

Latin American Studies Program

Fall 2026
Course Description Booklet



VILLANOVA
UNIVERSITY

Dr. Raúl Diego Rivera Hernández
Associate Professor, Director of Latin American Studies Program
St Augustine Ctr Liberal Arts Rm 341
Department of Spanish
800 Lancaster Avenue
Villanova, PA 19085
Email: raul.diegoriverahernandez@villanova.edu

Academic Programs

The main goal of the Latin American Studies program is to provide Villanova students with an innovative interdisciplinary curriculum that will allow them to explore and study Latin American in depth. Offering a balanced and creative combination of language courses, comparative global courses, experiential learning, methodological and writing courses, and a great variety of electives offered through the departments of Art History, Criminology, English, Global Interdisciplinary Studies, Philosophy, Political Science, Sociology, Spanish, and Theology and Religious Studies, the major and minor in Latin American Studies are designed to teach students complementary disciplinary approaches to understand the diversity, uniqueness, and complexity of Latin America.

The Latin American Studies program have been conceptualized to respond to national and international demands for global citizens who are aware of cultural differences, know how to respond to the challenges of more diverse populations, and who value, respect, and learn from diverse cultures, show competency in different languages and demonstrate openness, inclusiveness, cultural competence, and ability to interact with different groups of people. In this way, the Program is consistent with the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences' mission. This program provides students with a unique and academically high-quality opportunity to develop and enhance critical-thinking skills and cultural competencies, preparing them for a successful transition into the workplace.

Latin American Studies Minor Requirements

Six courses for a minimum of 18 credits.

a. Four elective courses with the LAS attribute (12 credits).

Note: The Latin American Studies program allows up to two courses, or six credits, to be counted in both the LAS minor and the Spanish major or minor. Overall, no more than two courses, or six credits, from the Department of Spanish may count as electives for the LAS minor.

b. Two Spanish courses at the intermediate level (1121 and 1122) or above (6 credits).

Spanish Electives	Two Spanish courses at the intermediate level (1121 and 1122) or above	6 credits
LAS Electives	Courses related to Latin America. Overall, no more than two courses, or six credits, from the Department of Spanish may count as electives for the LAS minor.	12 credits

Latin American Studies Major Requirements

Twelve courses for a minimum of 34 credits

- GIS 2000: Introduction to Global Interdisciplinary Studies
- Two GIS 5011 team-taught 3-credit courses
- GIS 5000: Special Topics (1-credit)
- GIS 6500: Senior Capstone 1: Research
- GIS 6600: Senior Capstone 2: Thesis

Six courses for a minimum of 18 credits, of which the following must be included:

- four courses with the LAS attribute (12 credits).
- two Spanish courses above 1122 (6 credits)

Note: courses taken as part of a study abroad program may be counted. One internship course may be counted.

Villanova Summer Program

“Spanish Language and Indigenous Sustainability in Mérida, Yucatán, México”

This 6-credit summer program takes place in and around **Mérida, Yucatán**, a vibrant and culturally rich city known not only for its deep history and environmental knowledge, but also for being one of the **safest cities in the Americas**.

Pre-requisite: Minimum of SPA 1131 Advanced Conversation & Composition 1, or equivalent required prior to program participation.

Courses:

- **Spanish 1132** (Conversation and Composition II) or **SPA 3412** (Special Topics Abroad).
- **LAS 3412. Ethnoecology and Indigenous Sustainability (required course).**
Attributes: Peace & Justice; Cultural Studies; Sustainability Humanities STEM; Diversity 3; Core Social Science; VSB BEHAVSCI; VSB SOCSCI Attribute; Policy and Management elective for Environmental Science and Environmental Studies majors, Global Health Minor elective, Sustainable Engineering Minor elective.

Note: LAS 3412 counts toward the Spanish major, but not toward the Spanish minor.

Faculty program coordinator: Dr. John Cunicelli: john.cunicelli@villanova.edu

For more information click [here](#).

Latin American Studies Course Descriptions Fall 2026

CRM 4000-002/003.- Crimmigration

Immigration and crime are two of the most salient topics in socio-legal debates and policymaking, not just in the United States, but globally. Drawing on research in law and the social sciences, this course examines historical and contemporary debates on the increasing intertwining of immigration and criminal law in shaping migration and deportation flows. First, we delve into theories and legal debates of migration and criminal behavior. Second, we analyze the increasing use of criminal justice tools in border enforcement (e.g., police, courts, prisons, etc.). Finally, the course will highlight the diverse field of community-based resistance that has emerged in response to immigration governance strategies, while acknowledging experiences of global transit. A significant focus will be on Latino immigration to the United States, as migrants coming from Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Venezuela, beyond the traditional sending countries of Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, make up most migrant (and vulnerable) communities.

