



University of
New Haven

History of Argentine Tango: Myth, Tradition & Identity

SECTION I: Course Overview

Course Code: HIS353/CUL353

Subject Area(s): Cultural Studies, History

Prerequisites: See Below

Language of Instruction: English

Total Contact Hours: 45

Recommended Credits: 3

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, you explore the history and culture of the Tango genre of music, dance, and text from the late 19th century to the present and engage in a deconstruction of its complex myths and popular stereotypes. In search of historical insight into the tensions of contemporary Argentine identity, culture, and society, you will listen to Tango music, analyze lyrics to its many songs, observe its steps in film and play, and personally dance the Tango in the *milongas* (or ballrooms) of Buenos Aires. Your goal in this course is to investigate the complex cultural, social, and political meanings—in terms of identity, gender, and class—of what has become a global social phenomenon.

Born in the late 19th century among the lower classes of Buenos Aires and nourished from the confluence of Afro-American and Spanish rhythms, Italian immigrant nostalgia, and gaucho musical traditions of the Pampas, the Argentine Tango today expresses the myths, identity, and aspirations of the people who invented it. Powerfully evocative and visually synonymous with sensual and romantic dance—in part due to Hollywood scenes of impassioned dancers crossing ballroom floors—Tango was always more than a dance. Its intoxicating music and socially-charged lyrics—a reflection of its lower-class roots—challenged conventional notions of national Argentine identity and was rejected by the dominant classes in Buenos Aires until its Parisian and New York boom in the 1910s that made it a socially acceptable and global phenomenon.

From 1920, it therefore migrated from lower class suburbia to downtown Buenos Aires where it became the most popular music of Argentina—danced, sung, and played by all social classes. By the 1940s, Tango had become mainstream: a national icon expressing the character and culture of the Argentine people. Through the influence of innovative tango composers such as Astor Piazzolla in the 1970s, Tango became an international craze: now performed, sung, and danced across the world. Tango has since gone global and, in that process, has fused with jazz, rock, and electronic music. By the end of the course, you will acquire critical historical

knowledge of this musical genre, cultural insight into the Argentine mentality, and practical experience at dancing the Tango and appreciating its cultural significance.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Cognitive / Knowledge Skills

- Identify the different characteristics of each historical phase of Tango.
- Describe the cultural, social and political issues shaping the Tango genre.
- Compare and contrast the Tango genre vis-à-vis other forms of popular music from Argentina (cumbia, rock, folklore).
- Explain how the medium and history of Tango can be used to provide insights into Argentine cultural identity and mentality.
- Describe the historical role Tango has played in the host society and culture.
- Identify historical links between Tango and the cultural, social and political transformations of Argentine society.
- Describe the historical process whereby Argentine Tango was transformed into a global esthetic and commercial product.

Analytical / Critical Thinking Skills

- Use standards of critical thinking to evaluate the role Tango plays in Argentine society.
- Use both local & international scholarship to inform your understanding of course concepts.
- Convey a critical understanding of this music (as music, dance and song) and demonstrate that you can deconstruct its myths and realities.
- Evaluate the impact of Tango music in the formation of Argentine tradition and identity.
- Write critical reports on the music, lyrics, and films related to Tango.

Affective & Behavioral / Attitudinal Skills

- Value the study of cultural phenomena as a means of understanding another culture.
- Demonstrate a heightened appreciation and curiosity for Tango as if through Argentine eyes.
- Respond to history on critical-analytical levels appropriate for academic study as well as emotional-ethical levels appropriate for personal interest.
- Demonstrate an awareness of the impact the Tango has on both host residents and yourself.
- Develop and convey empathy for the cultural values of other people who find meaning in their lives through dancing or listening to Tango music.
- Use knowledge of Tango to engage positively with the host population, city & culture.
- Apply your knowledge of Tango to overcome cultural differences with host people and be able to anticipate recurrent attitudes and discourses.
- Interview people in the street and make a video about the meaning Tango has in the lives of Argentine people today.

PREREQUISITES

Prior to enrollment, this course requires you to have completed introductory courses in Latin American history and/or cultural studies.

CROSS-LISTED COURSE

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the content, this course is cross-listed with History (HIS353) as well as Cultural Studies (CUL353). The instructor will provide directions during the first week of class regarding how to choose your desired course code.

