

Syllabus SPAN 260: Literature in Colonial Latin America

Yasmín S. Portales-Machado
Spanish and Portuguese Department
Northwestern University, Spring 2026

This course follows the Northwestern University Syllabus Standards. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with this information.

Course and Instructor Information

Professor Name: Yasmín S. Portales-Machado

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Office Location: Kresge 3-544 **Phone:** 847-491-3517.

Office Hours: Thursday 9:00AM - 10:00 AM, Fri 1:00PM - 2:00 PM

Class Meeting Information

Harris Hall L06: Tues, Thurs 2:00PM - 3:20PM

Course Description

This course surveys major Latin American literary works from pre-Columbian traditions to the period preceding the rise of modernism in the late 19th century. We will take a critical approach to the idea of "literature" by examining poetic and dramatic texts alongside historical, legal, ethnographic, and religious documents, as well as Indigenous narratives and artistic practices. Through this broad conception of textuality, we will explore the articulation, transformation, and preservation of identity across the colonial and early republican eras. Key themes will include indigeneity, colonialism, race, gender, language, and the uneven formation of national communities. While the primary language of the class will be Spanish, we will also consider the linguistic diversity of Latin America through translations of works originally written in Indigenous and European languages.

Accessibility

Northwestern University is committed to providing a supportive environment for students with disabilities. Should you anticipate or experience disability-related barriers in the academic setting,

please contact AccessibleNU to move forward with the university's established accommodation process. If you already have established accommodations with AccessibleNU, please let your instructor know as soon as possible, preferably within the first two weeks of the term, so we they can work with you to implement your disability accommodations. Disability information, including academic accommodations, is confidential under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

Enrollment Requirements

One of the following:

- PAN 200-0 or 204-0 (may be taken concurrently)
- Have an AP score of 5 for heritage students
- Have an AP of 5 in both Spanish Language and Literature exams for non-heritage students
- Sufficient score on the Spanish Language Placement Exam.

Materials

All materials will be available on our Canvas website or free access internet platforms. Please consider the environmental of printing and decide responsibly according to your needs.

Learning Objectives

This class will introduce students to the history and culture of Latin America through the analysis of literary works. Students will be asked to summarize, analyze, and respond to primary texts; to relate primary works to contextual information and critical readings; and to synthesize their knowledge in a final project. Throughout the quarter, students will develop their rhetorical skills by writing, speaking, and presenting their work in Spanish.

Course learning outcomes

This course is in the Foundational Discipline-Literature and Arts category. The students will:

- Observe the forms, genres, and styles of literary expression in Latin America from earlier years of the Spanish conquest to the end of the 19th century through practices of close reading and analysis.

- Gain awareness of the social, political, cultural, and historical factors influencing artistic expression, the relations between the artist and the public, and the potential of creative art to challenge or affirm social and cultural norms. This will include discussions of the leading Latin American literary movements of the period.
- Appreciate how literature reveals the differences and diversity, as well as the continuity and unity, of human cultures. This course will introduce students to the social and historical context in which the works were written.
- Through class participation and research assignments, to produce persuasive interpretation, analysis, and commentary on literature and art, both spoken and written.
- By emulating the subtleties of literature, students develop their speaking and writing skills in Spanish and sharpen their powers of interpretation, critique, and aesthetic perception. This will involve summarizing, close reading, contextualizing, and synthesizing analyses of course texts in short writing assignments.

Methods of Assessment and Evaluation

Evaluative methods

<i>Elements</i>	<i>% of final grade</i>
Attendance	5%
In-Class participation	10%
Discussion section	20%
Midterm project	25%
Final Reflection	40%

Class Participation (10%):

The participation assessment includes different elements:

- Actively engage in class discussions.
- Do readings on time and visit me during office hours in case you are having trouble with the readings.
- Whenever necessary, do pre-discussion activities on the website that the professor or another student asks us to do.
- Participate in making the classroom a collaborative, friendly, and inclusive environment.

