Course Description

This seminar examines women’s movements in Latin America. Women in Latin America are perhaps the most highly mobilized population in the world. Throughout the region women have organized around myriad issues, including the right to vote, human rights, poverty, legal rights, anticommunism, the workplace, race, ethnicity and war. Women’s efforts to challenge fiercely repressive regimes, deeply entrenched norms of machismo and extreme poverty defy conventional stereotypes about women and provide us with inspiring examples of how to sustain hope during difficult times. The seminar will introduce students to recent scholarship on women’s movements in Latin America in the 20th century, a literature that has exploded in the past decade. The goal of the seminar is to understand the emergence, evolution and outcomes of women’s movements in particular countries and to develop comparisons across cases. Under what conditions will women mobilize on the basis of their gender identity? What strategies do they choose and why? What is the relation between women’s movements and the state? What are international factors relevant? What impact have these movements had in terms of cultural change, policy outcomes and activists’ lives? How do right-wing movements compare with left-wing ones? Readings will focus on a range of countries throughout the region.

Books for Purchase


A coursepack is available for sale at Gnomon Copy. Several additional required articles are available at lib.harvard.edu/e-resources. Please download these NOW at the beginning of the semester.

Assignments

NB: Students must complete all assignments in order to pass the course.

1. Class Participation

Close reading of the assigned material is only the first step of learning. Much of the work of processing information and generating ideas takes place through talking, listening and debating. So come to class every day and be prepared to talk intelligently about what you’ve read. All students are expected to participate.
2. Discussion Leader

Each of you will be responsible for presenting the readings for one class meeting. In preparing your presentation, keep these three goals in mind: developing a strong grasp of the assigned material, presenting your ideas creatively and engaging the other students.

3. Response Papers

Each student will write a 1-2 page response to the assigned readings for 3 of the class meetings. Students should email these to me by Monday evening.

4. Research Paper

Each student will write a 20-25 page research paper that describes, investigates and analyzes a specific women’s movement or relevant topic of their choosing (preferably one not covered in class). Various components of the paper will be due throughout the semester: a 1-page prospectus describing the topic; an analysis of the historical background in which the movement emerged; a rough draft; and a final draft. See “Research Paper Guidelines” below.

Class Outline

Feb. 4 Introduction

• Nikki Craske, Women and Politics in Latin America, Ch. 1

Feb. 11 Women and Politics in Latin America: An Historical Overview

• Nikki Craske, Women and Politics in Latin America, Chs. 2, 3, 8

The aim of reading this book is to provide a general overview of the major changes in the status of women in Latin America, to give you some background information and to identify some of the main themes we will be addressing.

Feb. 18 The Nature of Comparisons


What is a women’s movement? How do we compare women’s movements in different countries? An investigation of variations in key concepts—such as state structure, economic arrangements, political system, political culture, ideology and collective identity—can help us to explain variations in the emergence,
structure, strategies, and successes of women’s movements across individual nations.

Feb. 25

**Gender as a Category of Analysis**

- Joan W. Scott, “Gender as a Useful Category of Analysis,” in *Gender and the Politics of History* [COURSEPACK]

What is gender? What does it mean to use gender as a category of analysis in the social sciences? Is gender really just about women? If we study women, does that necessarily entail studying gender? How does gender compare/relate to other categories of analysis, such as socioeconomic class, race or ethnicity?

March 4

**Gender as a Category of Analysis: Masculinity and Machismo**

- Mathew Guttman, *The Meanings of Macho*

What is culture? What is *machismo*? To what extent does it remain part of the culture in Latin America, both regionally and in particular countries? Are gender differences biologically determined or culturally constructed? How do cultural understandings of men’s and women’s roles shape the possibilities for political action?

March 11

**Women in Revolutionary Movements**

- Nikki Craske, *Women and Politics in Latin America*, Chapter 7
- Maruja Barrig, “Female Leadership, Violence and Citizenship,” in *Women and Democracy* [COURSEPACK]

Women participated actively in guerrilla movements throughout the region, as supporters and combatants. How did the experience of active combat shape conceptions of gender relations for these women? What role did they play in these movements?

