Course Description: This course will explore the representation of nature in Latin American literature and film. It will focus on the development of environmental writing and it will discuss how fictional representations of nature lead to a broader critique of unequal economic and social structures resulting from the globalization of Latin America economies in the 20th and 21st centuries. We will examine the ways in which writers and filmmakers represent Latin America’s current environmental crisis (deforestation, air pollution, toxic waste at the US/Mexico border, etc.) as tied to particular forms of marginalization and exclusion (migration, displacement of indigenous groups, violence against women, etc.). We will also look at the ways in which literature and the visual arts reflect the struggle for environmental justice and imagines alternative forms of thinking about our place in nature. The course will cover narrative, poetry and film from a wide range of geographical areas, and will include well-known authors as well as new voices, including contemporary indigenous writers.

Goals

- Learn to read contemporary Latin American literature and film from an ecocritical perspective
- Become familiar with a growing body of literature and film in Latin America that expresses both social justice and ecological concerns.
- Gain an understanding on how fictional representations of nature and the environment are driven by specific historical, political, economic, and cultural forces at play in the region.
- Gain a perspective on how perceptions and attitudes towards nature and the environment have changed since the beginning of the 20th century in Latin American.
• Reflect on the ways in which literature represents the physical world, our relationship with it, and our knowledge of environmental issues.
• Reflect on our own views and values on the environment by exploring the different perspectives that have informed the representation of these issues in Latin American literature and film since the beginning of the 20th century.
• Stimulate creative analysis, critical thinking, and oral and written communication in Spanish.

Learning outcomes. At the end of this course, the student should be able to:

• Identify and analyze concepts involved in the study of Latin American literature from an ecological perspective.
• Identify and discuss key Latin American works of literature and film which foreground social and environmental concerns.
• Identify cultural and historical forces driving common fictional representation of nature and the environment in Latin American literature since the beginning of the 20th-century.
• Explain common themes and tropes used by contemporary Latin American writers and filmmakers to represent nature and human interaction with it.
• Explain how national identity, race, gender, religion, and language use can shape literary representations of nature and the environment.
• Think, discuss, and write about abstract topics in Spanish with increased fluency and accuracy.

Requirements
TWO ESSAY-TYPE EXAMS: 30%.

RESEARCH ESSAY (30%): 1,500-2,000 word research essay making an argument relevant to one or more of the texts in the course. It will include a prospectus and an annotated bibliography.

PRESENTATIONS (15%): teams of two students will present on environmental issues affecting specific Latin American regions, and will also be responsible for reviewing homework worksheets for the day and offering interpretations of the assigned class reading.

HOMEWORK (15%). Reading questions highlighting important vocabulary and guiding students through the text will be posted daily in D2L and will be collected at the instructor’s discretion. Homework will also include short writing assignments.

PARTICIPATION (10%). Two participation grades evaluating contributions in general class dicussion and group and pair activities.

Tentative course plan

Introduction and key concepts
Sebastiao Salgado (Selection of photos)

Weeks 2 and 3. Latin American Nature: Foundational Myths
Fernando Mires, El discurso de la naturaleza. Ecología y política en América Latina, pp. 119-129
Cristóbal Colón, “Carta a Luis de Santángel.”
Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Facundo (excerpt)
Week 4. Modernization at the Turn-of-the-Century: Argentina’s Frontier.

Week 5. EXAM 1 (In-class essay)

Week 6. Women and Nature: Latin American Ecofeminisms
Gabriela Mistral. “Conversando con la tierra” (essay), selection of poems (1922-1957)
Gioconda Belli. Selection of poems.
Nancy Morejón. Selection of poems.

Leonardo Boff. “La ecología como nuevo espacio de lo sagrado.”

Week 8. Indigenous Identity and the Environmental Crisis: The Mapuche
Leonel Lienlaf and Elicure Chihuailaf, selections.
*Research paper proposal and bibliography

Week 9. EXAM 2 (In-class essay)

Week 10, 11. Ecological Dystopias
Vicki Funari and Sergio de la Torre, Maquilapolis (at home viewing).
Patricio Guzmán, Nostalgia de la luz (in class viewing)

Week 12, 13, 14: Imagining the Amazon
Luis Sepúlveda, El viejo que leía novelas de amor.
Ciro Guerrero, El abrazo de la serpiente
*First version of research paper.

Week 15: Presentations of research papers and conclusions
*Final version of research essay