Discussion section (20%):

Each week –except the first and sixth– you will write one short reflection (150–200 words, not including quotations) on the readings assigned for a class. These weekly posts should be submitted to Canvas on Discussions by no later than 10:00 AM on the day of the lecture to which the text/film you selected was assigned to.

The post must address at least one of the following questions:

- a) What passage from the readings and/or films assign to that week are you lingering over?
- b) In your opinion, does this passage relate to any of the materials previously addressed in this course?
- c) What do you still have questions about?

Midterm project (25%):

In week 6 you will present the play “El divino Narciso” (group work, 15%) and produce a “Bitácora de viaje” (individual, 10%) reflecting on the creative process of the play production (Times New Roman, 12p, double-spaced). Specific details will be available on Canvas in due time.

Final Reflection 40%:

The final project for this course is a critical essay of literary analysis in Spanish. The goal is to demonstrate the ability to synthesize ideas and analyze texts as well as your knowledge of key literary terms, concepts, and movements. You may go deep in a specific topic discussed in class (to closely read a passage or to compare texts). You will produce a reflection of between 5-6 pages or 10-13 minutes of oral speech. Details will be shared in CANVAS. It is mandatory that students schedule an appointment at the Spanish Writing Center well ahead of paper due dates. Details will be shared in CANVAS.

How your final grade will be determined

Late Assignments and Makeup Policy:

Assignments will be submitted on CANVAS and marked late automatically. In most circumstances, I will allow late assignments and extensions with no penalty, as long as you communicate your situation to me. A legitimate reason to submit late homework may be to have a medical emergency (with documentation), to have a family emergency (with proper documentation), and a natural catastrophe. In all other cases or if you fail to meet the second deadline, there will be a 15% penalty.

Final Grades

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>A</i>	<i>94-100</i>
<i>A-</i>	<i>90-94</i>
<i>B+</i>	<i>87-89.9</i>
<i>B</i>	<i>84-86.9</i>
<i>B-</i>	<i>80-83.9</i>
<i>C+</i>	<i>77-79.9</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>74-76.9</i>
<i>C-</i>	<i>70-73.9</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>60-69.9</i>
<i>F</i>	<i>0-59.9</i>

Do you know what your grades mean?

A – Demonstrated mastery of all the course learning outcomes OR mastery of most of the course learning outcomes and skilled proficiency in the other(s).

B – Demonstrated skilled proficiency in all or most of the course learning outcomes.

C – Demonstrated adequate comprehension and demonstration of all or most of the course learning outcomes.

D – Demonstrated adequate or developing comprehension of some of the course learning outcomes, but did not meet expectations for successful learning of the course content and skills.

F – Did not demonstrate adequate comprehension of the course learning outcomes (this time).

Student Resources

We are here to support your success in and out of the classroom.

The Spanish Writing Center (SWC) was created with the goal to improve the students' writing skills. The SWC will assist all 210-level students and above with their writing needs. The SWC aims to make students more aware of their own writing process.

The Center is **not intended to provide quick fixes or corrections**, but rather to help recognize global and local errors through close one-on-one sessions of 15-30 minutes so that students may eventually make their own changes.

To make an appointment, access the tutor's calendar in <https://spanish-portuguese.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/spanish-writing-center/>.

Students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with and use the online dictionary from the **Real Academia de la Lengua Española**, at <http://dle.rae.es>

Classroom practices

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

You are expected to attend most of the class sessions. You can have two absences, no questions asked throughout the quarter (I trust you). For excused absences (medical, athletic, personal, etc.), let me know as soon as possible (preferably before class). Unexcused absences (after the first two) will negatively impact your participation grade. Students cannot be absent for more than 25% of the class, that's four classes.

Be on time.

Attendance is taken at the beginning of class. Any arrival after that is considered "late". If you are more than 30 minutes late, you will receive an unexcused absence for the day. Three late arrivals equal one unexcused absence.

