Almost 2,000 miles long, the U.S.-Mexico borderlands stretch across coastal, desert, and tropical climatic terrains of varying altitudes. The lengthy U.S.-Mexico border is a region of multiple contrasts. Enormous demographic, socioeconomic, political, and cultural differences can be found across the nearly 2,000 mile-long border. There are also multiple issues to resolve along this extremely diverse and unequal region. These issues slide along the scale of the legal and the illegal in a fluid border constantly moving to a hardened state and populated by actors with specific interests.

The U.S.-Mexico borderlands have been in constant change for decades, and particularly since the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement or NAFTA in 1994 (now the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement or USMCA). The events of September 11, 2001 also reconfigured the conceptualizations of the U.S.-Mexico border, its management and related public policies. In the present era, the border is at the center of U.S.-Mexico relations. The 2016 U.S. presidential campaign and election of Donald Trump placed the U.S.-Mexico border directly in the national political discourse of each country.

This course examines the political dynamics and the main policy issues in the Mexico-U.S. border region today. For this purpose, we will first review the historic, geographic, demographic, cultural, economic, social and political dimensions of the Mexico-U.S. border
The U.S.-Mexico Border region. We will particularly assess the economic conditions, institutions, governance structures, social policy issues, and binational relations in the border region. Then, we will analyze border politics and policy in the areas of economic development, labor, immigration, public health, the environment, and security. Special attention will be given to the subjects of undocumented immigration, immigration policy and particularly to border security issues and policies.

Through the readings and discussion in the course, students will understand that the relationship between the United States and Mexico should not be treated as monolithic throughout the borderlands. A multiple-borders perspective is crucial to understanding the U.S.-Mexico border and border relations in this area, as well as related economic, social and political dynamics.

Note: The material for some sessions of the course will be complemented by presentations of guest speakers who are specialists or practitioners in key areas of public policy and security in the U.S.-Mexico border region.

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Upon completion of this course, student should have:

a) Understood the history and socioeconomic complexities of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

b) Identified the main issues to be solved at the U.S.-Mexico border region.

c) Identified the main legal and illegal, licit and illicit, economic activities at the U.S.-Mexico border region.

d) Analyzed the main areas of border policy designed and implemented for/at the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

e) Understood all aspects of undocumented immigration and analyzed issues with current U.S. and Mexican immigration policies and border enforcement.

f) Assessed the state of border security (on both sides of the border) and examined current border security policies and measures of border security cooperation.

**Writing-Intensive (WI):**

This course has a specialized designation: Writing Intensive in the Major.

More information about Writing Intensive courses is available at Mason’s Writing Across the Curriculum website: https://wac.gmu.edu/wi-course-resources/wi-course-criteria/.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Critical summaries (20%)  
A one-page critical summary of each topic should be submitted at the beginning of every class (Monday). The student should very briefly state the relevant argument, assess the strengths and weaknesses of this argument, as well as raise further questions for discussion. They must be typed and finished prior to coming in to the relevant class. In some cases, instead of writing a critical summary, the student should complete a short homework assignment or answer a specific question related to the relevant discussion (this will be specified one week in advance).

In-class presentations (20%)  
Students will pick up one social, economic or political problem in the Mexico-U.S. border and design an attempt to tackle it through specific public policies. Topics will be assigned on January 28. Students will present their work to their colleagues and submit a written report to the instructor. Papers should be 500-800 words (approx. 2-3 pages double spaced). Oral presentations will be graded taking into account: a) clarity and content; b) critical remarks; and c) originality of the exposition.

Final exam (30%)  
The in-class final exam is scheduled on May 6.

Final paper (30%)  
A semester-long research project will be required of each student. This project should examine one border policy initiative in the area of your choice (security, the environment, public health, etc.). The final essay should be approximately 10 pages long, in scholarly format, with an introduction, sub-sections, conclusions, and properly referenced bibliography. This paper is due for submission on May 13.

Papers will be evaluated according to their insight, clarity, and the effectiveness with which they answer the specific question. Writing style matters. Be clear and concise.

Please note that you can miss examinations and quizzes only for medically certified incapacity or for the gravest adequately documented, crisis in your immediate family. Make-ups will be given only in the case of an illness or emergency that is properly documented.

GRADING

Your final grade in the course will be assigned based on the following scale:
97-100 A+
93-96 A
90-92 A-
87-89 B+
83-86 B
80-82 B-
77-79 C+
70-76 C
67-69 D+
63-66 D
60-62 D-
< 60 F

GMU’s grading policy can be found at: http://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/academic/grading/#text

STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC RESPONSIBILITIES

Students are expected to be diligent in their studies and attend class regularly and on time. Students are responsible for all class work and assignments. On recommendation of the instructor concerned and with the approval of the Dean, students may, at any time, be dropped from the course. This may result in an “F” on the student’s permanent record.

