



Syllabus | DSS 5310: Strategic Survey of the Americas

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Course Dates | March 14th, 2022 – May 1st, 2022

Classes | Online Please Note | This Syllabus Subject to Change – please let me know if you spot any typos/confusions

Instructor & Course Introduction

Hello all, and welcome to DSS 5310 'Strategic Survey of the Americas'. This course aims for a broad introduction to both the key history of the United States' foreign relations within its hemisphere, and some of the core contemporary strategic issues of today in the Americas. We will trace continuities and changes across a broad period and ask probing questions about the U.S.' approach towards its geographic neighbors.

A little about me, for anyone who haven't 'met' me yet. I moved to El Paso, TX from the UK after completing a doctorate in International Relations (IR). My doctorate explored U.S. security interaction with Mexico in the context of Mexico's drug-related security crisis, U.S. Homeland Security, and North American regional security. My major research interests are in U.S. foreign policy and grand strategy, especially around security cooperation and North American regional security. How the U.S. defines, pursues, and achieves its national security is of course key to its foreign relations and wider strategy. As the U.S.' immediate neighborhood the Western Hemisphere is key to the development of how the U.S. 'does' foreign relations as well as being, be geographic default, a key strategic area. This time, this class is going to feel a little detached from the major events happening in Europe around Russia's invasion of Ukraine. However, that doesn't mean that security issues in the Western Hemisphere just stop. Plus, there are already regional ramifications happening in the Americas!

I have taught courses in a variety of topics within IR and Security Studies both in the UK and now in the U.S. I have been working at UTEP for something like seven years now (I lose track!), and I am very pleased to be part of such an excellent program within Criminal Justice.

Contacting Dr. Ashby

- You can email me directly. I will always try and respond to you within 24 hours, and although this may not always be possible, I will respond as soon as I am able.
- You can call me at my Google Voice number – 575 518 4459. I may not always be able to respond immediately, but I will get back to you if you leave a message.
- We can also set up Zoom, Teams, or Blackboard Collaborate sessions to meet virtually. Email me to set these up!
- You can also use the Help Board for the course in **Blackboard** - our online 'classroom' where we will be doing much of our work. Use the Course Help Board if you have a general question that you think others may benefit from seeing an answer to.

Information in the Syllabus

This Syllabus document gives a core overview of the course. However, do pair it with two other documents I will provide. This will all also be available on Blackboard.

[Full Course Overview](#) | This provides a clear breakdown of each Module; its required readings, core questions, and work due. It is a quicker and fuller reference resources to use *once* you are actively moving through the course.

[Work Guidance](#) | This gives deeper guidance and advice for the coursework

COVID-19 – Dealing with Impacts

This is of course a fully online program, so it can be easy to think ongoing events right now do not affect us. But of course, they do. You may have increased work responsibilities (I know I do!) You may have family responsibilities and childcare (I know I do!) Plus, although I hope you are all staying safe, the vaccine is accessible, and cases are thankfully dropping across the nation, we might experience illness.

I do want you to know I am here to help. Please reach out if you have any concerns or challenges. If you do become ill, prioritize your health, and do not worry about the course – we have avenues to deal with the fallout academically. Keep an eye on emails, and I will keep you posted if necessary.

Online Classroom

We will use Blackboard as our online classroom., I'll post all the necessary course materials and module materials on here.

- There are modules for each week, with readings and other materials posted.
- There is an official graded **Discussion Board** for some modules which will be assessed, as detailed below. I will provide a variety of prior material for each module to help you with this activity.
- There will also be a **Discussion Space** in each module place to discuss the week's topics with each other more freely. I will try and post interesting material here on a more ad hoc basis, and we can use it to discuss contemporary developments and news stories. This is graded, as discussed below and in the Work Guidance.
- You'll also upload your **Final Assignment Plan** and **Final Assignment** here.

Course Description

This course serves as an introduction to the history and contemporary nature of U.S. foreign and strategic relations with its hemisphere. Taking a historical and thematic approach, we will establish core strategic interests for the U.S. in its region, asking questions over the course's length about continuity and change. We detail how the U.S. historically conceived of 'Latin America' and the Caribbean, and set about achieving dominance, leadership, influence, hegemony, or even empire there (dependent on your interpretation). Moving through the Cold War we discuss how the U.S. set about securing its strategic interests within a wider global context. We note and debate the changes (or otherwise!) in U.S. relations with its closest neighbors as the Cold War ended.

We will then move through some core contemporary strategic issues in the Americas; drugs, transnational crime, and North American security (Canada is part of this region, too, don't forget!) We use case studies in Colombia, Central America, and North America to open up these issues, but don't feel limited by these in class and in your work. Again, continuity and change figure as key questions, as we ask whether we see connections from the past in how the U.S. conceptualizes these 'newer' security questions, and how their embedded nature connects to choices and events in the past. However, we also ask practical questions about the efficacy of U.S. policies and approaches and try to learn more about these challenges and the countries involved for their own sake.