ACTIVE PURSUIT:

In order to fulfill the required work for this course, students must practice an active pursuit attitude, which is defined as the completion of assignments, in-class projects and activities, as well as maintaining attendance that allows you to effectively succeed in the course. In SPAN 261, you will be considered not actively *pursuing* the course if either of these happens:

- You miss more than 3 classes before the midterm. Documented emergencies will be considered, and/or
- You do not submit 50% or more assignments before the midterm.

If you are not actively pursuing the course by October 3, the professor will discuss your situation and options.

ETIQUETTE:

1. Please be ready for your class when it begins.
2. Please enter the room quietly if you are late.
3. Take turns when speaking.

4. Make mistakes.
5. Ask Questions.
6. Respect each other's ideas and opinions.
7. Be bold, imaginative and give others the benefit of the doubt.
8. Keep your cellphone quiet and do not use it for personal reasons unless there is an emergency.

Prohibition of Recording of Class Sessions by Students

Unauthorized student recording of classroom or other academic activities (including advising sessions or office hours) is prohibited. Unauthorized recording is unethical and may also be a violation of Northwestern University policy and state law. Students requesting the use of assistive technology as accommodation should contact AccessibleNU. Unauthorized use of classroom recordings – including distributing or posting them – is also prohibited. Under the University's Copyright Policy, faculty own the copyright to instructional materials – including those resources created specifically for the purposes of instruction, such as syllabi, lectures and lecture notes, and presentations. Students cannot copy, reproduce, display, or distribute these materials. Students who engage in unauthorized recording, unauthorized use of a recording, or unauthorized distribution of instructional materials will be referred to the appropriate University office for follow-up and potential discipline.

Academic Integrity:

Students enrolled in Northwestern courses are required to comply with Northwestern's academic integrity policy. All papers submitted for credit in this course must be submitted electronically unless otherwise instructed by the professor. Your written work may be tested for plagiarized content. Any form of **cheating or plagiarizing**, including improper use of content generated by artificial intelligence, constitutes a violation of Northwestern's academic integrity policy. Individual students are responsible for doing their own work and producing their own ideas. Using the ideas of others including AI or Google or having a friend do your work is NOT a good way to learn.

What is cheating or plagiarizing?

Here are some general guidelines, so we all have a common understanding of how to make this class a successful learning experience.

Encouraged Behavior	Unacceptable Behavior
Asking your professor for help by attending office hours, staying after class, or emailing.	Using websites to get answers to questions that you are supposed to get on your own.
Asking a Tutor for help.	Having a friend complete the work or part of the work that you need to do.
Asking a friend to explain a concept.	Copying a friend's work or having a friend do your work.
Asking a tutor to help you revise a piece of writing (paragraphs, essays, etc.)	Asking a friend, or classmate to correct and fix your piece of writing for you. Paying a service to write, rewrite or fix your work.
Watching instructional videos (recommended by your instructor)	Using Google to get answers online that you are supposed to get on your own.
Accessing resources recommended by your instructor (online books and materials)	Posting your class assignments in social media or website to get answers.
Using technology if allowed and as instructed by your professor.	Using technology such as AI, ChatGPT, Bard, Bing, paraphrasing tools, or text generators to produce work that is expected to be done by you.
Using dictionaries, thesaurus, or translators only if allowed and as instructed by your professor.	Using Google translate, AI, ChatGPT, Bard, Bing or any other technology to do work that is supposed to be done by you.

In short, all classwork and homework including assignments, projects, discussion forums, book discussion, etc. MUST be done by the individual student or team members, using the tools and help discussed in class. The goal is to improve and learn from mistakes.

Course Schedule

SPAN 260 SP2026 Important Dates

Thursday, **April 2, 2:00 PM**

SPAN 260 begins.

