

WESTERN UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

CLC 2129B/ SP 2102B- Mexico City

(Please note: this course outline is subject to change)

**Professor:** Alena Robin

**Schedule:** Monday, 3:30-4:30 pm, Wednesday, 3:30-5:30 pm, TC 343

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**Office Hour:** Tuesday 2:00-4:00 pm



## I. COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Examine Mexico City through its history of continuous transformations from the Aztec empire to the megalopolis it is today. Identify traces of the various pasts in the city's contemporary urban landscape and daily life through art, film and literature. Comparisons to other Latin American cities will be drawn. Taught in English.

## II. LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of this course, students will:

- Understand broader, underlying socio-historical changes that inform literary and visual representations of a unique Latin American city during the past eight hundred years;
- Develop knowledge of some of the major artistic representations of Mexico City, and other cities of Latin America, across a range of texts and images;
- Engage in visual interpretations of the social and urban space through art, films, literature and other media;
- Discuss the role of emblematic historical figures crucial to the future of Mexico City and other Latin American cities;
- Create a case study that analyzes the coexistence of the sacred and the secular by examining the works of artists, writers and directors;
- Assess the interplay between artistic endeavours and economical, political and religious powers.

## III. EVALUATION

**Participation (15%):** Students are expected to attend every class unless medical circumstances prevent them from doing so (please see section below on department policies). The success of the course depends on the frequency and quality of the participation of its members. Assigned readings should be done prior to class in order to be adequately discussed in class. Students will be asked to submit topics for discussion in advance to the professor (readings with \*). This will also be taken into consideration as part of the participation.

Being present in class does not necessarily imply participating in it. Similarly, being absent from class on a repetitive basis will seriously affect the participation mark.

When absent, it is still the student's responsibility to complete and turn in coursework on time and catch up on the material covered in class. Students must inform their professor by email of any absence as soon as possible.

**Reflection paper (20%):** Tell me about your experience reading Nick Caistor, *Mexico City. A Cultural and Literary Companion*. Further information will be provided in class. **Due February 6.**

**Photo essay (20%):** Create your own photo album of Mexico City! This assignment provides you with the opportunity to explore Mexico City through the camera lens. It is designed as an exercise in cultural observation, which encourages you to explore your artistic imagination and ethnographic skills. Further information will be provided in class. **Due March 13.**

**Mexico City collage (20%):** Collages are pictures composed by gluing papers and various other objects to a ground, with the intention of transforming the most commonplace materials into creative works of art. Think of this assignment as your chance to create your own image of Mexico City using a pasting technique of different objects. Be creative! No need to be an artist! Further information will be provided in class. **Due April 5.**

**Debate (20% + 5%):** According to the calendar of activities, students divided in small groups are expected to present a topic in relation to an assigned reading, animate and moderate the debate that their presentation will generate. Preferably by group of 4-5 people. This activity, in total, should cover the 50 minutes of the class. Further information will be provided in class. **Date TBA.**

**PLEASE NOTE:** For group activities, the same grade will be given to all members of a group. However, you will be provided with a rubric to assess the collaboration of each member of your team.

The assignments will be graded on research, originality of thesis and approach, argument, structure and style. All written assignments must be in Times New Roman, 12 point font (no other font will be accepted), double-spaced, and prepared according to MLA style.

**IMPORTANT:** The only acceptable reason for turning in a late assignment or missing an examination is for medical purposes (see section on departmental policies below). Late assignments will lose 5 points per day (on 100%). Assignments turned in a week after the due date (7 days) will not be accepted and will receive a grade of "0."

All university regulations concerning plagiarism apply. If you are unsure about plagiarism, please ask.

"Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course, will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course (after due warning has been given). On the recommendation of the department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course. The Dean of the Faculty offering the course will communicate that decision to the Dean of the Faculty of Registration."

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/exam/attendance.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/attendance.pdf)

The **Department of Modern Languages and Literatures Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Modern Languages and Literatures courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures website at <http://www.uwo.ca/modlang/undergraduate/policies.html>. It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, and thus

ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.

**Electronic Devices:** You are encouraged to bring tablets and laptops to class, as we may use them for some in-class activities. I expect you to avoid using cellphones in class and only use your laptop, tablet, or other technologies for note taking and in-class activities.

#### IV. CALENDAR OF MANDATORY READINGS AND ACTIVITIES

Mandatory reading (available from the bookstore): Nick Caistor, *Mexico City. A Cultural and Literary Companion*. New York, Interlink Books, 2000.

