Course Title

SPIN 271: History and Political Culture of Nicaragua (3 credits)

Professor

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Instructor

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Course Description

The course addresses the cultural, religious, political and economic factors that have shaped and are shaping Nicaragua. It will look at the pivotal historical events and the principal worldview perspectives that are at the root of current Nicaraguan culture and society. The course will also examine some of the contemporary challenges facing Nicaraguan society.

Student Learning Goals

Through this course, you will learn to:

- Identify the pivotal moments of Nicaraguan history which have shaped contemporary Nicaraguan society and culture
- Describe the principal worldviews which have formed Nicaraguan culture and evaluate them from the perspective of an integral Biblical worldview
- Examine how intervention by world powers has affected the history and development of Nicaragua and, from a Christian perspective, reflect on these events and foreign policies.
- Appreciate some of the diverse ways that Nicaraguan Christians have responded to the more recent events in their national history

Methods

1. Reading and Class Participation

This class will meet in 8 sessions of three hours each. There will also be 5 field trips. All sessions are mandatory. Inform the professor in advance if you are sick or have another valid reason to be absent. See attendance policy in the handbook.

There will be assigned readings that the students will be required to discuss in class. Sometimes the students will be assigned different readings and required to orally summarize their assigned reading in class for the benefit of those who were assigned something else.

Class participation will be graded on understanding of the subject matter, critical thinking, and level of participation. Active, enthusiastic and thoughtful participation in class discussions and activities is expected. Students should demonstrate through discussion that they have done the reading. Occasional quizzes may be given if students are not demonstrating they have done the reading.
2. Field Trips

The following 5 field trips are part of the course.

- León Viejo. This UNESCO World Heritage site was one of the first Spanish settlements in the Americas, and the first in Nicaragua, founded in 1524. It was abandoned in 1610 and soon buried in ash and mud. It remained in that state, protected and undisturbed, until it was rediscovered by archaeologists from León in 1967. It is a rich source of information on early Spanish colonial life.
- Rural Nicaragua. In this field trip the students will experience a slice of Nicaraguan culture first-hand as they look at development work in a rural community.
- León. Although the students will be living in León, this walk will focus their attention on some of the many important events that occurred in their “home town” relating to the Somoza dynasty and popular resistance.
- Managua. In Managua the students will visit the scene of greatest damage from the earthquake of 1972 and some of the important sites of the Sandinista revolutionary fight against the Somoza government.
- Costa Rica. The last field trip will be a week-long visit to Costa Rica where students will look at issues of Nicaraguan emigration to Costa Rica and explore cultural and historical differences between these two neighboring countries.

3. Reflection papers

In a reflection paper you write about personal experiences, observations or events, and you analyze them and explain their significance. A significant part of the paper should be analysis and explanation. The papers must reflect critical thinking. You are encouraged to draw conclusions and express informed opinions.

Reflection papers are essays of 4-5 pages. Papers must be typed, double-spaced, and proofread for both grammatical and spelling errors. Sources (both written and oral) must be cited appropriately. You are encouraged to draw on sources beyond those assigned.

Papers should be submitted electronically to tansgo@gmail.com on or before the due date and time. Grades for late papers will be reduced 10 percentage points for the first late day and 5 percentage points for each additional day.

Students majoring in Spanish are required to write these papers in Spanish.

The general subjects of the reflection papers are listed below. Further instructions will be handed out by the professor. All papers are due at the start of class on the stated due date, except as otherwise noted. Please note that the first paper is due on the first day of class.

- Paper #1: Contrasting worldviews of Spanish conquerors and indigenous natives. Due at start of class 1 on September 28.
- Paper #2: Survival of indigenous worldview. Due at start of class 4 on October 19.
- Paper #3: Popular perceptions of recent Nicaraguan history. Due at start of class 6 on November 2.
- Paper #4: Comparison of Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Due at noon on November 18.
4. **Final Presentation**

A final presentation will be required on November 20. Possible topics include:

- Christians’ responses to and involvement in Nicaragua’s Sandinista revolution
- Nicaraguan emigration to Costa Rica
- Nicaragua’s Grand Canal
- Syncretism in fulfillment of the command to make disciples—God’s grief or joy?
- Agrarian land reform – Nicaragua’s battles for a better harvest
- The Alemán-Ortega Pact – A Return of Caudillismo?
- Other topic of your choice approved by professor

**Required Texts**


**Grading**

The grade will consider the following factors and be weighted as noted:

- Class participation and in-class response to reading assignments: 30%
- Reflection papers (4): 40%
- Final Presentation: 30%

Grading is according to letter grades on the following scale

- A: 91-100
- B: 81-90
- C: 71-80
- D: 60-70
- F: below 60

Academic dishonesty: In accordance with Dordt policy, academic dishonesty of any kind will result in an F (no credit) on that assignment.
Course Schedule and General Outline

Class 1: Native Culture and the Spanish Conquest (September 28)

Reflection paper #1 due at start of class.

Required reading (handouts):

- “Requerimiento 1510.” Council of Castille (Spain). Translation from National Humanities Center.
- “Mexica (Aztec) & Tlaxcala Accounts of the Spanish Conquest, 1500s.” Translation from National Humanities Center.

Field Trip 1: León Viejo (September 29)

Field Trip 2: Rural Nicaragua Field Trip (September 29 - October 1)

Class 2: Patriarch and Folk and the Independence Movement: Roots of Contemporary Nicaragua in the Colonial Society (October 5)

Reading: Selected readings from Burns, Patriarch and Folk: The Emergence of Nicaragua 1798-1858.

Additional recommended (not required) reading (handout):


Class 3: William Walker and Manifest Destiny: Early U.S. Intervention in Nicaragua (October 6)

Required: Selected readings from Burns, Patriarch and Folk: The Emergence of Nicaragua 1798-1858.

Required (handouts):

- Walker, William. 1860. The War in Nicaragua. Conclusion

Mid-Semester Break (October 12-16)
Class 4: **Sandino, Somoza and the Legacy of U.S. Involvement in Nicaragua** (October 19)

Reflection Paper #2 due at the start of class

Reading: Selected readings from Diederich, *Somoza and the Legacy of U.S. Involvement in Central America.*

**Field Trip 3: León (October 20)**

Class 5: **The Sandinista Revolution and Liberation Theology** (October 26)

Reading: Selected readings from Walker and Wade, *Nicaragua: Living in the Shadow of the Eagle.*

Reading: Selected readings from Brown, *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Guide*

**Field Trip 4: Managua (October 27)**

Class 6: **The Contra War and the Post-Revolutionary Governments** (November 2)

Reflection Paper #3 due at the start of class


Class 7: **Contemporary Issues: Globalized Economy, Social Disintegration, and Return of the Sandinista Government** (November 3)

Reading (handouts):


**Field Trip 5: COSTA RICA: Exploration of the Social, Economic & Political Dimensions of Emigration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica** (November 9-13)

Reading (handout): “Nicaragua and Costa Rica” from Harrison, Lawrence E., *Underdevelopment is a State of Mind.* (Madison: 2000)


**IMPORTANT: Paper #4 (November 18)**

Reflection Paper # 4 is due at noon on November 18. (No class on that day.)

Class 8: **Final Presentations** (November 20)