

Latin American Studies Program

Spring 2026
Course Description Booklet



VILLANOVA
UNIVERSITY

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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 America 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, English, 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).

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| 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” May 17-June 28, 2026

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 Spring 2026

CRM 4000-002/003.- Organized Crime

This seminar draws on criminology, economics, political science, and related disciplines to open the “black box” of organized crime. The course unfolds in three parts. Part I introduces the four major types of criminal organizations: mafias, cartels, street gangs, and prison gangs. Part II explores their impact on the societies they inhabit, from violence and corruption to social control and economic distortion. Part III turns to policy: What, if anything, can governments do to combat organized crime effectively? While our primary focus will be on Latin America and the Caribbean—the global epicenter of organized crime today—we will also examine comparative cases from other regions to deepen our understanding (e.g., Europe, US, Asia).

Attributes: Core Social Science, Latin American Studies.

Professor: Guillermo Jesús Escaño

Meeting time: T/R: 11:30am - 12:45pm (Sec 002)
T/R: 2:30pm - 3:45pm (Sec 003)

HIS 155-007.- Latinos in the US

With more than 40 million Spanish speakers, the United States is now the second-largest Spanish-speaking country in the world—second only to Mexico. Latinos have lived for centuries in territories that would later become part of the United States and have since migrated to every state across the country. People of Latin American descent have not only provided a key labor force for the U.S. economy but also made significant contributions to politics, food, music, and popular culture. This course is designed to provide students with a comparative introduction to the social, political, economic, and cultural history of Latinos in the United States. Students will examine the experiences and adaptations of Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Cubans, and Dominicans, among other Latino groups, upon their arrival in the country, as well as their impact on U.S. society. Selected themes include identity, migration, colonialism, imperialism, bilingualism, social movements, and struggles for self-determination.

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

Professor: Oscar Aponte

Meeting time: T/R: 4:00pm – 5:15pm

HIS 2324-001.- Contemporary Latin American History

Latin America and the Caribbean is a vast and diverse region spanning more than thirty countries, from the Pacific to the Atlantic oceans, from the U.S.-Mexico border to Patagonia. It is home to more than 650 million people speaking over 550 different languages—including Spanish, Portuguese, French, English, Haitian Creole, and hundreds of Indigenous languages. Centuries of European colonial rule, long-lasting Indigenous and Afro-descendant societies, Cold War interventions and military dictatorships, revolutions and social movements, extractive economies and export booms, and ongoing struggles for democracy, social justice, and human rights have shaped Latin American and Caribbean history. This course provides an introduction to the history of Latin America and the Caribbean, focusing on the region's social, economic, political, and cultural history from the birth of its republics in the 1800s to the present. It will explore what brings such a large number of diverse societies together as a region and what sets them apart. Selected themes include European colonialism and Indigenous societies, independence from colonial rule, extractive economies and international trade, neocolonialism, nationalism, revolutions, and neoliberalism.

Attributes: Latin American Studies, CPS PE Approved

Professor: Oscar Aponte

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

SOC 3600-001.- Sociology of Race and Racism

This course introduces the sociological study of racism, race, and ethnicity. The class examines the different experiences and outcomes of individuals of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, the historical processes, and the growth of new racial formations, group divisions, and outlooks for the future, and centers the arguments of sociologists of color. The course will discuss the empirical realities of racial inequality, reasons for both optimism and pessimism, and theoretical understandings of the origins of such inequality (focused, as US history of racial inequality has been, primarily but not exclusively on Black and White experiences).

Attributes: Africana Studies, Criminology, Core Social Science, Diversity Requirement 1, Latin American Studies, Peace & Justice

Professor: Rory Kramer

Meeting time: T/R: 11:30am - 12:45pm

SOC 4100-001.- Sociology of Migration

This course will provide students with an overview of the major concepts and perspectives that mark the study of international migration within sociology and other social sciences, ranging from theories of immigrant incorporation to ongoing debates about citizenship. To do so, we will explore systems of inequality in the United States through the lens of international migration. This course will examine the ways in which race/ethnicity, class, gender, age, and citizenship status shape the experience of migrants and non-migrants in the process of dislocation and resettlement. Most of the readings in this course address migration and immigration to and from the US, but we will also address other regions of the globe as we learn about transnational migration and ties.