Monday, April 6, 2026

Last day for full term withdrawals to receive 100% refund

Friday, April 10, 2026

Last day to request academic accommodations for religious observance

Sunday, April 19, 2026

Last day for full term withdrawals to receive 75% refund

Thursday, **May 7, 2:00 PM**

Midterm Project part 1 DUE

Friday, **May 8, 2026, 11:59 PM**

Midterm Project Part 2 DUE

Last day to drop a FULL-TERM class for Winter in CAESAR.

Any requests after this date result in a W on the transcript and must go through the course withdrawal process

Sunday, May 10, 2026

Last day for full term withdrawals to receive 50% refund

Saturday, June 6, 2026

Spring classes end

Friday, **June 12, 2026, 5:00 pm**

Final Reflection DUE

Tuesday, **June 16, 2026, 3:00 pm**

Final Grades DUE

Tentative Calendar: 10 weeks

Tema	Fecha	Contenido
1 Introducción	4/2	Clase 1 Presentación del curso. Iciar Bollaín, “También la lluvia” (2010)
2 Antes de la llegada del castellano	4/7	Clase 2 “Desde donde se posan” (Yaocuicatl) “Hacen estrépito” (Icnocuicatl) “¡Ay de mí!” (Icnocuicatl) “La visión de los vencidos”, “Los cinco soles (Teotlahtolli) “Consejos del padre a su hija” (Huehuetlahtolli 1) “Consejos de la madre a su hija” (Huehuetlahtolli 2)
	4/9	Clase 3 “La leyenda de Vucub–Caquix”, del <i>Popol Vuh</i> “Los dzules”, del <i>Chilam Balam</i> “Oración primera al hacedor” (Jailli)
3 La invención de América	4/14	Clase 4 Cristobal Colón, “Diario de abordo” (1492) y “Carta a Santángel” (1493) Hernán Cortés, “Segunda carta de relación” (1520) Adorno, <i>Colonial Latin American Literature: A Very Short Introduction</i> . “Chapter 1. First encounters, first doubts” (2011)
	4/16	Clase 5 Cabeza de Vaca, <i>Nafragios</i> (1555, fragmentos) Proemio Capítulo I En que cuenta cuándo partió la armada, y los oficiales y gente que en ella iba Capítulo IV Cómo entramos por la tierra Capítulo VII De la manera que es la tierra Capítulo XXIV De las costumbres de los indios de aquella tierra Capítulo XXVIII De otra nueva costumbre Capítulo XXXV De cómo el alcalde mayor nos recibió bien la noche que llegamos Capítulo XXXVII De lo que aconteció cuando me quise venir Capítulo XXXVIII De lo que sucedió a los demás que entraron en las Indias Adorno, <i>Colonial Latin American Literature: A Very Short Introduction</i> , “5. A North American sojourn” (2011) Koldo Serra, “Tiempo de conquista” (<i>El Ministerio del Tiempo</i> S3Ep8) (2017)
4 Destrucción, conquista y memoria	4/21	Clase 6 Bartolomé de Las Casas, <i>Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias</i> (1552, selección) Jean-Daniel Verhaeghe, “La Controversia de Valladolid” (1992) Adorno, <i>Colonial Latin American Literature: A Very Short Introduction</i> , “2. Oviedo and Las Casas” (2011)
	4/23	Clase 7 El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, <i>Comentarios reales de los Incas</i> (1609, selección)