SECTION II: Instructor & Course Details

INSTRUCTOR DETAILS

Name:	TBA
Contact Information:	TBA
Term:	SEMESTER

ATTENDANCE POLICY

This class will meet twice weekly for 90 minutes each session. All students are expected to arrive on time and prepared for the day's class session.

CEA enforces a mandatory attendance policy. You are therefore expected to attend all regularly scheduled class sessions, including any field trips, site visits, guest lectures, etc. that are assigned by the instructor. The table below shows the number of class sessions you may miss before receiving a grade penalty.

ALLOWED ABSENCES – SEMESTER		
Courses Meeting X day(s) Per Week	Allowed Absence(s)	Automatic Failing Grade at X th absence
Courses meeting 2 day(s) per week	2 Absences	8 th Absence

For every additional absence beyond the allowed number, your final course grade will drop down to the subsequent letter grade (ex: A+ to A). As a student, you should understand that the grade penalties will apply if you are marked absent due to tardiness or leaving class early. In the table below, you will find the grade penalty associated with each excessive absence up to and including automatic course failure.

ATTENDANCE DOCKING PENALTIES								
Absence	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th
Penalty	No Penalty	No Penalty	0.5 Grade Docked	1 Grade Docked	1.5 Grades Docked	2 Grades Docked	2.5 Grades Docked	Automatic Failure
HIGHEST POSSIBLE GRADE AFTER ATTENDANCE PENALTIES								
Grade	A+	A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	F

CEA does not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. As such, no documentation is required for missing class. Similarly, excessive absences, and the grade penalty associated with each, will not be excused even if you are able to provide documentation that shows the absence was beyond your control. You should

therefore only miss class when truly needed as illness or other unavoidable factors may force you to miss a class session later on in the term.

GRADING & ASSESSMENT

The instructor will assess your progress towards the above-listed learning objectives by using the forms of assessment below. Each of these assessments is weighted and will count towards your final grade. The following section (Assessment Overview) will provide further details for each.

Class Participation	10%
Reflection Papers	20%
Oral Presentation & Video	20%
Midterm Exam	25%
Final Exam	25%

The instructor will calculate your course grades using the CEA Grading Scale shown below. As a CEA student, you should understand that credit transfer decisions—including earned grades for courses taken abroad—are ultimately made by your home institution.

CEA GRADING SCALE			
Letter Grade	Numerical Grade	Percentage Range	Quality Points
A+	9.70 – 10.0	97.0 – 100%	4.00
A	9.40 – 9.69	94.0 – 96.9%	4.00
A-	9.00 – 9.39	90.0 – 93.9%	3.70
B+	8.70 – 8.99	87.0 – 89.9%	3.30
B	8.40 – 8.69	84.0 – 86.9%	3.00
B-	8.00 – 8.39	80.0 – 83.9%	2.70
C+	7.70 – 7.99	77.0 – 79.9%	2.30
C	7.40 – 7.69	74.0 – 76.9%	2.00
C-	7.00 – 7.39	70.0 – 73.9%	1.70
D	6.00 – 6.99	60.0 – 69.9%	1.00
F	0.00 – 5.99	0.00 – 59.9%	0.00
W	Withdrawal	N/A	0.00
INC	Incomplete	N/A	0.00

ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

This section provides a brief description of each form of assessment listed above. Your course instructor will provide further details and instructions during class time.

Class Participation (10%): Student participation is mandatory for all courses taken at a CEA Study Center. The instructor will use the rubric below when determining your participation grade. All students should understand that attendance and punctuality are expected and will not count positively toward the participation grade.

CLASS PARTICIPATION GRADING RUBRIC	
Student Participation Level	Grade
You make major & original contributions that spark discussion, offering critical comments clearly based on readings, research, & theoretical course topics.	A+ (10.0 – 9.70)
You make significant contributions that demonstrate insight as well as knowledge of required readings & independent research.	A/A- (9.69 – 9.00)
You participate voluntarily and make useful contributions that are usually based upon some reflection and familiarity with required readings.	B+/B (8.99 – 8.40)
You make voluntary but infrequent comments that generally reiterate the basic points of the required readings.	B-/C+ (8.39 – 7.70)
You make limited comments only when prompted and do not initiate debate or show a clear awareness of the importance of the readings.	C/C- (7.69 – 7.00)
You very rarely make comments and resist engagement with the subject. You are not prepared for class and/or discussion of course readings.	D (6.99 – 6.00)
You make irrelevant and tangential comments disruptive to class discussion. You are consistently unprepared for class and/or discussion of the course readings.	F (5.99 – 0.00)

Reflection Papers (20%): You will write two reflection papers related to course films and/or onsite study excursions. In addition to your own reflective thoughts and insights, these papers must also integrate concepts and information drawn from course readings. Further instructions and resources for this assignment will be provided during class.