Finally, we round off the course by asking whether the Western Hemisphere remains (enough of) a strategic priority to the U.S. given wider changes in the world around the 'return' of great power competition (GPC), the situation in Venezuela, and what the future may hold. This module becomes all the more important with the invasion of Ukraine and its global ramifications.

Learning Objectives

The main aim of the course is to structure and broaden students' understanding of historical and contemporary strategic issues and academic debates in the Western Hemisphere, and to give them the critical and analytical tools to do so. Through our work together, and most importantly your own independent research, thinking, and analysis, you will be expected to have a strong understanding of the key ground we will cover. On completion of the course, students will be able to demonstrate:

- Knowledge of the key history of U.S. foreign relations and strategic interests and actions in the Americas, especially Latin America;
- Understanding of the key debates in this history;
- Ability to identify analyze, and evaluate the assumptions made by different approaches to the history of U.S. relations with its hemispheric neighbors;
- Critical awareness of the apparent changes to U.S. hemispheric relations and strategic interests therein after the Cold War;
- A deeper understanding of a selection of contemporary distinct issues and concerns for U.S. strategic interests in the Americas – democracy, drugs, transnational organized crime, North American regional security;
- An ability to critically evaluate the usefulness / applicability of contemporary approaches to modern day strategic/security issues in the hemisphere;
- A greater understanding of the Americas as a strategic priority for the U.S. into the 21st Century
- An ability to consider and debate where the region fits in a world of GPC and following Russia's invasion

Course Module Breakdown

Here is a simple at a glance breakdown of the weekly module topics on the course. **However**, refer to the **Full Course Overview** and **Blackboard** for more detail. Please see next page:

Week	Module	Class Start
1	Introduction Beneath the United States? The Western Hemisphere in the U.S.' Historical Imagination	03.14.22
2	The U.S. as Hemispheric Imperial Power? Strategic Interests and the Cold War	03.21.22
3	After the Cold War Democratization and Shifting Concerns?	03.28.22
4	Strategic Challenge I - Drugs	04.04.22
5	Strategic Challenge II - Transnational Crime	04.11.22
6	Strategic Challenge III – North American Security	04.18.22
7	Making the Hemisphere Important Again? The Americas and U.S. Grand Strategy into the 21 st Century	04.25.22

Textbook

We will use the following as our textbook. Copies should be available online as an ebook (links below). Please let me know if it is tough to get this book, it seems its availability may have changed.

- Gregory B. Weeks [U.S. and Latin American Relations](#) 2nd edn. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015)

Task Breakdown, Due Dates, and Overall Grading

Tasks within the course are below. Note – they are a little less than those in DSS 5302, because I know some of you are taking both and wanted to ease the load in this course a little.

Activity	% of Overall Grade	Due Date
Student Introduction	2%	03.20.22
Weekly Open Discussion	10%	<i>Each week</i> - but see Work Guidance
Discussion Pieces (3)	36% (12% each)	In Modules 2, 4 and 6
Final Assignment Plan	11%	04.15.22 11.59pm
Final Assignment	40%	04.29.22 11.59pm
Course Evaluation	1%	Extra Credit Opportunity
Total	100%	

The *overall* achieved grades will be given numerically in percentages on the UTEP grading scale:

59 □ (F) | 60-69 (D) | 70-79 [C] | 80-89 (B) | 90-100 (A)

Course Expectations and Key Advice

My Expectations of You...

My expectations are straightforward - I expect you to try your best on this course, keep to deadlines - or keep me informed if you need some extra time - and complete the work required! This course relies on the participation of all the people in the class to make it successful. The pace of these 7-week courses is pretty frenetic and requires significant motivation and self-discipline.

As this is a graduate course, the reading is quite extensive, and very important. This is the key thing I expect each week – for you to have completed some of the required reading. This reading, and some extra effort, is key to your Discussion Pieces and in the Final Assignment. Indeed, reading is the key to success! In my experience, there is almost always a correlation between those who demonstrate they have read carefully and widely during the course and those who get the highest marks!

What you can expect of me

You should expect flexibility from me and understanding of any situations that might impact your work.

You should always feel comfortable approaching me for help, guidance, and advice. If you do need something, let me know. I will endeavor to respond to any email queries within 24 hours. I really do encourage you to contact me about your assignment topics early on. I will also be understanding of personal circumstances affecting work and deadlines – as long as we communicate. More on that below.

Instructions and what you need to do to perform well in particular assessment tasks and on the course as a whole should be clear from the material provided you within and without of class.

I will endeavor to provide assessment feedback within seven days of the due date. I will let you know if there is any likely delay to that. I have found this tougher going with new responsibilities as Director/Advisor, some personal changes, and with recent events. If I am delayed, deadlines for you will be adjusted accordingly.

