A Continent of Crises? An Economic History of Latin America

Economic and financial crises have plagued few world regions as much as they did Latin America. This seminar seeks to trace some of the historical reasons for Latin America’s proneness to recurring crises. The seminar’s first part offers a theoretical approach to the economic history of Latin America. It raises the question, for instance, of whether and how specific institutions derived from colonial times shaped the region’s economic history. We will also address the role that ideas played in the formulation of economic policies. The second (and larger) part of the seminar deals with a series of historical case studies of economic and financial crises and phenomena, ranging from colonial times through to the present. The maximum of participants will be 30, seminar language is English (unless all students prefer German), while a basic knowledge of Spanish will be an advantage.

Course Requirements

This will depend essentially on the degree you are enrolled for and the module within which you are taking this course. Most likely many of the Latin Americanists are taking this as part of the module “Constitution of Latin America,” while many historians will use this course either as part of their MA in Global History or as part of the “Spaces and Regions” Module in the ‘normal’ MA in History. Whichever your degree your first point of call are the respective study regulations. When in doubt speak to Christian Ambrosius if you are a Latin Americanist, and to Michael Goebel if you are a historian.

If you require to write a course paper in order to obtain the necessary credits for this course, this means one research paper of roughly 7,500 words (including the footnotes, but excluding the bibliography) by March 31, 2015; an absolute deadline! Please get your approval for the topic and the research question for this paper by pitching a printed abstract of 300 words by January 7, 2015, to both instructors. Then make an appointment to discuss it during one of the instructors’ office hours. For those who need an exam in order to obtain credits for this course, a written test based on the required readings and discussions in class will be offered at the end of the semester (exact date tbc).

Irrespective of your module, the vast majority of you will need a certificate of “active and regular participation” in this course (Teilnahmeschein). This is also the basis for all credit points you may get in this course.

Unexceptionally, “active participation” in this seminar consists above all in reading the required texts for each class and in partaking in discussing them in class. “Regular” participation means that you must not miss class more than three times.

Moreover, we require you to give one presentation throughout this course on a topic of your choice, among the ones indicated below. Depending on the overall number of participants, presentations will usually be delivered by two or more students. You are free as to how to organize the division of labor between yourselves.
Week by Week:

1. **October 22: Introduction**

Who are we? Distribution of presentations.

**Techniques:**

How to prepare and deliver a good presentation.

2. **October 29: The Colonial Origins of Economic Development**

**Required Reading:**


**Question:**

How did colonialism affect economic development in Latin America in the long run?

**Presentation:**


3. **November 05: Informal Empire? The British Railways in Argentina**

**Required Reading:**


**Source:**


**Question:**

Did the British railways “underdevelop” Argentina?

**Presentation:**

4. November 12: Sovereign Debt Crises I: The Baring Crisis of 1890

Required Reading:


Source:


Question:

Who and what was responsible for the Baring Crisis and did they find a helpful way out?

Presentation:


5. November 19: Coffee and Commodity Chains

Required Reading:


Source:


Question:

To what extent does the coffee commodity chain confirm dependency theory?

Presentation:


Techniques:

Formulating a Viable Research Question.

Required Reading:


Question:

How did the insertion into the global economy affect economic growth at the turn of the century?

Presentations:


Techniques:

Reading and Interpreting Statistical Tables.

7. December 3: WWI and the Depression as Ruptures – the Birth of ISI?

Required Reading:


Question:

How important were WWI and the Great Depression for the onset of ISI policies?

Presentations:


Required Reading:


Sources:


http://www.eacfaculty.org/history/220_Expropriation.html

Lázaro Cárdenas, “Speech to the Nation” (1938)

Question:

Was it a good idea to nationalize oil in Mexico?

Presentation:


9. December 17: Albert O. Hirschman (guest session Anna Barbara Sum)

Required Reading:


Source:


Question:

Why did Albert O. Hirschman criticize the development approach of the World Bank in Colombia and which strategy did he propose instead?

Presentations:


10. January 7: Latin American Structuralism

Required Reading:


Question:

In which way did the different currents of Latin American structuralism challenge orthodox/neoclassical views of growth and development?

Presentation:


Required Reading:


Question:

Which problems did state-led development strategies face in Latin America and why?

Presentations:


**Required Reading:**


**Question:**

What led to the debt crisis of the 1980s?

**Presentations:**


**Required Reading:**


**Question:**

Why were outcomes of reforms following the “Washington Consensus” so disappointing?

**Presentations:**


**Required Reading:**


Sources:


“Time to Cry for Argentina”, *The Observer*, August 12, 2001:
http://www.theguardian.com/business/2001/aug/12/argentina.theobserver

Question:

Who and what is to blame for the Argentine Crisis?

15. February 11: How to write a Good Research Paper