Oral Presentation & Video (20%): In teams of 2-3 classmates, you will create and give a video presentation including interviews of local residents on the art and meaning of Tango music as well as the impact it has on their lives. The video presentation must be accompanied by an oral presentation in which you make clear connections between the readings and the material gathered in the interview. You must also submit a one-page, 500-word overview of the video and corresponding oral presentation.

Midterm & Final Exams (50% total, 25% each): The midterm and final exams are designed to establish and communicate to you the progress you are making towards meeting the course learning objectives listed above. They are comprised of questions and exercises that test your abilities in three important areas of competency: the amount of information you master; the accuracy of the information you present; and the significance you ascribe to the facts and ideas you have integrated across your study in this course.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ACTIVITIES (AICAP)

CEA courses are designed to include a variety of experiential learning activities that will take you out of the classroom and allow you to explore your local, host city. These activities may include field studies, guest lectures and/or activities offered through our Academically Integrated Cultural Activities Program (AICAP). The following experiential learning activities are included in this course:

- Field Studies to Classic Milonga & Queer Milonga
- New Tango Orchestra Performance

The instructor reserves the right to make changes or modifications to this syllabus as needed

REQUIRED READINGS

Reading assignments for this course will come from the required text(s) and/or the selected reading(s) listed below. All required readings—whether assigned from the text or assigned as a selected reading—must be completed according to the due date assigned by the course instructor.

- I. SELECTED READING(S):** The selected readings for this course are listed below. You will not need to purchase these readings; the instructor will provide these selected readings to you in class (either in paper or electronic format).

- Borges, J. L. "A History of the Tango" in *Evaristo Carriego*. New York: Dutton, 1984, pp. 131-148.
- Borges, J. L. "Man on Pink Corner" in *Collected Fictions*. New York: Viking, 1998.
- Cara, A. C. "Entangled Tangos: Passionate Displays, Intimate Dialogues." *Journal of American Folklore*, 122.486, 2009, pp. 438-465.
- Collier, S. "Carlos Gardel, his encounter with tango".
- Collier, S. "The Popular Roots of the Argentine Tango" in *History Workshop*, 34.1, 1992, pp. 92–100.
- Cortázar, J. "The Gates of Heaven" in *Blow-up and other stories*, Pantheon, 1985, pp. 97- 113.
- Cortázar, J. and C. Nine. "Las Puertas del Cielo (comic)" in *La Argentina en pedazos*, Buenos Aires: De La Urraca, 1993.
- David, K. "Queering Tango in Dancing Tango: Passionate Encounters in a Globalizing World", New York: NYU Press, 2015, pp. 127-154.
- Dávila, A. "Tango Tourism and the Political Economy of Space in Culture Works: Space, Value, and Mobility Across the Neoliberal Americas." New York: NYU Press, 2012, pp. 135-164.
- Fischer, L. "'Dancing through the Minefield': Passion, Pedagogy, Politics, and Production in 'The Tango Lesson'", *Cinema Journal*, 43.3, 2004, pp. 42-58.
- Gálvez, M. "Nachta Regules (selection)".
- Guy, D. J. "Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina", Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991, pp. 240-75.
- Karush, M. B. "Cosmopolitan Tango: Astor Piazzolla at Home and Abroad", *Musicians in Transit: Argentina and the Globalization of Popular Music*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 70-107.
- Liska, M. "Relentless Denial: Female Homosexuality in Tango".
- Morgan, J. L. "Tango Renovación: On the Uses of Music History in Post-Crisis Argentina", *Latin American Music Review*, 28.1, 2007, pp. 68-93.
- Pellarolo, S. "Queering Tango: Glitches in the Hetero-National Matrix of a Liminal Cultural Production", *Theatre Journal*, 60.3, 2008, pp. 409-431.
- Pick, Z. M. "Spectacle and the Displaced Body: Tangos: The Exile of Gardel in The New Latin American Cinema: A Continental Project", Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993, pp. 167-175.
- Pinet, C. "Translating Tango: Sally Potter's Lessons", *Romance Notes*, 46.3, 2006, pp. 377-385.
- Savigliano, M. "Whiny Ruffians and Rebellious Broads: Tango as a Spectacle of Eroticized Social Tension", *Theater Journal*, 47.1, 1995, pp. 83-104.
- Solanas, F. and C. Fusco. "The Tango of Esthetics & Politics: an interview with Fernando Solanas", *Cinéaste*, 16.1/2, 1987-88, pp 57-59.