*** Important:

Please provide a respectful learning environment for your fellow students. Repeated tardiness, cell phone disruptions, reading materials unrelated to the course, and web browsing and texting during class will adversely affect your grade. Repeated disruptive behavior may result in your involuntary withdrawal from the course.

Please arrive at class on time and mute (or switch off) cell phones, pagers, and alarms during class.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The integrity of the University community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. GMU has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the
ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited. A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting.

UNIVERSITY HONOR CODE

Mason shares in the tradition of an honor system that has existed in Virginia since 1842. The code is an integral part of university life. On the application for admission, students sign a statement agreeing to conform to and uphold the Honor Code. Students are responsible, therefore, for understanding the code’s provisions. In the spirit of the code, a student’s word is a declaration of good faith acceptable as truth in all academic matters. Cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing of academic work and related materials constitute Honor Code violations. To maintain an academic community according to these standards, students and faculty members must report all alleged violations to the Honor Committee. Any student who has knowledge of, but does not report, a violation may be accused of lying under the Honor Code. (See http://oai.gmu.edu for more information)

The complete Honor Code is as follows:

To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code: Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.

SPECIAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.

READING MATERIALS

The required readings listed below each class are essential to understand the course. The recommended readings list provides supplementary materials to pursue topics in greater
depth for your final papers, oral presentations and independent study. The online links represent additional sources of information.

Books can be ordered directly from the publishers, or from Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble, etc. There is a book order of the required texts for this course.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**


**RECOMMENDED READINGS:**


**ADDITIONAL READING MATERIAL:**

In addition to the required and recommended texts, there are a number of articles available on-line through GMU library website. Further readings will be posted on Blackboard, so be sure to check the website often [Note: These materials will be posted one week in advance of the relevant session].

See also:

- U.S.-Mexico Border Issues: A Selected Bibliography from the Smithsonian Institution Libraries' Collections: (Compiled by Celia C. Perez; Smithsonian Institution Libraries Intern; University of South Florida; School of Library and Information Science; Summer 2000: [http://www.sil.si.edu/silpublications/us-mexico-border-issues.htm](http://www.sil.si.edu/silpublications/us-mexico-border-issues.htm)
DISCUSSION TOPICS AND READINGS PER CLASS
(DRAFT-subject to change)

Week 1: January 28

Road map of the course- Introduction and explanation of course requirements
“U.S.-Mexico Relations, Border Relations and Institutions”

Week 2: February 4

The U.S.-Mexico Border and Borderlands Today


Week 3: February 11

The U.S.-Mexico Transborder Region I

- Vélez-Ibáñez and Heyman, eds. (2017): Part I and Part II

Week 4: February 18

The U.S.-Mexico Transborder Region I

- Vélez-Ibáñez and Heyman, eds. (2017): Part III and Part IV.

Week 5: February 25

The U.S.-Mexico Transborder Region III

- Vélez-Ibáñez and Heyman, eds. (2017): Conclusion.
Week 6: March 4

**The U.S.-Mexico Border: Policy Dynamics**


Week 7: March 11

**SPRING BREAK**

(NO CLASS)

Week 8: March 18

**The Future of the U.S.-Mexico Border**


Week 9: March 25
Immigration Policy I


Week 10: April 1

Immigration Policy II


  Guest speaker:
  (TBA)

Week 11: April 8

U.S.-Mexico Border Security and Border Security Cooperation


Week 12: April 15

The Three U.S.-Mexico Border Wars: Drugs, Immigration, and Homeland Security

- Payan (2017): Chapters 3-5.

  Guest speaker:
  (TBA)

Week 13: April 22

Energy and Security along the U.S.-Mexico Border Region
• Schneider, Keith. Water Scarcity Could Deter Energy Developers from Crossing Border into Northern Mexico. Wilson Center and Circle of Blue. http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/water-scarcity-could-deter-energy-developers-crossing-border-northern-mexico?mkt_tok=3RkMMJWWff9wsRonuKXNcO%2FhmjTEU5z16ugtXae%2Biokz2EFye%2BLIHETpodcMTcRgMr3YDBceEJhvyQJxPr3HLdkN18NoRhfmCw%3D%3D

Week 14: April 29

The Multiple U.S.-Mexico Borders


Week 15: May 6

Final Exam

Week 16: May 13

Final paper due

*** The professor reserves the right to make reasonable changes to this syllabus as needed ***