MEXICO-U.S. RELATIONS: A BILATERAL PERSPECTIVE
From Reagan/de la Madrid to Trump/Lopez Obrador

This course will take a bilateral perspective, understanding this relationship from both sides of the border. Much of the discussion in this country has been preoccupied by the position of the Trump administration on this topic, but there is much less attention paid to the debate in Mexico on this issue. In this light, the course will focus on three questions in particular: trade, immigration, and the drug trade. The story will begin with a turning point in the relationship during the 1980s, when a new administration in the White House will parallel the onset of a recently elected presidency in Mexico, where both will confront turbulent economic times and weighty political shifts. Generally speaking, the sessions will be divided into two parts, with each part of 40-45 minutes of lecture with Q&A of 15 minutes or so. Given the fluidity of current events regarding U.S.-Mexico relations, the content of the lectures may be at variance from the syllabus below. *Note: due to current events involving US-Mexico relations, there may be alterations to the syllabus below.*

SCHEDULE OF THE COURSE

SESSION #1
This session will begin with an overview of the three current major issues in order to frame the discussion of the Mexico-U.S. relationship. The second half of this session will examine the "backstory" to the present by going back to the early 1980s; a time in which the nature of the relationship between the two countries will pivot due to the changes in both countries over the questions of trade, immigration and drugs.

SESSION #2
This session will focus on the policy moves in both countries toward what would became NAFTA and its repercussions for both sides of the border. In addition, the lecture will discuss the importance for both countries of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 signed by President Reagan at a time of the increasing polarization between—and within—the major parties of the two nations. This session will conclude with an analysis of the drug trade and its meanings for Mexico and the U.S. during those years.

SESSION #3

This session will begin with the signing of NAFTA—a move initiated by Mexican president Carlos Salinas—and the policy directions of then President Clinton in light of the political and economic troubles in Mexico that almost immediately followed the trade accord; the 1994 passage of proposition 187 in California in the midst of a recession; the increase in border enforcement measures; and the economic recovery of the late 1990s. Meanwhile, in Mexico, the dominant party of nearly 70 years will come apart and lose the presidency for first time since 1929. As a result, a right-of-center, pro-free trade presidency will enter with high hopes for comprehensive immigration reform among other goals with the election of George W. Bush—but 9/11 will derail the effort for closer ties between the two countries where domestic politics will play a key role.

SESSION #4

This session will focus on the tensions generated in both countries by disputes over trade, immigration and the drug trade in the context of the domestic political economy of the U.S. and Mexico with the "great recession." Particular attention will be given to the domestic polarization on both sides of the border and the implications for the shifting electoral alignments over the three major issues of the relationship.

SESSION #5

This session will discuss the background to the transitional years from the Obama administration to the Trump presidency's efforts to redo NAFTA, intensify border enforcement, and to suppress the drug trade. The lecture will also address the tumult in Mexico as the major parties fragment with differing views on the bilateral relationship and its consequences. This class will also examine the backstory to the crisis in Central America that eventually leads to the increased migration to the U.S. via Mexico from the "northern triangle" of that region.

SESSION #6

The concluding session will discuss the current state of the relationship, given the tenor of the new presidency in Mexico on the one hand, and on the other hand, the political fallout of the Trump administration's policies and rhetoric. Finally, the lecture will discuss the cultural synergies that surround the relationship, from tortillas, tequila and smartphones to Guillermo del Toro, Alfonso Cuaron, and Starbucks—and the fusion of American cuisine with Mexican culinary practices.

For those who may be interested, you may wish to read the essay by Shannon O'Neill, "Lopez Obrador Spells Trouble for Mexico," which is available on the website of the Council on Foreign Relations, dated November 30, 2018. For a different perspective, see the story in the Washington Post, March 6, 2019, by Adam Taylor, "A Poll found Mexicans think relations with the US better than before. Ignoring Trump may be the secret."

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RECOMMENDED READINGS:
Andrew Selee, *Vanishing Frontiers: The Forces Driving the Mexico and the United States Together* (2018)

Shannon O'Neil*, Indivisible Nations: Mexico, the United States and the Road Ahead* (2013)

Francisco Cantu, *The Line Becomes a River: Dispatches from the Border* (2018)

Sam Quinones, *Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic* (2016)

Michael Dear, *Why Walls Won't Work: Repairing the US-Mexico Divide* (2013)