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Course Description

From colonial travelers to contemporary popular culture, the Amazonian forest has been a source of endless fascination, greed and, more recently, ecological concern. The numerous actors that have been shaping the region, including artists, writers, scientists, anthropologists, indigenous peoples, and the extractive industry, among others, bring a multifaceted view of this region that has been described as the paradise on earth as much as a green hell. This course offers an overview of Amazonian history, cultures, and environmental issues that spans from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century. What are the major topics, works, and polemics surrounding the ways the Amazon has been depicted and imagined? How can the region’s history help us understand the state of environmental policies and indigenous rights today? What can we learn about the Amazon from literature and film? What is the future of the Amazon in the context of Brazil’s current political climate? From an interdisciplinary perspective, we will cover topics such as indigenous cultures and epistemologies, deforestation, travel writing, modern and contemporary literature, music, photography, and film, among others. Authors may include Claudia Andujar, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Euclides da Cunha, Ciro Guerra, Milton Hatoum, Susanna Hecht,
Davi Kopenawa, Andrea Tonacci and the project Video in the Villages, among others. Taught in English.

Objectives

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

→ Have a panoramic understanding of the Amazon’s history;

→ Identify and discuss major works, authors, and theses on the Amazon;

→ Make connections between topics, concepts, and works from different periods and parts of the region;

→ Discuss major issues related to the region, such as environmental policies and indigenous rights, from the perspectives offered by cultural objects;

→ Develop an informed opinion on the current state of the region and its future challenges;

→ Contextualize the Amazon within Brazilian and South American frameworks.

Required Materials

The following works are available for purchase at the Seminary Co-op Bookstore:


These works are also available on Amazon, in print and Kindle formats.
All the remaining materials will be available on Canvas. Students are encouraged to read works in Portuguese or Spanish if possible. Portuguese minors and Spanish majors and minors are required to read in the original works produced in these languages.

Calendar

Week 1. Introduction

- Introduction: Content, syllabus, course structure, evaluations

Optional reading:


Week 2. Travelers and Chroniclers

- Photography by Flavio de Carvalho.

Further readings (required for graduate students, optional for undergraduate students):

Week 3. The Amazon in Cinema


Further readings (required for graduate students, optional for undergraduate students):


Week 4. Indigenous cultures: Film, Poetry, Myth

- Selections from the project *Video in the Villages*

Further readings (required for graduate students, optional for undergraduate students):


**Assignment #1 due on Friday, May 1, by 11:59pm**

Week 5. Amerindian Epistemologies

**Further readings (required for graduate students, optional for undergraduate students):**


**Week 6. Indigenous Rights**

• Photography by Claudia Andujar.

**Further readings (required for graduate students, optional for undergraduate students):**


**Week 7. Deforestation**

• *Grazing the Amazon*. Dir. Marcio Isensee e Sá. ((O))eco, 2018.
Further readings (required for graduate students, optional for undergraduate students):


Assignment #2 due on Friday, May 22, by 11:59pm

Week 8. Contemporary Fiction 1


Further readings (required for graduate students, optional for undergraduate students):


Week 9. Contemporary Fiction 2 and Conclusion


Further readings (required for graduate students, optional for undergraduate students):


Assignment #3 due on Friday, June 4, by 11:59pm
Course Structure

Given the impossibility of having in-class meetings, the course will be taught online through a combination of resources including short lecturers, online forums, Zoom meetings, and questionnaires. Instead of meeting on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:30 to 4:50 pm, as originally planned, we will meet on Thursdays and have asynchronous assignments on the other days. This is the provisional weekly structure:

