



SPECIAL TOPICS IN LATIN AMERICAN AND LATINO/A STUDIES

Summer 2012
(LAST 484.001)

Professor: Lea Ramsdell
Office: LA4010E, ext. 5369
Office hours: MW 1:30-2:30 or by appointment
E-mail: ramsdell@towson.edu

CATALOG DESCRIPTION: SPECIAL TOPICS IN LATIN AMERICAN AND LATINO/A STUDIES (3) Study through lectures and discussions of interdisciplinary topics selected by the instructor. May be repeated for a maximum of 6 units. Prerequisite: consent of instructor.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: In Fortaleza, students will work a minimum of 12 hours in a non-profit community organization serving low-income populations. They will complete several readings and assignments related to social and economic issues in Brazil before the departure date in preparation for their service-learning experience. Once they have begun their service, they will reflect upon their encounters in the community in oral and written form. They will also research the sociopolitical context of the populations being served by the organization as well as the history of the organization itself. They will incorporate their reflections and research into a final project that analyzes an issue of importance to the community and that explores methods for resolving the issue.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to do the following:

- Apply Portuguese expressions, vocabulary, and grammatical structures learned in the classroom to real-life situations.
- Recognize and appreciate cultural differences between the U.S. and Brazil and among Brazilians themselves.
- Communicate effectively with native speakers of Portuguese.
- Analyze the context of a community in order to be able to propose possible solutions to concrete problems.
- Engage in critical reflection on the causes and consequences of poverty and on one's personal worldview.

TEXTS: Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (selections)

Readings posted on Blackboard:

- "Girl Power in Brazil." *National Geographic*.
- "Brazil: The Awakening Giant." *Modern Latin America*.
- Short articles on socioeconomic context of Northeast and of Fortaleza.

Film (available in the library or through Netflix): *Central Station*

Evaluation:

| COURSE COMPONENTS & POINTS | | GRADING SCALE | | | |
|---|-----|---------------|----------|----------|---------|
| Film review (pre-departure) | 10% | 94-100 A | 87-89 B+ | 77-79 C+ | 60-69 D |
| Assignments on readings (pre-departure) | 25% | 90-93 A- | 84-86 B | 70-76 C | 00-60 F |
| Participation | 10% | | 80-83 B- | | |
| Journal | 25% | | | | |
| Research project (post-return) | 30% | | | | |

Film review: Students will write a two-page (650 words minimum) review on the Brazilian film *Central Station*. A more complete explanation of this assignment can be found in the handout attached to the syllabus. This assignment will comprise 10% of the final grade and should be turned in to the instructor by e-mail by June 27.

Assignments on readings. For each of the assigned readings, students will either complete a comprehension exercise on Blackboard or be given a choice of two prompts on which to reflect and write a structured response. A more complete explanation of the structured response can be found in the handout attached to the syllabus. The deadlines for these reflections will be in the month of June prior to our departure. A list of the deadlines will be distributed at the orientation meeting in May.

Participation. Students will be graded on their performance during the community service project in terms of their effort, attitude, and positive contributions.

Journal: Students will keep a journal in which they describe the tasks completed each day at the community service site as well as their thoughts about what they have observed on site. Students should reflect critically upon each experience and draw into that reflection sociocultural, economic, and historic factors that they have learned through their texts. Each entry in the journal should be at least 300 words in length and will be graded more heavily on substance than on form.

The journals will be handed in in two sets – one set will be due to the instructor midway through the community service project and the other will be due the day after the last day of the project.

Research project: The student will write an 8-10 page paper in which they incorporate information gleaned from written sources as well as from their own experiences in the community. A more complete explanation of this assignment can be found in the handout attached to the syllabus. This paper must be turned in to the instructor by e-mail by July 31.

Each student will view the Brazilian feature film “Central Station” and write a formal, **650-word review** of it. The review is worth **50 points** and is due on **June 27**.

The film review should not merely summarize the action of the film; rather, it should be a commentary on the cultural significance of the film. Keeping the following questions in mind as you watch the film will help you to identify its deeper meaning:

1. What is the film’s subject matter? What does this subject matter reveal about Brazilian cultures?
2. Where does the action take place? What is notable about the landscapes portrayed?
3. What are the relationships among the characters like? Can something about Brazilian culture be learned from these relationships?
4. What are the actors like? Do they tend to be more white/European or do they represent one (or a combination of) the ethnic groups in Brazil? Why do you think actors of these ethnicities were cast in the part that they are playing?
5. Are socioeconomic inequities evident in the film? In what ways?
6. What does the soundtrack communicate?
7. Are regional differences represented in the film? What are they?

