

HUM-368

Encountering latin America

Cursus	Sem.	Type
Humanities and Social Sciences	BA6	Obl.

Language of teaching	English
Credits	2
Session	Summer
Semester	Spring
Exam	During the semester
Workload	60h
Weeks	14
Hours	2 weekly
Courses	2 weekly
Number of positions	80

Remark

pas donné en 2019-20

Summary

Contemporary Latin America emerges from a history of encounters between cosmologies, including scientific ones. This course seeks to analyse current social and cultural dynamics in Latin America, through case studies concerning the circulation and translation of knowledges and practices.

Content**Historical and contemporary issues in knowledge circulation**

One of the challenges in understanding Latin America is its great diversity. What we currently know as 'Latin America' is the product of a history of encounters between peoples and things, before and after colonial times, which did not bring about unified and global forms of knowing. These encounters are relevant for understanding many of the current challenges or social dynamics in Latin America, such as health, gender and poverty inequalities; indigenous, Afro-American or peasant/informal workers identities and social movements; contending forms of nationalisms; and recent political or financial crises in the region.

Our path into exploring diversity in Latin America will be to consider in more detail the interactions between different forms of knowledges and practices, especially in what concerns the arrival of scientific practices during colonial times and contemporary appropriations of science in the region. Combining a sociocultural and a historical approach, students will be introduced to important topics in Latin America such as gender, ethnicity, violence, cities, through an exploration of case studies in which different forms of knowing about and acting in the world come together. The cases will range from indigenous technologies such as quipu in the archaeology of the Andes or current ethnobotany practices in Colombia, to the history of Spanish and Portuguese navigation, the control of diseases such as malaria at the turn of the 20th century in Mexico, and more contemporary examples of pharmaceuticals in Argentina, assisted reproduction in Ecuador, volcano science in Guatemala, climate change in Brazil, and genomics in Cuba.

Keywords

Latin America, social-anthropology, history, sciences, technology, indigenous, knowledge, practices.

POLY-perspective :

- interdisciplinary perspective
- global perspective

<https://www.epfl.ch/schools/cdh/cdhs-vision/>

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, the student must be able to:

- Identify socio-cultural dynamics relevant in situations of transmission or exchange of scientific knowledge practices
- Analyze and compare different instances of circulation and translations of knowledge in Latin America, in relation to global contexts
- Critique given notions, narratives or models of progress and development that do not take into account local contexts
- Transpose lessons learnt from studying sociocultural dynamics and knowledge circulation in Latin America, to other areas of the world

Transversal skills

- Demonstrate the capacity for critical thinking
- Make an oral presentation.
- Summarize an article or a technical report.

Teaching methods

Brief introductory lectures on general topics of relevance in Latin American anthropology or history will be combined with the in depth discussion of cases in the literature. Students will all read the required literature, but will alternate presenting individually or in groups to the rest of the class. Another group of students acting as commentators and guiding a general discussion. Students will be encouraged to think beyond the given cases and to relate to other examples they may know. There will be an individual or collective observation exercise (ethnography) of their own labs.

Expected student activities

1. Active participation in the course, including completing the required readings, doing assigned presentations and moderation of discussions, and intervening during the discussions.
2. To engage in an observation exercise in their own labs, to be shared and commented in group
3. Write towards the end a short essay or reflection on what they have learnt

Assessment methods

1. Individual or group presentation 60%
2. Final essay/reflection 40%

Supervision

Office hours	Yes
Assistants	No
Forum	No
Others	Lectures for this course will be in English, but all discussions and written work may also be in French or in Spanish.

Resources

Bibliography

Medina, E; Marques, I; Holmes, C. 2014 *Beyond imported magic: Essays on science, technology and society in Latin America*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Kopenawa D, Albert B. 2010 *La chute du ciel. Paroles d'un shaman Yanomami*. Plon. [Or its translation in English: 2013. *The falling sky, words of a Yanomami shaman*. Harvard University Press]

Poole, D. 2008. *A companion to Latin American anthropology*. Wiley Blackwell

Cueto, M., 2007. *Cold war, deadly fevers: malaria eradication in Mexico, 1955–1975*. Woodrow Wilson Center Press.

Medina, E. 2011. *Cybernetic revolutionaries: Technology and Politics in Allende's Chile*. MIT Press

Ressources en bibliothèque

- Cybernetic revolutionaries : technology and politics in Allende's Chile / Eden Medina
- La chute du ciel : paroles d'un chaman yanomani / par Davi Kopenawa et Bruce Albert
- A companion to Latin American anthropology / edited by Deborah Poole
- Cold war, deadly fevers : malaria eradication in Mexico, 1955-1975 / Marcos Cueto
- Beyond imported magic : essays on science, technology, and society in Latin America / ed. by Eden Medina, Ivan da Costa Marques, and Christina Holmes