- Mondays by 11:59 pm: I will upload a few short lectures of myself commenting the materials for the week on Canvas. Students are required to watch these videos. They will be available on the Panopto Video and can be accessed through the weekly modules;
- Wednesdays by 11:59 pm: Students are required to post a comment on the online forum addressing the materials for the week. The expected length is 200-300 words for undergraduate students and 400-500 words for graduate students.
- Thursdays by 11:59 pm: Students are required to post a reply to a comment by another student on the online forum. The expected length is 100-150 words for undergraduate students and 200-250 words for graduate students. Students can also write shorter responses to multiple comments. Students can reply anybody’s comment, regardless of whether that comment has already received other replies or whether students are in the same group or not. Instead of replying to an original comment, students can also reply to other responses. The more dialogue we have, the better.
- Thursdays: we will have Zoom meetings focused on questions and discussion. In order to make discussions more manageable, the class will be divided into three groups. Each group will have three 25-minute meetings: one with the instructor, one with the CA, and one with the LA. Meetings will tentatively take place during the originally scheduled class time. Adjustments will be made as needed.
- Fridays: Students are required to complete a short questionnaire accessing their learning process and goals during the week.
- Any time during the week: Students are welcome to participate in a second online forum named “Alegria!” (it means “happiness” in Portuguese). In these times of social distancing and quarantine, this is a free space where we can talk about nice things. This forum is to share videos, songs, pictures, links, nice experiences, ideas, tips. There are no grades and no requirements associated with it. It is only a space where we can have some social life and help each other.

NOTE 1: If students are unable to complete any of these steps on a regular fashion due to external factors, such as limited access to the internet, different time zone, among others, they are strongly encouraged to contact the instructor and/or the CA and LA as soon as possible so that alternative arrangements can be made.
NOTE 2: This structure is tentative and adjustments may be needed. Students will be formally invited to provide assessments of the course structure and make suggestions on Weeks 2, 5, and 7, but suggestions will be welcomed throughout the quarter.

Office Hours

- Office hours with the instructor will be held tentatively on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 1 to 2pm, or by appointment. Depending on external factors, students may require or be required to postpone office hours or use the chat instead of the video.
- Office hours with the CA will be held on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 2 to 3pm.

Evaluations

1) Assignments - 45%

There are three assignments per quarter, each one worth 15% of the total grade. Each assignment should be 3-4 pages long for undergraduate students and 4-5 pages long for graduate students. The assignments should be uploaded on Canvas on the Fridays of Weeks 4, 7, and 9 by 11:59pm. Students may explore different types of assignments, including:

- A scholarly paper;
- A book review of a book published in the past ten years;
- A project for a grant, thesis or dissertation;
- A 10-minute presentation, with the use of Power Point;
- A website or blog;
- A journalistic piece (only for undergraduates);
- A 5-minute video of fiction or non-fiction (only for undergraduates).

Students may choose any option for each assignment, but at least one assignment must be the scholarly paper. Students may not repeat a same type of assignment with the exception of the
scholarly paper. Other genres and types of assignments may be accepted if previously approved by the instructor. The length and format of an assignment may also be adapted to the requirements of specific projects, publications, and applications, upon previous consultation with the instructor.

Regardless of the assignment chosen, students are expected to develop their own ideas and provide secondary sources whenever needed. Summaries and purely descriptive assignments will receive a lower grade. Written assignments should follow MLA or Chicago styles.

2) Online Forum - 25%

This portion of the grade refers to the student’s participation in the online forum as a whole, including weekly comments and replies to other comments.

3) Participation in class - 20%

This portion of the grade refers to the student’s participation in the weekly Zoom meetings.

4) Weekly questionnaire - 5%

This weekly short questionnaire is designed to track students' progress. It will be available every week on Canvas.

Attendance, Late Work, and Plagiarism Policies

- Students are expected to attend all classes, arrive on time, and participate in discussions and activities.
- Late deliveries will be accepted by 11:59pm on the third day after the due date, with one grade deduction (e.g. an A would be become an A- and so on). After this second deadline, late deliveries will no longer be accepted.
- Any case of confirmed plagiarism will result in an F for the assignment where it occurred. Two or more cases of confirmed plagiarism will result in automatic failure for the course.
- Given the special circumstances in which classes are being currently held, I understand that students’ performance may be impacted by factors beyond their control. Special arrangements can be made depending on each student’s individual situation, as long as
they communicate in advance with the instructor. Communication has never been as important as it is now!

Disabilities

Students with disabilities who need accommodations should contact me as soon as possible, as well as the Student Disability Services at disabilities@uchicago.edu or 773-702-6000, so that any needed arrangements can be made in a timely fashion.