March 18

**Women React to Revolution in Chile**

- Margaret Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile*

Not all women’s movements are feminist. In the early 1970s, Chilean women mobilized against the democratically-elected government of socialist Salvador Allende. They generated significant public support for the military coup staged on September 11, 1973 by General Augusto Pinochet. How did their goals, strategies and tactics differ from those of the other movements we’ve read about?

March 25

**NO CLASS TODAY --- SPRING BREAK**
April 1

NO CLASS TODAY --- we will reschedule

Writing a Term Paper

Students will exchange the work they have done so far on their research papers prior to class. We will discuss how to select, analyze and evaluate sources, as well as how to structure the paper.

April 8

Women Against Authoritarianism: Human Rights Groups

- Rita Arditti, *Searching for Life*

Transitions to democracy in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s were often accompanied, if not initiated, by the mobilization of women. Women protested against widespread human rights violations, economic crisis and the patriarchal patterns of authority embodied by military regimes. *Searching for Life* focuses on the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, an Argentine human rights group whose main task was to locate the children of women who had been detained and “disappeared” by the military government from 1976-1982. How did a group of relatively powerless women come to gain international visibility? To what extent has this movement been successful in achieving its goals?

April 15

Indigenous Women’s Activism

- Rosa Isolde Reuque Paillalef, *When A Flower is Reborn."

This book is *atestimonio* written by an indigenous woman from the south of Chile, reflecting on her activism and political issues in collaboration with Florencia Mallon, a gringa/chilena historian at the University of Wisconsin. It is perhaps the latest book in the testimonial genre; the most controversial example is *I, Rigoberta Menchu*.

April 22

Transnational Feminisms

- Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, “Transnational Networks on Violence Against Women” in *Activists Beyond Borders* [COURSEPACK]

April 29

Gender and Public Policy

- Nikki Craske, *Women and Politics in Latin America*, Ch. 4
- Mala Htun, policy piece, available at
Research Paper Guidelines

The main assignment for this course is a 20-25 page research paper. You will write the paper in six stages over the course of the semester. Each of the first five stages counts for 5% of your final grade for the course, and the completed paper is worth 35%.

Stage 1: Choose a Research Question
Due: Friday, March 7
You need to write about a gender-related movement in Latin America, or a topic closely related to such a movement, preferably one we do not cover in class. Write a 2-3 page description of what you want to write about and why you chose this topic. Identify a central question or set of questions.

Stage 2: Background/Historical Context
Due: Friday, March 21
Write a 5-page paper explaining the historical context in which your movement emerged. Consider economic, political and social factors. Include a working bibliography that indicates which sources you’ve read, which sources you have in hand but haven’t read yet and which ones you plan to get.

Stage 3: Literature Review
Due: Tuesday, April 8
Write a 5-page paper that summarizes the major arguments that have been made in the existing literature on your movement and on movements similar to it. Who are the major scholars who have written about your topic? What are the major issues they identity? What approaches have they used to analyze the case? On what points do they agree and disagree with one another? You will need to have read enough of the literature to answer these questions, but I don’t expect you will have read everything yet. You may (and probably should) incorporate materials we have read in class into your literature review.

Stage 4: Analysis
Due: Friday, April 25
Write a 5-page paper that provides your own analysis of the movement you’ve chosen. What is your explanation for the question you have posed? What is your interpretation of the material you have gathered? On what basis do you draw your conclusions?

Stage 5: Introduction
Due: Friday, May 9
Write a 5-page paper that ties your separate pieces together. Include a clear and concise statement of your main question and your argument, explain why this is an interesting and/or important question and map out the substance of the argument you will make in the rest of the paper.

Stage 6: Final Revision
Due: Friday, May 16
Revise the pieces you have written so far according to the plan you lay out in your introduction. Update them to incorporate new material you’ve gathered. Write a conclusion that summarizes the paper and examines some of the implications of your research.