

Syllabus SPAN 261: Literature in Modern Latin America

Yasmín S. Portales-Machado
Spanish and Portuguese Department
Northwestern University, Winter 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: Wed 10:00AM - 11:00 AM, Fri 2:00PM - 3:00 PM

Class Meeting Information

Kresge Centennial Hall 2-440: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30PM - 1:50PM

Course Description

This course provides an overview of some of the major trends in Latin American literatures since 1888, modernismo, the historical avant-garde, the "Boom," and end of the 20th century. The readings, class discussions and assignments will offer many opportunities to improve students' oral and written Spanish. The course will emphasize various literary styles and ideological constructions that, in different ways, reflect the complexity of Latin American writing. While introducing students to the social and historical context in which the works were written, the course will focus on the following issues: the cultural and political dimensions of literature; the representation of class, gender, and race; and the concern for finding autochthonous modes of expression. During the quarter, students will discuss primary texts and more recent research addressing the historical, political and social processes that shaped literary and cultural production at the end of the 19th and the 20th centuries in Latin America. Our goal is to generate the knowledge and develop the skills necessary to understand and discuss the period literature and its debates about national identity, post-colonialism, race, and the body, among other issues.

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:

- Pre/Co: SPANISH 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 the Spanish Language and Literature exams for non-heritage students
- Achieve sufficient Spanish Language Placement Exam score.

Materials

All materials will be available on our Canvas website or free access internet platforms. Please print the materials for class to reduce screen use and allow better collaborative dynamics.

Learning Objectives

To survey major literary trends in Latin America since 1888, such as "Modernismo", "Magical Realism" and the "Latin American Boom".

To understand major historical, social, and political contexts in Latin America since 1888.

To analyze the intersections between culture, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality and other elements as they appear within literary and artistic practices.

To develop speaking and writing skills in Spanish and sharpen powers of interpretation, critique, and aesthetic perception.

To produce persuasive interpretation, analysis, and commentary on literature and art, both spoken and written.

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 the end of the 19th century to the present 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, 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.

How your final grade will be determined

Evaluative methods

<i>Elements</i>	<i>% of final grade</i>
Attendance	10%
Participation and readings	10%
Facilitate a class discussion	30%
Two Writing assignments	20%
Final Reflection	30%

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>

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 have a medical emergency (with documentation), having a family emergency (with proper documentation), a natural catastrophe. In all other cases or if you fail to meet the second deadline, there will be a 15% penalty.

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).

Methods of Assessment and Evaluation

Participation:

The participation assessment includes different elements:

- Assist to class and 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:

In one of our weekly sessions, we will have a 30-minute discussion facilitated by two students on a topic particularly relevant for Latin American history and culture. Students will briefly present contextual information on the material we are examining (5 minutes) and propose 3 questions for us to discuss. For this assignment:

- a) Sign up in the discussion on Canvas.
- b) Examine the material we will discuss carefully, decide collaboratively on the information you want to present, and come up with at least three questions or topics for discussion.
- c) Come to office hours one week in advance to discuss your ideas with me and receive feedback.
- d) Submit your questions at least 2 days before the discussion.

Writing Exercises:

Throughout the quarter, you will produce two formal essays (Times New Roman, 12p, double-spaced, 2 pages) to analyze literary, visual, or audio material. Specific details will be available on Canvas in due time. 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.

Final Reflection:

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, to compare texts/artworks) or focus on content absences and how to improve it in future iterations. You will produce a reflection of between 5-6 pages or 10-13 minutes of oral speech. Details will be shared in CANVAS.

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 261 WI2026 Important Dates

Tuesday, **January 6, 12:30 PM**

SPAN 261 begins.