Attributes: Latin American Studies, Core Social Science

Professor: Lorena Avila Jaimes

Meeting time: T/R: 10:00am - 11:15am (Sec 002)
T/R: 11:30am - 12:45pm (Sec 003)

CRM 4000-004/005.- Crime and Violence in Latin America

This course explores the complex dynamics of crime and violence in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The course draws from multiple disciplines, such as criminology, sociology, political science, anthropology, and economics. Students will analyze historical, cultural, socio-economic, and political factors contributing to the region's prevalence of crime and violence. Examples of specific topics students will cover in the course include: social, economic, and political context; organized crime and drug trafficking; gender-based violence and femicide; policing, criminal justice, and human rights; state legitimacy; and vigilantism. By the end of the course, students will have a holistic and comprehensive understanding of why nations in LAC contain some of the highest homicide rates, femicide rates, and property crime rates in the world.

Attributes: Core Social Science, Latin American Studies, Political Science, Peace & Justice

Professor: Guillermo Jesús Escaño

Meeting time: T/R: 11:30am - 12:45pm (Sec 004)
T/R: 1:00pm - 2:15pm (Sec 005)

ENG 4651. Lives of the Undocumented

In this course we will examine the lived experiences of being undocumented as represented by those who were, or who remain without legal documentation in the US. Who are the main institutions and what are the policies involved in making and unmaking citizens? Where do we find possibility for change? Through memoir, interdisciplinary critical and theoretical essays, we will attempt to discuss how the perspective from undocumented Americans are crucial to understanding citizenship, identity, and belonging in the U.S.

Attributes: Writing Intensive Requirement, Latin American Studies, Peace & Justice

Professor: Tsering Wangmo

Meeting time: T/R: 10:00am - 11:15am

GIS 5011-002.- Transnational Feminisms: Latin/x America & Middle East

This course introduces students to transnational feminist thought and praxis through a comparative study of women's voices from Latin America and the Middle East (LA/ME). Drawing from feminist, decolonial and postcolonial theory, the course examines how global forces like surveillance capitalism, colonialism, nationalism, migration, state power and militarism, and new forms of extractivism as well as constructs like race, class and religion have shaped women's lived experiences. By comparing site specific struggles and foregrounding women's voices and movements as they faced challenges related to labor, reproductive & environmental justice, citizenship, gender-based violence, migration or displacement, and grassroots activism, students will develop tools to think comparatively and ethically about feminisms across regions while also recognizing the nuances, differences and agency of women's struggles from both regions.

Attributes: Gender and Women's Studies, UNITAS Division 3, Spanish, History, Latin American Studies

Professors: Hibba Abugideiri and Laura SándeZ

Meeting time: T/R: 4:00 pm - 5:15pm

HIS 1065-003.- Amazon Rainforest History

The Amazon rainforest covers an area of over 2.7 million square miles within eight countries and one overseas territory, from Brazil to Colombia, Suriname to Bolivia. To put it in perspective, it comprises 40% of South America and has almost the same size as the U.S.'s forty-eight contiguous states. As the largest rainforest in the world, Amazonia plays a fundamental role in the regulation of the planet's climate and conservation of wildlife—it contains 20% of the world's liquid freshwater and about one in ten known species on earth—and it is at the center of global discussions on climate change. Amazonia has also been the home of hundreds of Indigenous societies and the stage for violent colonial enterprises pushed forward by European colonial empires and the nation-states that replaced them. This course provides an overview of the history and current situation of the Amazon rainforest, focusing on the Indigenous and environmental history of the region since the 1500s. Selected themes include Indigenous peoples and their relationship with the rainforest, colonial expansion and native responses, extractive economies and their human and environmental impacts, national expansion and frontiers, climate change and deforestation, and Indigenous and environmental social movements.

Attributes: Core History, Latin American Studies, CPS PE Approved, Intl Bus Social Science

Professor: Oscar Aponte

Meeting time: T/R: 2:30pm – 3:45pm

HIS 1385-001.- Latin American Environmental History

We are living in times of climate crisis. Understanding the historical roots of contemporary environmental conflicts is essential to make sense of inequality, development, sustainability, and ecological destruction in Latin America and beyond. This course introduces students to the history of Latin American societies and their interactions with the environment from the colonial period to the present. From sugar plantations in Cuba to silver mines in Mexico, from hurricanes in the Caribbean to coca fields in the Andes mountains, from infrastructure projects in Brazil to the forestry boom in Chile, this class will examine how Latin Americans have transformed—and been transformed by—the natural world. We will analyze the environment in its multiple entanglements with the region's social, political, economic, and cultural history. Selected themes include colonialism, capitalism, extractive economies, infrastructure projects, sustainability, and environmental movements.

Attributes: Latin American Studies, Core History, CPS PE Approved

Professor: Oscar Aponte

Meeting time: T/R: 1:00pm - 2:15pm

SPA 3412 – 001. Latin American Science Fiction

Science fiction literature and cinema in Latin America have their own characteristics through which it is possible to determine social, political and economic dynamics that have marked the history of its countries. This course proposes a review of the genre in Latin America to develop a way to understand how a concept of the future has been built on the continent, how our relationship with technology is produced and how science fiction has been adapted and transformed in Latin American cultural history. The readings and films will be organized around three historical moments. The first covers the technological and national imagination of the first half of the 20th century. The second axis will cover narratives of dystopia and crime fiction at the beginning of the 21st century. Finally, the third axis focuses on climate catastrophe and post-apocalyptic fiction.

