

Short Course Report: Sustainability and Development in Latin America, 7.5 hp

Semester: Autumn 2022

Course Coordinators: Aster Tommasini and Rebeca Montes

Registered students: 9

Answering frequency: 5

Date: 2023-02-10

Brief summary of student viewpoints and suggestions

(based on both quantitative results and key viewpoints from students' free-text answers)

The Sustainability and Development in Latin America (SDLAT) course ran during the Autumn 2022 semester and has been well received by the students. When asked the level of satisfaction with their learning experience as a whole, all students who filled the evaluation form indicated a “high level” or a “complete” level of satisfaction.

The course brought together students from different backgrounds, and the small group atmosphere made the learning experience very personal. On the other hand, the small size was also seen as a limitation, as some sessions were scarcely attended. That resulted in some students also reporting feeling a higher pressure to be active in the class discussions, as the number of people present was sometimes low.

The course appears to have run smoothly, and the students found the degree of difficulty and workload to be either set at a reasonable level in relation to the number of credits. Lectures, seminars and workshops all received good feedback, and the workshops and group work seem to have been particularly beneficial to the students' learning.

Of the two course books, *Open Veins of Latin America* was generally appreciated, especially as it brings a new perspective on why and how Latin America became what it is today. However, some students remarked that the last chapter of the book was somewhat irrelevant, since it was very specific to the economy of certain countries of an old period of time.

The Handbook of Social Movements in Latin America stood out for its vastness in showing cases and movements where citizens' voices were vital to fight for a democratic society. Additionally, students appreciated the possibility of choosing which parts of the book to give a greater focus to, depending on the topic they chose for their final reports.

The main point of criticism about the literature was the fact that some readings were not referred to in classes, or were not directly connected to the content of the respective lectures. Additionally, some students reported feeling "overwhelmed" with the amount of reading, and that the night class, together with other courses they were taking, should have been taken into account so that more students could take better advantage of SDLAT content.

Overall, the course has worked very well and has been an enjoyable experience for both the students and the course coordinators.

"Strengths" according to students

- "Open Veins of Latin America. The variety of guest speakers and topics. The course coordinators stimulated participation without putting too much pressure on the student to speak up in class."
- "The acceptance of everyone by the teachers was a highlight of the course. I loved how understanding they were with the students. One example was during our presentations, one student was feeling nervous about presenting and the teacher gave them the option of taking some extra time to prepare themselves before presenting."
- "Many different perspectives and contemporary content during the course!"
- "I like that the lecturers were so diverse. (It felt as though you paid attention to inviting as many women as men and to inviting people from Latin America or from a Latin American background)."

Lectures highly appreciated according to students

- "Colonisation, decolonisation, and post-colonisation. International relations, geopolitics, and democracy. Human rights and migration. Environmental racism and indigenous rights. Criminality and Narcos."
- "I enjoyed the student presentations and the lecture/video about the indigenous people and how they live."
- "The historic latin america lecture."
- "Colonization, decolonization, and post-colonization, Human rights and migration (the lecturer Laura had a really good energy), Criminality & Narcos (such a good documentary!)."

"Weaknesses" according to students

- "I would prefer class readings to be a bit more reasonable so students have a better chance of being able to read all of them. I understand we had a week to get through them all, but students are also taking a lot of other classes at the same time. Also, I would have liked more connection to the literature during the lectures."
- "The small size of the course made it very personal, but also challenging as we were not a lot of people showing up and there was more pressure on the individual. Of course you can not influence the size of the course, but I think it would run even better if there were more people attending."

- "The majority of the class lectures I was not able to engage with. This might have been because the class was a night class and I was tired, but this should be taken into account when choosing what to lecture on."
- "Some lectures didn't feel relevant for the assignments. However, they were still interesting."
- "Some modules felt a bit draining, but most were very interesting! I also liked the combination of lectures in person, via Zoom and in the CEMUS library. Every lecture felt a bit like a surprise about what would be coming."

Comments from course coordinators on the implementation and outcome of the course

After completion of the course, we are very happy with what we have achieved this semester! It has been a great joy to come to class and meet the engaged group of students that we have had the pleasure to learn alongside throughout this course. We agree with the students' perception of the course and feel as though it has run smoothly and brought together a varied compilation of ideas and perspectives. The only other remark we have is that while the small size of the class was very helpful in creating a supporting and welcoming learning environment, attendance to several sessions was quite sparse, which in turn impacted the level of engagement and depth of exchange with the lecturers.

Proposed changes/comments/measures

- Add to the modules only readings directly connected to lectures, and make sure that guest speakers refer to them during lectures.
- Work on strategies for getting more students on the course for better enrollment, as well as strategies for retaining student attendance during the semester.
- Evenly distribute the readings in a way that each week contains a similar amount of articles/book pages to be read.
- Expand options for group work, both in-class activities as well as outside class time, for example student-led reading groups.
- Start to organize a variety of field trips, and consider how to keep them accessible for all students.