		Guaman Poma, <i>El primer nueva corónica i buen gobierno</i> (1615, selección) The origin of this said book, pp. 14-17 How the royal administrators abuse the Indian, pp. 491-519 The chapter of the black Africans, pp. 717- 725 The chapter of Guaman Poma's dialogue with the King, pp. 974-999 Adorno, <i>Colonial Latin American Literature: A Very Short Introduction</i>, "7. Urban Baroque" (2011)
4/27 Final Reflection 1 Topic Proposal		
5 La poesía de la conquista	4/28	Clase 8 Alonso de Ercilla, <i>La Araucana</i> (1569, selección) Adorno, <i>Colonial Latin American Literature: A Very Short Introduction</i>, "6. Epic accomplishments" (2011)
	4/30	Clase 9 Silvestre de Balboa, "Espejo de paciencia" (1608, selección) Omar Felipe Mauri y Yuri Hernando Soler, <i>Espejo de Paciencia</i>, Ed. Pablo de la Torriente, La Habana (2017)
6 Juana Inés de Asbaje Ramírez de Santillana	5/5	Clase 10 Nicolás León, "Las castas del México colonial o Nueva España" (1924) María Luisa Bemberg, "Yo, la peor de todas" (1990) Adorno, <i>Colonial Latin American Literature: A Very Short Introduction</i>, "8. Baroque plenitude" (2011) Luis Felipe Fabre, "Sor Juana y otros monstruos" (2015) Darío Brooks, "Criollos, mestizos, mulatos o saltapatrás: cómo surgió la división de castas durante el dominio español en América", <i>BBC Mundo</i>, (12 de octubre de 2017) Daniel Chacón, "Las Castas – Spanish Racial Classifications" (2025)
	5/7	Clase 11 Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, "<i>El Divino Narciso</i>" (1690) Proyecto de Mitad de Periodo 1) Puesta en escena (en clase) 2) Cuestionario de Espectadore (11:59 PM)
5/8 Midterm Project 3 "Bitácora de viaje"		
5/10 Final Reflection 2 Annotated Bibliography		
7 Visiones de la vida colonial	5/12	Clase 12 María de las Mercedes Santa Cruz y Montalvo, <i>Viaje a La Habana</i> (1840, selección) "A mis compatriotas" "A su excelencia el capitán general O'Donnell" "Carta IV" "Carta VII" "Carta X" ¿Qué música escuchaban María de las Mercedes y su círculo social? Global Stats, "Most Popular Music Artists - From Beethoven

		to Taylor Swift (1700-2026)", <i>Global Stats</i> , 23 de febrero de 2026. https://youtu.be/34sOeu0fiEc?si=6fyAj5-jlPaAJoku
	5/14	Clase 13 Juan Francisco Manzano, <i>Autobiografía de un Esclavo</i> (1840) Sergio Giral, "El otro Francisco" (1974)
5/17 Final Reflection 3 Research Question & Argument		
8 Hacia la independencia	5/19	Clase 14 Simón Bolívar, "Carta de Jamaica" (1815) Andres Bello, "Prólogo", <i>Gramática de la lengua castellana destinada al uso de los americanos</i> (1847) Adorno, <i>Colonial Latin American Literature: A Very Short Introduction</i> , "On to Independence" (2011)
	5/21	Clase 15 José Martí, "Abdala" (1869) y "Nuestra América" (1891) Centro de Estudios Marianos de Cuba, "Biografía mínima de José Martí" (https://www.josemarti.cu/biografia/)
9 Ficciones fundacionales	5/26	Clase 16 Jorge Isaacs, <i>María</i> (1867, selección) Capítulos: I, II, V, VII, XII, XIII, XIV, XVI, XIX, XXII, L, LIV, LV, LXII, LXIII, LXV Ana Chouciño, "Biografía de Jorge". <i>Biblioteca Americana de la Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes</i> . Sommer, Doris "Un círculo de deseo: los romances nacionales en América Latina", <i>Araucaria. Revista Iberoamericana de Filosofía, Política y Humanidades</i> , Nº 16, pp. 03-22. (2006) Bonus: Sommer, Doris <i>Foundational fictions: the national romances of Latin America</i> , "6. María's Disease: A National Novel (Con)Founded" (1991)
	5/28	Clase 17 Cirilo Villaverde, <i>Cecilia Valdés</i> (1882, selección) Introducción, Prólogo PRIMERA PARTE. Capítulos I, II, IV y VI SEGUNDA PARTE. Capítulos I y III TERCERA PARTE. Capítulo IX CUARTA PARTE. Capítulos II, V y VII CONCLUSIÓN, GLOSARIO Portales-Machado, "Los regresos de Cecilia (Valdés)" (2008) Tony Nodarse y Gonzalo Roig, "Yo soy Cecilia Valdés", Estudios de Animación del ICAIC (2010) Bonus: Sommer, <i>Foundational fictions: the national romances of Latin America</i> , "4. Sab C'est Moi" (1991) Gonzalo Roig, "Cecilia Valdés" (1932). Puesta en escena de la Fundación Puertorriqueña de Zarzuela y Opereta (2017)
5/31 Final Reflection 4 Format of Final Project		