Friday, January 9, 2026

Last day for full term withdrawals to receive 100% refund

Friday, January 16, 2026

Last day to request academic accommodations for religious observance

Saturday, January 24, 2026

Last day for full term withdrawals to receive 75% refund

Sunday, **January 25, 11:59 PM**

Ejercicio de Escritura 1 DUE

Friday, February 13, 2026

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**

Saturday, February 14, 2026

Last day for full term withdrawals to receive 50% refund

Sunday, **February 15, 11:59 PM**

Ejercicio de Escritura 2 DUE

Saturday, March 14, 2026

Winter classes end

Thursday, **March 19, 2026, 5:00 pm**

Final Reflection DUE

Monday, **March 23, 2026, 3:00 pm**

Final Grades DUE

Tentative Calendar: 9 weeks

Tema	Fecha	Contenido
1 Introducción y América toma la palabra (Modernismo)	1/6	Clase 1. Presentación del seminario. Portales-Machado, "WI2026 SPAN 261 Syllabus" (2025) López de Palacios, "Requerimiento" (1512) José Martí, "Nuestra América" (1891) Juan Luis Guerra, "El costo de la vida" (1992) Inscríbete en el calendario de discusiones.
	1/8	Clase 2. José Martí, "Versos Sencillos" (1891, selección) Rubén Darío, "Caupolicán" (1888), "Sonatina" (1896), "A Roosevelt" (1904).
		Lectura semanal recomendada: José Enrique Rodó, selecciones de <i>Ariel</i> (1900).
2 En busca de la identidad (Modernidad)	1/13	Clase 3. Horacio Quiroga, "El almohadón de plumas" (1917), "El paso del Yabebirí" (1918), "El hombre muerto" (1920), "Decálogo del perfecto cuentista" (1927)
	1/15	Clase 4. Gabriela Mistral, "Dame la mano" (1922), "Escóndeme, que el mundo no me adivine..." (1922), "Decálogo del artista" (1919), "Dos himnos" (1938) Alfonsina Storni, "La loba" (1916), "Tú me quieres blanca" (1918), "Hombre pequeñito" (1919), "A Eros" (1934), "Autorretrato barroco" (1938), "Voy a dormir" (1938)
		Lectura semanal recomendada: Adriana J. Bergero y Elizabeth A. Marchant, "Feminist Insurrections: From Queiroz and Castellanos to Morejón, Poniatowska, Valenzuela, and Eltit" (2022)
3 Siempre hemos estado aquí (Indigenismo y mestizaje)	1/20	Clase 5. PRESENTACIÓN Frida Kahlo: "Autorretrato en la frontera" (1932), "Lo que el agua me dio" (1932), "Dos Fridas" (1939) Chavela Vargas, "La Llorona" (¿1932?) Yásnaya Aguilar Gil, "No es lo mismo ser bilingüe que ser bilingüe" (2015) y "Nuestras lenguas no mueren, las matan" (2019)
	1/22	Clase 6. PRESENTACIÓN José María Arguedas, "La agonía de Rasu-Ñiti" (1961), "El sueño del pongo" (1965) Gabriela Yepes, "Danzak" (2008)
		Lectura semanal recomendada: Estelle Tarica, "Indigenismo" (2016)
Domingo 1/25, 11:59 PM - Ejercicio de Escritura 1 y Reflexión Final paso 1. Tema		
4 Vamos a romperlo todo (Vanguardia)	1/27	Clase 7. PRESENTACIÓN Carlos Gardel y Alfredo Le Pera, "Volver" (1934) César Vallejo, "Los heraldos negros" (1917), "Masa" (1937) Jorge Luis Borges, "Tema del traidor y del héroe" (1944), "El Etnógrafo" (1969), "Antidecálogo del escritor" (1948)