- Taylor, J. "Tango: Theme of Class and Nation", *Ethnomusicology*, 20.2, 1976, pp. 273-291.
- Valenzuela, L. and A. Zatz. "Tango", *Latin American Literary Review*, 19.37, 1991, pp. 180-183.
- Viladrich, A. "Neither Virgins nor Whores: Tango Lyrics and Gender Representations in the Tango World", *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 39.2, 2006, pp. 272-293.

ADDITIONAL COURSE MATERIALS

I. SELECTED TANGO LYRICS: These are popular tango lyrics you will find in the course packet.

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|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| • Niño Bien | • Madam Yvonne | • El ciruja |
| • Che Papusa Oí | • El choclo | • Milonguita |
| • Soledad | • Viejo smoking | • Mi noche triste |
| • Anclao en París | • Milonga lunfarda | • El motivo |
| • Cuesta abajo | • Mi Buenos Aires querido | • Ventanita de arrabal |
| • Garúa | • La morocha | • De mi barrio |
| • Cotorrita de la suerte | • Canción de Buenos Aires | • Sur |
| • De mi barrio | • La bicicleta | • Yira, yira |
| • Muchacho | • El porteño | • Cambalache |
| • Al pie de la Santa Cruz | • Baile de los morenos | |

II. SELECTED FILMS: These are the required films and additional ones are included in the course packet.

- *Tangos: El Exilio de Gardel* (Fernando Solanas, 1985)
- *The Tango Lesson* (Sally Potter, 1997)
- *El día que me quieras* (John Reinhardt, 1935)
- *Tangos, no me dejes nunca* (Carlos Saura, 1998)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

In order to ensure your success abroad, CEA has provided the academic resources listed below. In addition to these resources, each CEA Study Center provides students with a physical library and study areas for group work. The Academic Affairs Office at each CEA Study Center also compiles a bank of detailed information regarding libraries, documentation centers, research institutes, and archival materials located in the host city.

- **UNH Online Library:** As a CEA student, you will be given access to the online library of CEA's School of Record, the University of New Haven (UNH). You can use this online library to access databases and additional resources while performing research abroad. You may access the UNH online library [here](#) or through your MyCEA Account. You must comply with UNH Policies regarding library usage.
- **CEAClassroom – Moodle:** CEA instructors use Moodle, an interactive virtual learning environment. This web-based platform provides you with constant and direct access to the course syllabus, daily schedule of class lectures and assignments, non-textbook required readings, and additional resources. Moodle includes the normal array of forums, up-loadable and downloadable databases, wikis, and related academic support designed for helping you achieve the learning objectives listed in this syllabus.

During the first week of class, CEA academic staff and/or faculty will help you navigate through the many functions and resources Moodle provides. While you may print a hard copy version of the syllabus, you should always check Moodle for the most up-to-date information regarding this course. The instructor will use Moodle to make announcements and updates to the course and/or syllabus. It

is your responsibility to ensure that you have access to all Moodle materials and that you monitor Moodle on a daily basis in case there are any changes made to course assignments or scheduling.

To access Moodle: Please log-in to your MyCEA account using your normal username and password. Click on the “While You’re Abroad Tab” and make sure you are under the “Academics” sub-menu. There you will see a link above your schedule that says “View Online Courses” select this link to be taken to your Moodle environment.

- **Online Reference & Research Tools:** The course instructor has identified the resources below to assist you with understanding course topics. You are encouraged to explore these and other avenues of research including the databases available via the UNH online library.