Attributes: Lab, Arab and Islamic Studies, Asian Studies, Core Social Science, Cultural Studies, Diversity Requirement 1, Gender and Women's Studies, Latin American Studies, Peace & Justice, Political Science

Professor: Chih-Yan Sun

Meeting Times: M/W: 4:45pm - 6:00pm

SPA 2221-001.- Literature and Culture of Latin America

This course introduces students to intellectual and socio-cultural issues traversing fields such as science, politics, race, gender, and popular cultures that are paramount to understanding Latin America. Students will discuss how writers, artists and intellectuals have imagined relations to the past and present of Latin America beginning with foundational texts in the colonial period and moving through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The topics covered in the syllabus will function as platforms from which to pose questions, develop research interests, and ultimately to understand Latin America cultural production as a paradigmatic site that affords specific modes of engagement with the contemporary world.

Attributes: Latin American Studies, Diversity Requirement 3

Professor: César Francisco Salgado Portillo

Meeting times: T/R: 11:30am - 12:45pm

SPA 3412-001 Literature, Arts & Sounds in Central America

This course explores the vibrant diversity of Central American cultural expression through literature, visual arts (including film), and music. Together, we'll ask: Does Central America exist beyond geography? How do history, migration, and identity shape its artistic production? From the Maya highlands along the Pacific to the Garífuna communities of the Atlantic coast, from Costa Rican poetry to Salvadoran women's theater, from Kaqchikel (Guatemala) pop to Belizean and Honduran *punta* music and dance, students will examine how creators redefine the region's borders—both real and imagined. We'll also consider how U.S. intervention and migration have shaped cultural memory and artistic resistance, and how the U.S.–Central American diaspora transforms ideas of home and belonging. Through discussion and analysis, students will gain a deeper understanding of how Central America has moved from *los costados* (the margins) to the center of modern Latin American cultural identity.

Attributes: Latin American Studies

Professor: César Francisco Salgado Portillo

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

SPA 3412-002 Latinx Feminisms

The course will expose the student to feminist studies and critical theory. Overall, the seminar offers a historical and critical grounding for Chicana/Latina/Latinx writing in the US by surveying Latina/x thinkers who present different lenses for analyzing past and present contexts of objectification, inequity and injustice together with their endeavors towards social change.

Attributes: Latin American Studies, CPS PE Approved

Professor: Laura V. Sández

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

SPA 3412-003 Narratives of the War on Drugs

This course explores fiction and non-fiction works that engage with the war on drugs and its devastating impact on civil society in Mexico and the United States. We will examine the work of journalists, writers, independent filmmakers, and activists who give voice to the victims of this violence—individuals and communities often silenced or rendered invisible by official narratives. These include the families of the disappeared, survivors of state and cartel brutality, and those living in fear or mourning amid systemic impunity. Through chronicles, novels, and documentaries, these cultural narratives serve not only as acts of witness, but also as forms of political resistance and solidarity. Special attention will be given to the roles played by citizens, collectives, and activists in seeking truth and justice in the face of widespread impunity surrounding homicides, feminicides, forced disappearances, and human rights violations. Through critical analysis and discussion, students will engage with urgent questions about memory and the power of storytelling in contexts of violence in both countries.

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 in Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law—particularly with the Clinic for Asylum, Refugee and Emigrant Services (CARES) and the Farmworker Legal Aid Clinic (FLAC). The course prepares students to be verbal interpreters and translators, from English to Spanish or vice versa, by introducing them to the basic strategies for written translation and oral interpretation. This community-based learning course allows the student intern to use his/her Spanish abilities while helping Villanova law students represent clients. To satisfy the internship requirement, students need to complete 120 hours of service at the Law School Clinic and the 2993 course requirements. This 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 5003-003. Liberation Theology

This course will introduce students to Latin American Liberation Theology, one of the most profound contemporary theological movements in the Church. Liberation Theology emerged out of the concrete struggle in Peru to overcome poverty, oppression and repression. We will examine the biblical and ecclesial roots of liberation theology, its “unconventional” theological methodology, the powerful insights of Gustavo Gutierrez and some other of its theologians and religious leaders, its impact, the price paid for prophetic witness, the controversy that surrounds it, and its ongoing challenge to theology today, to the Church and its institutions, and to a global society plagued by growing inequality.

Attributes: Latin American Studies, Core Theology, Peace & Justice

Professor: Arthur Purcaro

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

Prerequisites: THL 1050 or THL 1000 or HON 1825 or HON 1003 or HON 1053 or THL 1051 or HON 1827 or HON 1850

THL 5003-001. THM Hispanics in the US Catholic Church

This course explores a theology rooted in the 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 the lived experiences of the people of God. Through theological inquiry, students examine the 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 the learning process.

Attributes: Latin American Studies, Core Theology.

Professor: Ruth Bolarte

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

Prerequisites: THL 1050 or THL 1000 or HON 1825 or HON 1003 or HON 1053 or THL 1051 or HON 1827 or HON 1850