Other readings as indicated below will be available on OWL:

Date	Topic	Mandatory readings and assignments due
Monday, January 9	Introduction	
Wednesday, January 11	Mexico City: basic facts and notions	
Monday, January 16	Foundation of Mexico-Tenochtitlan	
Wednesday, January 18	The case of Lima and Cuzco (Peru)	1. Tom Cummins, "A Tale of Two Cities: Cuzco, Lima, and the Construction of Colonial Representation", <i>Converging Culture: Art &amp; Identity in Spanish America</i> , New York, H. N. Abrams, 1996, pp. 157-170. (*)
Monday, January 23	Xochimilco: the architecture of evangelization, and other traditions	
Wednesday, January 25	Tlatelolco: the encounter of three cultures	
Monday, January 30	<b>Debate 1: Nightlife in Mexico City</b>	2. Carlos Monsiváis, "Nightlife," <i>The Mexico City Reader</i> , ed. Rubén Gallo. Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004, pp. 175-192. (*)
Wednesday, February 1	The Virgin of Guadalupe	
Monday, February 6	Elena Poniatowska: the voice of the people	<b>Reflection paper due (20%)</b>
Wednesday, February 8	Elena Poniatowska: tragedies in Mexico City	3. Elena Poniatowska, "The Student Movement of 1968," <i>The Mexico Reader, History, Culture, Politics</i> . Durham, Duke

		University Press, 2002, pp. 535-569. (*)  4. Elena Poniatowska, "The Earthquake," <i>The Mexico City Reader</i> , ed. Rubén Gallo. Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004, pp. 237-246. (*)
Monday, February 13	<b>Debate 2: Water in Mexico City</b>	5. Joel Simon, "The Sinking City," <i>The Mexico Reader, History, Culture, Politics</i> . Durham, Duke University Press, 2002, pp. 520-535. (*)
Wednesday, February 15	University City, Mexico (1952)	
February 20-24	<b>Reading Week</b>	<b>No Class</b>
Monday, February 27	The city through the camera lens: a few cases for inspiration	6. John Mraz, "Mexican History: A Photo Essay," <i>The Mexico Reader, History, Culture, Politics</i> , Duke University Press, 2002, pp. 297-331.  7. Carlos Monsiváis, "Identity Hour, or, What Photos Would You Take of the Endless City?," <i>The Mexico Reader, History, Culture, Politics</i> , pp. 613-618.
Wednesday, March 1	Diego Rivera (1886-1957) and Frida Kahlo (1907-1954): their traces in the city	
Monday, March 6	<b>Debate 3: Garbage recollection</b>	8. Alma Guillermoprieto, "Mexico City. 1990. This is not a healthy place," <i>The Heart that Bleeds. Latin America Now</i> . New York, Alfred A Knop, 1994, pp. 47-67. (*)
Wednesday, March 8	Screening and discussion of <i>El Cerrito</i> , directed by Juan Andrés Bello (2005), 57 minutes	
Monday, March 13	Ulises Unda Lara, guest speaker: "Quito and its People Through Painting"	<b>Photo essay due (20%)</b>
Wednesday, March 15	Brasilia (Brazil): The making of a capital	9. Valerie Fraser, "Brasília",

	city	Frank, Patrick, ed. <i>Readings in Latin American Modern Art</i> . New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004, pp. 117- 131. (*)
Monday, March 20	<b>Debate 4: Crime and drug trafficking in Tepito</b>	10. Sam Quinones, “Tepito,” <i>True Tales from Another Mexico: The Lynch Mob, the Popsicle Kings, Chalino, and the Bronx</i> , Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 2001, pp. 233-247. (*)
Wednesday, March 22	Mexico City and the movies: screening of <i>Amar te duele/ Loving You Hurts</i> , 2002, dir. Fernando Sariñana, 104 min.	After seeing the movie, please send questions or topics for discussion on Monday
Monday, March 27	Mexico City and the movies: and discussion	
Wednesday, March 29	<b>Debate 5: The Subway</b> (first hour) Introduction to collage (second hour)	11. “The Metro,” <i>The Mexico City Reader</i> , ed. Rubén Gallo. Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004, pp. 123-145. (*)
Monday, April 3	Mexico City collage	
Wednesday, April 5	Presentation of collage & Conclusion of course	<b>Collage due (20%)</b>