Expectations of each other!

If there is anything you are unsure of, let me know! Again, communication between us will only ever help.

If you require content-related help and support, please reach out. You can use the Help Forum in the Blackboard shell - if you are wondering about something, probably other people are wondering too, and you are helping everybody out by being the brave one who asks! Plus, you can of course contact me directly anytime. I will aim to help with content, and with any situations that are affecting or likely to affect your work. I am always available! You just need to reach out – you won't find out unless you ask! ☐

Be courteous in online communication. Stick to the rules and expectations of academic integrity! More on those below, too!

Late Policies

As this course lasts only 7 weeks, it is *essential* to be organized and manage your time wisely.

However! If, because of work, illness or family emergency, you find yourself struggling to keep up with what is expected, please email me as soon as possible. I know that on occasion life does of course intrude on other plans! As I mentioned above, I am aware that you have existing commitments and responsibilities. I will be flexible as long as you communicate with me!

If you require an extension on course work because of extenuating work, health or family reasons, email me **at least 12 hours before** the relevant assignment deadline. Briefly explain your situation and request an extension of a specific length (e.g. 1 day). I will reply as soon as possible. Depending on the case, you may need to submit supporting documentation (e.g. a doctor's note).

In cases where an extension has not been arranged and no contact has been made between me and the student, work submitted late will be subject to a penalty of 5% per day.

Assignments will not be accepted after they are 5 days late and there has been no communication between us; they will be given a grade of 0.

IMPORTANT! I will work with you on these issues! I know how busy you all are in the MDSS program, often with full time work commitments and everything else life throws at us! All I ask is that you make sure you let me know what is going on, and I will help.

Academic Integrity

As a UTEP student, you are expected to demonstrate academic integrity. In particular, you must properly identify and provide references for *all* material that you quote or paraphrase.

Cheating, plagiarism and collusion are all violations of the UTEP [Handbook of Operating Procedures](#). Again, for more on this see the relevant section of the [Curriculum and Classroom Policies](#). Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will be referred to the Dean of Students Office for disciplinary action.

NOTE! Large tracts of texts copied verbatim, even if you have a reference for them, can be considered technical plagiarism, especially if they are not indicated with quotations. It *definitely* will not gain good grades as you won't show your own work. Repeating your own work is a form of self-plagiarism. In both cases, action can be taken accordingly.

We will cover this again in class. However, if you have any questions or concerns about this please do let me know. If in doubt – check!

Evaluations

We will have an official evaluation near the completion of the course through UTEP.

UTEP greatly appreciates your input and opinion on courses. From a personal perspective, I take your feedback seriously and will always try to incorporate it into the course where appropriate. We therefore greatly appreciate you taking the time to complete these evaluations.

IF I GET A 70% EVALUATION RESPONSE RATE, I WILL GIVE EXTRA CREDIT!

The Online Learning Community

Learning relies on the participation of all the people in the class to make it successful. You should actively engage in the course and be courteous and thoughtful at all times. Before you begin the course, take a few minutes to review the [core rules of online communication](#). The key thing - be as respectful online as you would offline! Disagreement is healthy and natural; insults and *ad hominem* are not! Read other's post carefully, respond with mutual respect, and remember we're a community learning together.

Other Important / Helpful Information

UTEP Course Drop Policy

If unforeseen circumstances happen where a drop is necessary, *students* are responsible for initiating any course drop. It is the student's responsibility to determine how dropping courses may affect financial aid. **Students are limited to dropping no more than 6 courses over their entire academic career of all courses taken at any public college or University in Texas.** **You should contact me as your advisor about this.**

- a) Students who drop a course **before the "official census date,"** the course will not appear on the transcript, and doesn't count toward the 6-course drop limit.
- b) Dropping a course **after the official census date, but before the "course drop date"** will generate a "W" in the course—although the drop shows on your transcript, a "W" does not lower your GPA. However, a "W" counts against your 6 drop limit.
- c) If the course is dropped **after the "course drop date"** or if the student just stops participating, taking tests, etc., UTEP requires the instructor to issue an "F" in the course that permanently remains on the transcript.
- d) UTEP also allows instructors to administratively drop any student because of too many times the student fails to submit assignments, discussion questions, or because of disciplinary reasons. In this case, the student will be notified of the course drop through their UTEP student email account. A "W" or an "F" will be issued. A "W" for these reasons counts against the 6-drop limit.

Disability Statement

Individuals with disabilities have the right to equal access and opportunity. If you have a condition that may affect your ability to perform successfully in this course, it is your responsibility to contact [The Center for Accommodations and Support Services](#) (CASS) at **(915) 747-5148** (voice or TTY) or cass@utep.edu. CASS has a new portal for students and instructors that makes the whole system electronic – there's information in the link above. You are also encouraged to discuss this in confidence with me, preferably before classes begin.

Copyright & Fair Use

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