After watching the film and thinking about these questions, you will have to develop a thesis for your film review. You will need to focus on a particular aspect of the film in your thesis and then provide evidence for your main idea in the body of the paper. The evidence should consist of concrete examples from the film. Here are some examples of acceptable theses from reviews of other Latin American films:

In this film, the director highlights the distinctions among various ethnic groups inhabiting the Andes Mountains.

The enormous biodiversity of South America almost becomes a character in its own right in this film, which features many of the region’s most impressive landscapes.

The soundtrack of this film, consisting of traditional Chilean music, greatly enhances the sociocultural message of the film.

After you have formed a thesis, you will need to organize your thoughts in the form of an outline such as the one below:

- I. Introduction
 - A. Title, director, year released (THIS INFORMATION MUST APPEAR SOMEWHERE IN THE INTRODUCTION)
 - B. Thesis
- II. Body
 - A. Concrete example #1 from film and an explanation
 - B. Concrete example #2 from film and an explanation
- III. Conclusion
 - A. Summarize the thesis
 - B. Give a recommendation – who would benefit from watching this film?

LAST484 STRUCTURED REFLECTION

What is a structured reflection?

In a reflection, the student expresses his/her impressions of a topic and makes connections between that topic and others that are related to the subject matter of the class. The student thinks critically about the topic so that s/he arrives at a profound analysis of it. However, the reflection is also personal and therefore contains references to personal experiences.

A *structured* reflection is an organized reflection that follows the structure of an introduction with a thesis, a body in which the thesis is developed, and a conclusion.

The structured reflections in this class should be 400-500 words in length. Students will write a reflection on each of the five assigned readings. The thesis statement of each reflection should be underlined.

The structured reflection will be graded according to the following criteria for a total of 20 points:

Organization (5 points)

1. Does the introduction orient the reader and capture her/his interest?
2. Is the thesis statement clear and focused?
3. Does the conclusion summarize the main idea and leave a strong impression?

Content (9 points)

1. Is the reflection descriptive and original?
2. Is it profound or superficial?
3. Are there connections made with related topics from the class?
4. Are there concrete and relevant examples?
5. Is the information accurate and does it support the thesis?

Style and language usage (6 points)

1. Are the ideas expressed clearly?
2. Is the vocabulary appropriate and varied?
3. Is there redundancy in the structures used or the ideas expressed?
4. Is there consistency in the use of verb tenses?
5. Are the spelling and punctuation accurate?

Students will write 8-10 pages on an issue of importance in the community where they work. They should draw on a variety of sources, such as the organization's own promotional literature, interviews with Brazilians about the area, conversations with the participants in the organization's programs, personal observation as well as websites, books, and articles. This information should be placed within the larger context of the Brazilian Northeast. The paper should also include descriptions of government programs and projects run by non-governmental organizations that are attempting to address the problem. Finally, students will make recommendations for ways of dealing with the problem based on their research.

Examples of topics to research include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Drug use and trafficking
2. Gender roles and/or prostitution
3. Waste management and recycling
4. Racial tensions (especially in regard to the indigenous)
5. Culture of poverty
6. Housing and public services

Below is a sample outline that may be used to help organize your paper. Though you need not adhere strictly to the outline as far as order, all of the elements mentioned here should be included somewhere in the paper.

- I. Introduction
 - A. Brief orientation addressing the issue generally.
 - B. Thesis statement: specifically articulates the main idea of the paper
- II. Context and Background
 - A. Brief synopsis of the history of the Northeast and its present situation/status within greater Brazil.
 - B. Basic facts about Fortaleza
 - C. Emergence of the favela (slum) where the service is carried out
- III. The favela today
 - A. Basic facts (location, population, etc.)
 - B. Positive aspects
 - C. Negative aspects
- IV. The Issue
 - A. Socioeconomic factors that contribute
 - B. Cultural factors that contribute
 - C. Consciousness of problem among the general population and that of the community
- V. Reactions and ideas to resolve problem
 - A. At government level
 - B. At community level
- VI. Your recommendations and justification for them
- VII. List of sources