	1/29	Clase 8. PRESENTACIÓN Pablo Neruda, "Poema 20" (1924), "Walking around" (1935), "Oda al Tomate" (1954). Consuelo Velásquez, "Bésame mucho" (1940) Augusto Monterroso, "El dinosaurio" (1959), "La tela de Penélope o quién engaña a quién" (1969), "La oveja negra" (1969), "Decálogo del escritor" (1978)
	Lectura semanal recomendada: Fernando J. Rosenberg, "Cultural Theory and the Avant-Gardes: Mariátegui, Mário de Andrade, Oswald de Andrade, Pagú, Tarsila do Amaral (2022)	
5 Nos trajeron del otro lado del mar (La diáspora africana)	2/3	Clase 9. PRESENTACIÓN Nicolás Guillén, "Prólogo" de <i>Sóngoro Cosongo</i> (1931), "Son número 6" (1934) Rigoberto López, "Yo soy del son a la salsa" (1995)
	2/5	Clase 10. PRESENTACIÓN Georgina Herrera, "Oriki para las negras viejas de antes" Victoria Santa Cruz "Me gritaron Negra" (1978) Juan Formell y Eloy Machado "Soy todo" (1995) Elizabeth Acevedo, "Hair" (2009)
	Lectura semanal recomendada: Doris Sommer, "Literary Liberties: The Authority of Afrodescendant Authors" (2007)	
Domingo 2/8, 11:59 PM – Reflexión final paso 2. Bibliografía		
6 Cambiar las reglas del juego (La Revolución Cubana)	2/10	Clase 11. PRESENTACIÓN Jesús Orta Ruiz, "Marcha triunfal del Ejército Rebelde" (1959) Sabá Cabrera Infante y Orlando Jiménez Leal, "PM" (1961) Fidel Castro, "Palabras a los intelectuales" (1961) Gerardo Muñoz, "La política de los gestos: la actualidad de "PM"" (2011)
	2/12	Clase 12. PRESENTACIÓN Silvio Rodríguez, "Aunque no esté de moda" (1969) Pablo Milanés, "Yolanda" (1970) Sara González, "Dame más" (1977) Miriam Ramos, "Ámame como si fuera nueva" (1982) Sara Gómez, "Mi aporte" (1972) Sandra Abd'Allah-Alvarez Ramírez, "Her Contribution" (2021)
	Lectura semanal recomendada: Roe, Matthew David. "Everything or Nothing: The Cuban Revolution's Censorship of Cinema" (2025)	
Domingo 2/15, 11:59 PM - Ejercicio de Escritura 2 (10% of final grade)		
7 El realismo mágico hizo BOOM	2/17	Clase 13. PRESENTACIÓN Julio Cortázar, "La noche bocarriba" (1956) Gabriel García Márquez, "La fotogenia del fantasma" (1955), "Los funerales de Mamá Grande" (1962) Oscar Chávez y Daniel Camino, "Macondo" (1969)
	2/19	Clase 14. PRESENTACIÓN Clarice Lispector, "Amor" (1952) Mercedes Sosa "Canción con todos" (1969)

		Rosario Castellanos, "Lección de cocina" (1971)
		Lectura semanal recomendada: Horacio Castellanos Moya & Ezra E. Fitz "Latin American Literature: From the "Boom" to the Aftershock" (2023)
Domingo 2/22, 11:59 PM - Reflexión final paso 3. Pregunta de investigación		
8 La Revolución Permanente (Disidencias de género)	2/24	Clase 15 Rodrigo Sepúlveda y Pedro Lemebel, "Tengo miedo torero" (2020) Norge Espinosa, "Vestido de novia" (1990)
	2/26	Clase 16. Chely Lima, <i>Lo que les dijo el licántropo</i> (2017, selección) Camila Sosa Villada, "Las malas" (2019, fragmentos)
		Lectura semanal recomendada: Amauri Francisco Gutiérrez Coto, "Is There a Transgender Literature in Latin America and the Caribbean?" (2020)
Lunes 3/2, 11:59 PM - Reflexión final paso 4. Borrador 1		
9 Que se vayan ellos (Territorios, migraciones y resistencias)	3/3	Clase 17 Gloria Anzaldúa, <i>Borderlands</i> (1987) pp.1-5 Yadira Álvarez Betancourt, "Carne y pescado" (2009) Reflexión Final Paso 5 Taller de discusión entre pares.
	3/5	Clase 18 Ernesto Wong García, "¿En qué se parece Lorca a Jacob Forever? La música popular en el lenguaje y viceversa" (2020) Willie Colón & Rubén Blades, "Tiburón" (1980) Julio Numhauser, "Todo cambia" (1982) Los prisioneros, "We are sudamerican rockers " (1988) Juan Gabriel "Canción 187" (1995) Ricardo Arjona, "Si el Norte fuera el Sur" (1996) A.N.I.M.A.L., "Gritemos Para No Olvidar" (2001) Calle 13, "Latinoamérica" (2011) Residente, "This is Not America" (2022) Bad Bunny, "LO QUE LE PASÓ A HAWAII" (2025)
Lo que piensas tu	3/10-14	Reading Period.
Jueves 3/19, 5:00 pm - Entregar Reflexión final		
	3/23	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>