Course Description

In many ways, Cuba is a unique country. Known by its rich cultural life, its cigars, its Revolution iconography and its historic confrontation with the United States of America, Cuba remains one of the few surviving socialist nations in the world.

The course on Contemporary Cuba seeks to explore the diverse nature of the Cuba’s peculiarity, especially since the moment the Caribbean island declared itself Socialist. The course is designed to provide students with an understanding of Cuba’s history and the Cuban Revolution, undoubtedly the most important and complex historical event in twentieth-Century Latin America and Caribbean. By placing historical, political, economic and cultural analysis within the contemporary social context, the course examines the evolution of Cuba’s economic performance, political life, social achievements and challenges as well as Cuba’s place in the international system once the island has reestablished diplomatic relations with the US since 2014. Cuba’s reinsertion processes in the global economy after the end of the Cold War will be analyzed, along with the country’s involvement in international institutions and key international political conflicts.

The course covers an interdisciplinary topic, touching as it does on history, political economy and international relations.

The methodology includes a combination of core issues from International Relations (IR) and International Political Economy (IPE), which will introduce students to the key events and emerging trends that contribute to build an informed understanding of the nature of relations of small states with the rest of the world.
It is recommended for students who take this course to be proficient at reading Spanish.

Course Rationale

The main purpose of the course is to provide students with an update overview of contemporary issues and challenges that Cuba faces in the international system. The students will gain a comprehensive view of Cuba’s history, society, economy, institutions, political organization and foreign policy.

Students need to know how to read for content, how to synthesize and integrate literatures, how to write summaries with both a critical and analytical eye, how to express opinions and how to give formal presentations. A secondary goal of this course is to develop skills in all these areas.

Goals

The course is designed to:

• provide, through a range of genres, an appreciation of the salient features in Cuban history and contemporary challenges;

• encourage the students to think critically about Cuba as a Caribbean state and SIDS;

• gain an understanding of Cuba’s history, economy, political organization and society in the Caribbean, Latin American and hemispheric contexts;

• foster analytical skills to evaluate Cuba’s responses to specific challenges, vulnerabilities and hazards;

• deepen their knowledge of the development and survival strategies Cuba has implemented according its particular condition, possibilities and historical circumstances; and
• present an opportunity of investigating some in depth selected topics and of acquiring a sound general knowledge of the subject, reading widely and critically in the literature associated with it.

General Objectives

The course will allow students to:

• recognize Cuba as a Caribbean and Latin American state;

• understand what Socialism means for Cuba and Cubans in their own historical context;

• identify main events in Cuba’s history;

• recognize Cuba’s particular vulnerabilities as a Caribbean SIDS;

• identify key features of Cuba’s foreign policy and its relation with Latin America and the Caribbean

• discuss the development challenges Cuba faces in the current period of globalization;

• assess the responses Cuba has implemented to face different social, economic and political issues after the end of the Cold War; and

• critically evaluate the process of normalization of bilateral relations with the US and the impacts of it for the rest of the Caribbean.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

• demonstrate deep understanding of contemporary Cuba;
characterize Cuba according social, economic and political features, and specific vulnerabilities;

evaluate the consequences of colonialism and neocolonialism in Cuba;

show an enhanced appreciation of the consequences of the US policy towards Socialist Cuba;

evaluate the impacts of the end of the Cold War for Cuba;

understand the transformations Cuban Socialism has endured during 50 years;

demonstrate deep understanding of Cuba’s foreign policy after 1959;

compare Cuba’s relationship with Latin America and the Caribbean;

analyze contemporary, emerging issues and challenges related to economy, politics, foreign policy, changing society;

demonstrate reading comprehension of relevant Cuba Studies literature;

undertake a range of assessments; and

incorporate successfully learning skills in their learning process and academic development.