Cuba Today: Politics and Society
PLSC 300 (INTS ###, LASP ###)
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Course Description: This course will provide students with a unique study abroad learning experience. Most of the contact hours for the course will take place on the island of Cuba, allowing students to get a first-hand look at the politics and society of one of the last surviving communist political systems. Moreover, Cuba is undergoing dramatic changes as it is trying to re-establish cordial ties with the United States, while still retaining its socialist system. Students will of course also experience a different cultural environment, thus enriching their cross-cultural knowledge.

Course Objectives: There are four basic objectives in this course:

1. To understand the contemporary Cuban political and economic systems. Students will consider Cuba’s accomplishment in the spheres of education and health, while examining the negative effects of authoritarian politics and a state-controlled economy.

2. To understand the changes that have taken place in Cuba since 1991, as a result of the loss of subsidies from the Soviet Union and continuing U.S. economic sanctions; and, more recently the restoration of diplomatic relations with the United States. Students will examine the promotion of tourism, the legalization of small businesses, and the partial decentralization of the economy. Students will be able to consider the positive and negative effects of these necessary changes and how the average Cuban is coping in a depressed economy in flux.

3. To understand the changing role of religion in Cuba with particular emphasis on the Catholic Church. Our goal will be to meet with religious leaders and parishioners to understand how emerging faith in Cuba is changing the social and political landscape. Pope Francis’ recent visit to Cuba highlighted the need for religious freedom. We will also examine Spiritism’s influence in Cuba by looking at the practice of Santeria.

4. To consider the importance of and take part in service to humanity. Here we will provide donations to a school and a clinic in Cuba. We will meet with the director of a school who will explain the desperate condition of schools in Cuba and students will see the effects of helping those in need. Likewise, we will visit a hospital or clinic to understand the state of the health system in Cuba and donate much needed medical supplies.
**Course Requirements:** This course is designed to be mostly experiential learning, since we will take part in many activities while in Cuba that will help to promote the learning objectives of the course. Nevertheless it is essential that each student understand some Cuban history as well as the contemporary situation on the island. Thus, I expect each student to read approximately three books prior to departing for Cuba. Below is a list of recommended books, but feel free to look for other books or articles that you may find more interesting. Remember, however, that the books you read should assist you in achieving the course objectives. While in Cuba, each student will keep a daily journal and annotate his/her impressions of daily activities. While some journal entries will be impressionistic and even personal, each student must also include daily entries that are relevant to the course objectives and informed by the suggested readings for the course. On many evenings, while in Cuba, we will have a group reflection so that we can discuss our impressions and ideas about what we are learning, seeing, and experiencing. Upon returning from Cuba, you will then write a 15-page reflection of the trip that addresses clearly the course’s learning objectives. While in Cuba, I expect that you will attend all scheduled events.

**Assessment:** Since this course is based largely on experiential learning, 40% of the course grade will depend on your participation at the scheduled events as well as at the evening discussions. The other 40% will consist of the 15-page reflection paper (20-page for graduate students) that addresses the learning objectives in the course. Class participation prior to going to Cuba will constitute the remaining 20 percent of the grade.

**Textbooks/readings:**

2. Supplemental readings provided via Sakai

**Deadlines and Requirements:** We will most likely meet as a group three times prior to departing for Cuba. Attendance at these three times will be mandatory since we will discuss Cuba’s history and contemporary. On the third meeting we will discuss travel arrangements and safety issues. These meetings will prepare you for the immersion experience. The final paper for the course will be due one week after your return from Cuba. It is essential, therefore, that you keep a good journal while in Cuba that you can use to write your paper. You may send the paper to me via email at psanche@luc.edu, but if you do so you must ensure that it is attached as an MS Word file and is properly formatted. I will provide more detailed guidelines for the paper prior to our departure.

**Academic Integrity:** Plagiarism is a very serious offense. If I have evidence that a student plagiarized a paper, or even a small part of a paper, that student will receive a zero for the paper assignment. You also cannot use a paper or part of a paper that you have written for another class. Please keep in mind that if you get a zero on 30% of the course grade, you will most likely fail the course. If you are unfamiliar with what constitutes plagiarism, check an appropriate reference, discuss the matter with me or go to the University’s statement on academic integrity at [http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml](http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml)
Recommended Readings:


Kaufman Purcell, Susan, Cuba: The Contours of Change (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000).

Kirk, John M., Between God and the Party: Religion and Politics in Revolutionary Cuba (University of South Florida Press, 1989).


Moses, Catherine, Real Life in Castro’s Cuba (Scholarly Resources, 2002).


Schwab, Peter, Cuba: Confronting the U.S. Embargo (St. Martin’s Press, 1999).