Attributes: Latin American Studies, CPS PE Approved

Professor: Agnese Codebò

Meeting times: T/R: 2:30pm - 3:45 pm

SPA 3412-002.- Intersectional Approaches in Latin America

This course explores how gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, and nation intersect in Latin America from the mid twentieth century to the present. Centering voices historically pushed to “the margins”—women, rural people, Afro-descendant, Indigenous, and queer communities—we examine how cultural production becomes a space of resistance, imagination, and social transformation. Over the past 35 years, debates around feminism, LGBTQ+ rights, and gender diversity have reshaped public discourse across the region. Through literature, film, performance, music, legislative reforms, scholarly texts, and even social media, students will analyze how these movements challenge dominant national narratives and propose alternative futures. Grounded in intersectional theory, decolonial thought and subaltern studies, the course investigates how race, gender, sexuality, and class structure both private lives and public institutions. Together, we will ask: How do marginalized communities redefine belonging? How do cultural works reshape national identity? And how do these struggles continue to shape everyday life in the Americas?

Attributes: Latin American Studies, CPS PE Approved

Professor: César Salgado Portillo

Meeting time: T/R: 1:00pm - 2:15pm

SPA 3412-004.- Mexadelphia Food and Culture

This is a community-based learning course that examines Mexican food in Philadelphia as a lens to explore identity, migration, settlement practices, and foodways. Students will analyze how Mexican communities shape and are shaped by the city's social, cultural, and economic landscapes, with particular attention to entrepreneurship, labor, neighborhood formation, and transnational connections. A central requirement of the course is active engagement beyond the classroom. Students will collaborate directly with local food businesses to support ongoing initiatives outside of class hours. By combining academic inquiry with sustained community partnership, the course invites students to understand Mexican food not only as cuisine, but as a dynamic practice through which Mexican immigrants sustain community, preserve heritage, and negotiate their lives in Philadelphia.

Attributes: Latin American Studies, CPS PE Approved

Professor: Raúl Diego Rivera Hernández

Meeting Times: M/W: 1:55pm – 3:10pm

SPA 3993. Community Interpreter Internship

The Community Interpreter Internship is a partnership between the Department of Spanish and the eight clinics at the Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law, particularly the Clinic for Asylum, Refugee and Emigrant Services (CARES) and the Farmworker Legal Aid Clinic (FLAC). This community-based learning course prepares students to serve as interpreters and translators between English and Spanish. Through coursework and supervised practice, students develop foundational skills in written translation and oral interpretation, with an emphasis on accuracy, ethics, and professionalism in legal settings. As part of the internship, students apply their Spanish language skills to support Villanova law students in representing clients. To fulfill the internship requirement, students must complete 120 hours of service at the Law School clinics in addition to all requirements for SPAN 3993. This is a letter-graded internship course.

Attributes: Latin American Studies, Peace & Justice, Pre-Law

Professor: Raúl Diego Rivera Hernández

Meeting time: Wednesday 5:20-7:20pm

THL 4990-002. Stewardship of Creation

This course presents Catholic Social Teaching on the environment, centering on Pope Francis' Encyclical Laudato Si, "On Care for our Common Home". We will treat the Sustainable Development Goals identified by the community of nations and how achieving them depends highly on an ethos of sustainable living. We will consider the particularly Augustinian contribution to this topic. The course follows the methodology employed in the Encyclical: See-Judge-Act; and encourages involvement in sustainability activity by students

Attributes: Latin American Studies, Core Theology, Geography and the Environment, Humanities, Peace & Justice, Social Science, Sustainability-Humanities Stem, GB Sustainability

Professor: Arthur Purcaro

Meeting time: T/R: 8:30am - 9:45am

THL 4990-004.- God in Spanglish

This course is an exploration of Latine theology. 'Latine' and 'theology' have complex conceptual and material entanglements, individually and together, that simultaneously reveal and obscure their meanings for their intended audiences and beyond. In this no-prior-knowledge-needed in-person course, we will read, discuss, and write about Latine Theology, its relevant terms and methods, and its challenges to (and from) Latine life in the United States and to humanity in general. Along the way, we will gain skills in reading, speaking, and writing as scholars ever-in-training.

Attributes: Latin American Studies, Core Theology

Professor: Héctor Varela

Meeting times: T/R: 2:30pm - 3:45pm

THL 5001-001. THM Hispanics in the US Catholic Church

This course explores a theology rooted in everyday, communal, and liberating faith experiences of Hispanic communities in the United States. Grounded in pastoral realities, Hispanic theology emphasizes reflection that remains close to lived experiences of the people of God. Through theological inquiry, students examine dynamic relationship between culture and faith. The course also engages with key church documents that guide effective ministry within culturally diverse communities. Collaborative dialogue and group work are essential components of learning process.

Attributes: Latin American Studies, Core Theology.

Professor: Ruth Bolarte

Meeting time: M/W: 8:00am - 9:15am.