllabus