



# GLOBAL MINDS INSTITUTE

## Sample Course Syllabus

*PUERTO RICO: Independence, Statehood, or Colony ?*

**Instructor:** Edwin Hirschfeld

**Meetings:** Continual throughout the course. Pre and post expedition meetings to be scheduled.

**Classroom:** Various sites in and around San Juan, Puerto Rico. Also virtual pre/post expedition.

**Office Hours:** Continuous throughout the course, or by appointment

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course created by the Global Minds Institute [registered 501(c)(3)] guides students and educators through San Juan, Puerto Rico and its surrounding areas to learn about and address the island's unresolved political status and the history that produced it.

Three million U.S. citizens hold U.S. passports and live under federal law with no vote for president and no voting representation in Congress. Is Puerto Rico a colony? Should it become the 51st state? Or should it be fully independent?

We will engage with civic leaders, activists, nonprofit organizations, artists, educators, and local residents on all sides of the debate concerning Puerto Rico's future paths and how its communities may be optimally served.

As with all Global Minds Institute courses, Puerto Rico is strictly an academic endeavor which is firmly unaffiliated with any advocacy organizations, political agendas, or religious ideologies.

Discovering Puerto Rico and immersing ourselves in its diverse cultures are both sweet and essential to our mission. We will explore the island, closely examine competing status proposals, meet grassroots activists, engage with community arts, volunteer alongside Puerto Rican high school students, and learn about climate resilience and reforestation efforts in El Yunque National Forest. A variety of recreational activities and very much fun are of course part of the experience. No background on the subject is necessary.

In order to mediate and design effectively, this course will survey Puerto Rican history beginning with the Taíno, First Nation, in recognition that the island is defined predominantly (but not exclusively) by successive waves of conquest, forced and voluntary migration, and cultural fusion. Participants will become familiar with a comprehensive range of agendas and narratives regarding how Puerto Rico arrived at its present status, and how it ought to proceed.

Special focus will be placed on the aftermath of Hurricane María, which is commonly regarded as emblematic of the issues emphasized by advocates of statehood, independence, and the current territorial arrangement alike. As the course progresses students will be encouraged to develop their own critical thought, progressively becoming more discerning consumers of current events.

Through direct engagement with the community, student inquiry, and design sessions, we will create an artifact that effectively addresses problems associated with Puerto Rico's political status while respecting the affected people and their range of agendas.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Chronicle history of Puerto Rico beginning with the Taíno, First Nation
- Fathom the role of conquest, migration, and diaspora in shaping Boricua identity
- Identify the dynamics of territorial status, citizenship, and self determination
- Comprehend the range of competing narratives
- Manage the collaborative design process

## METHODOLOGY

Our group will be divided into teams, each assigned to a separate facet of the design. Collaborative design thinking will be our methodology. The process follows sequential steps:

Identifying a problem → hypothesizing a solution → designing a prototype → testing the prototype → redesigning and testing as necessary → synthesizing the product

Students will be developing a final project addressing real challenges, to be presented to an outside audience.

## SOURCES

Readings and multimedia sources to be listed shortly.

## BASIS OF EVALUATION FOR STUDENTS

**Participation (25%)** Frequent and thoughtful participation in group discussions and activities is not only expected and required, it is an indispensable resource which insists we elevate ourselves and our colleagues through inquiry and the exchange of ideas.

**Homework (25%)** Everyone is expected to be conversant in assigned reading, and up to date on work assigned by instructors or team leaders.

**Citizenship** (25%) Punctuality, respect, personal hygiene, general adherence to rules, not separating oneself from the group, overall attitude - all these social criteria have a direct bearing on the entire group's learning experience.

**Final Project** (25%) Each team will be collaboratively designing an artifact of its choosing in any medium that meaningfully addresses an aspect of Puerto Rico's status, recovery, or community development as experienced by the people we meet. Projects will be presented to outside audiences.

## APPEALS

I strive to be accurate and fair in assessments, yet keep an open mind to my own (plentiful) flaws and errors. Students who believe a grade does not reflect their work are invited to raise the matter, and scores will be adjusted if I am persuaded.

## CHEATING & PLAGIARISM

The discovery of cheating or plagiarism on any assignment in or outside the class will result in a referral to your school or relevant agency/institution.

## RESPECT

Projects and discussions often concern controversial and deeply contentious issues. The standard norm of due respect and tolerance for all individuals and their opinions applies at all times, whether or not we agree with them. This applies especially to our hosts and interlocutors, who are extending to us their hospitality and their candor.

## CULTURE

The college-preparatory component of the program is one which I take to heart. A key goal is to prepare students for the pace, responsibilities, and standards of discourse they will encounter in an undergraduate, college-level political science or history course.

*This syllabus is subject to emendations at the discretion of the instructor. Any changes will be duly announced.*