<http://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/la2x4>

<http://www.todotango.com>

<http://www.piazzolla.org>

<http://www.hoy-milonga.com>

<http://www.los36billares.com>

<http://www.torquatotasso.com.ar>

<http://www.puntotango.com.ar>

COURSE CALENDAR
History of Argentine Tango: Myth, Tradition & Identity

SESSION	TOPICS	ACTIVITY	READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS
1	Introduction to the Course Overview of major historical & cultural events that shaped Argentina and its music	Lecture & Discussion	—
2	The Origins of Tango	Lecture & Discussion	Collier, “The Popular Roots of the Argentine Tango”
3	The Tango Idol: Carlos Gardel	Lecture & Discussion	Collier, “Carlos Gardel, his encounter with tango”
4	Tango: Topics, Characters, Artists	Lecture & Discussion	Taylor, “Tango: Theme of Class and Nation”
5	Traditional Tango Scene	Field Study: Classic Milonga	—
6	Tango: Politics & Morals	Lecture & Discussion	Guy, “Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires” Gálvez, “Nachá Regules (selection)” Savigliano, “Whiny Ruffians and Rebellious Broads”
7	Tango: Yesterday & Today	Guest Speaker	—
8	Tango Today: Home Tango & Export Tango	Lecture & Discussion	Cara, “Entangled Tangos: passionate displays, intimate dialogues”

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9	Intellectuals on Tango: History & Fiction	Lecture & Discussion	Borges, “A History of the Tango” *Due: Reflection Paper 1
10	Intellectuals on Tango: History & Fiction	Lecture & Discussion	Borges, “Man on Pink Corner”
11	Tango: Nostalgia & Exile	Lecture & Discussion	Pick, “Spectacle and the Displaced Body.” Solanas and Fusco, “The Tango of Esthetics & Politics”
12	In-Class Review Session	Review for Midterm Exam	All course readings & materials
13	MIDTERM EXAM		
14	New Tango: Astor Piazzolla	Lecture & Discussion	Karush, “Cosmopolitan Tango: Astor Piazzolla at Home and Abroad”
15	New Tango: Other Developments	Lecture & Discussion	Morgan, “Tango Renovación: On the Uses of Music History in Post-Crisis Argentina”
16	New Tango Experience	Field Study: New Tango Orchestra Performance	—
17	Stylized Tango	Lecture & Discussion	Film: <i>Tangos, no me dejes nunca</i> (Carlos Saura, 1998)
18	Tango & Tourism	Lecture & Discussion	Dávila, “Tango Tourism and the Political Economy of Space” *Due: Reflection Paper 2

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19	Tango & Gender	Lecture & Discussion	Viladrich, “Neither Virgins nor Whores: Tango Lyrics and Gender Representations”
20	Tango & Gender	Lecture & Discussion	Pellarolo, “Queering Tango: Glitches in the Hetero-National Matrix” David, “Queering Tango in Dancing Tango”
21	Queer Tango	Field Study: Queer Milonga	—
22	Queer Tango	Lecture & Discussion	Liska, “Relentless Denial: Female Homosexuality in Tango” *Due: Student Presentations
23	Tango: Identity & Gendered Dancing	Lecture & Discussion	Film: <i>The Tango Lesson</i> (Sally Potter, 1997) Readings: Fischer, “Dancing through the Minefield” Pinet, “Translating Tango: Sally Potter’s Lessons”
24	Other Popular Music	Lecture & Discussion	Valenzuela and Zatz, “Tango”
25	Intellectuals on Tango: Fiction	Lecture & Discussion	Cortázar, “The Gates of Heaven” Cortázar and Nine, “Las Puertas del Cielo”
26	In-Class Review Session	Review for Final Exam	All course readings & materials
27	FINAL EXAM		

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SECTION III: CEA Academic Policies

The policies listed in this section outline general expectations for CEA students. You should carefully review these policies to ensure success in your courses and during your time abroad. Furthermore, as a participant in the CEA program, you are expected to review and understand all CEA Student Policies, including the academic policies outlined on our website. CEA reserves the right to change, update, revise, or amend existing policies and/or procedures at any time. For the most up to date policies, please review the policies on our website.

Class & Instructor Policies can be found [here](#)

General Academic Policies can be found [here](#)