10 Tenemos memoria	6/2	Clase 18 Ricardo Palma, <i>Tradiciones peruanas</i> (1872, selección) Un virrey hereje y un campanero bellaco Capricho de limeña ¡Beba, padre, que le da la vida! Las brujas de Shulcahuanga Una elección de Abadesa Oswaldo Holguín Callo, "Biografía de Ricardo Palma". <i>Ricardo Palma en Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes</i> Final Reflection 5 Peer-Review Workshop
		6/9 Final Reflection 5 Peer-Review Workshop Report
Reading period	6/3-8	Reading Period.
	6/12	5:00 pm Entregar Proyecto final
	6/16	3:00 pm Final Grades DUE

Accommodations

We all draw strength from being members of this community, but we are also individuals with unique abilities and needs. It is your right to be respected and receive reasonable accommodations in order to complete your coursework while also maintaining your identity.

Religious Observance

Northwestern is committed to fostering an academic community respectful of and welcoming to persons of differing backgrounds. To that end, the policy on academic accommodations for religious observance stipulates that students will not be penalized for class absences for religious observance. Students for whom a religious observance conflicts with a class meeting, exam, or assignment deadline, should consult with their instructor by the end of the second week of the term. Note for undergraduates: if observance of a religious observance conflicts with a common midterm (i.e., a midterm scheduled outside of the regular class meeting time) or final exam, you should submit an accommodation request to the Office of the Provost's religious accommodation request form.

Providing Display/Preferred Names and Pronouns

Northwestern community members can change their personal information by logging into NUValidate and selecting the “Edit Online Directory Information” tile. Any updates to your display name and pronouns will be visible to your instructor within a few days. For additional information visit: <https://www.northwestern.edu/diversity/initiatives/gender-inclusive-initiatives/names-pronouns/update-instructions.html>

Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual Misconduct

Northwestern University does not permit discrimination or harassment on the basis of protected characteristics. View Northwestern’s non-discrimination statement and Title IX statement. If students have concerns, they may submit a report or contact the Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance (OCR) at ocr@northwestern.edu. All University employees (including student employees) and graduate students with teaching or supervisory authority are required to report all allegations of sexual misconduct (including sexual assault, sexual exploitation, dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, and sexual harassment), discrimination based on a protected category, and harassment based on a protected category of which they become aware in the scope of their work for the University to the Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance unless they are identified as a confidential resource. Read more about the University’s discrimination, harassment and sexual misconduct policies and resources on the Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance website.

Support for Wellness and Health

Northwestern University is committed to supporting the wellness of our students. Student Affairs has multiple resources to support student wellness and mental health. If you are feeling distressed or overwhelmed, please reach out for help. Students can access confidential resources through the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Religious and Spiritual Life (RSL) and the Center for Awareness, Response and Education (CARE). Northwestern also participates in TimelyCare, a virtual mental health platform that provides counseling, health coaching and 24/7 on-demand services at no cost. Additional information on these resources and eligibility can be found here:

<https://www.northwestern.edu/counseling/>

<https://www.northwestern.edu/religious-life/>

<https://www.northwestern.edu/healthservice-evanston/about-nuhs/who-can-use-nuhs.html>

<https://www.northwestern.edu/studentaffairs/timelycare.html>