

SPAN 4319 | ENGL 5375

US Latina/o/e Soundscapes: Musical Cultures of Latin America

Profe: Elena Foulis

Times and days: Lunes y miércoles | 3:30-4:45pm

Horas de oficina: Miércoles de 5-6:30 y por cita

Course Description

Welcome to US Latina/o/e Soundscapes! Conducted in Spanish, this course provides an introduction to the richness and diverse musical genres of Latin America and how they are adopted and adapted by US Latina/o/e communities. We will take a panoramic view of how music, dance, and sound are important cultural practices that express an individual's social-historical context, shared knowledge, knowledge creation, and identity formation. From learning about how Indigenous groups use winds, percussion and song, to how Afro-Latina/o/e rhythms and poetics, to connecting rhythms like salsa, cumbia, and conjunto music, to considering how local and transnational Latin American and US Latina/o/e soundscapes tell us about culture, and how they impact the societies that sustain them. Through decolonial, feminist, and historical perspectives, we will understand how to analyze and engage issues related to the situated and local knowledge in music production. You will have a chance to conduct your own participant-observation group project, to inform your end-of-the-semester project, so you will not only be learning about music, but participating in local music events over the course of the semester. Be prepared to take risks, experiment, and play!

Learning Goals

By the end of the semester, students will:

- Demonstrate critical reading and listening skills in Spanish and identify key structural, rhythmic, and performative elements of Latin American genres and styles, and connect with US Latina/o/e practices.
- Explain how social issues, including those related to the expression of race, gender, and class, surface in the lyrics, performances, and uses of popular music and discuss how music impacts society.
- Evaluate how cultural products, such as music and dance represent identity, conflict, and celebration, and compare how US Latinas/os/es and Latin Americans negotiate their own practices as they adapt their own histories of colonialism, slavery, nationalism, globalization, etc.
- Design a product based on their fieldwork by attending **one** public Latin American/Conjunto musical performance and critically interpreting their findings within a cultural studies focus.

Evaluation	
Class Attendance, Participation, Engagement	15%
Key Terms and Identifications Assignments – 4	20%
Journal Entries – 2	20%
Individual Presentation	15%
Group Music Project: Participant Observation	15%
Final Research Assignment	15%
Total	100%

Course Materials

Readings, listening, and viewing samples on Blackboard unless otherwise indicated

Attendance, Preparation, Participation (15%)

Attendance is mandatory. No more than **two** unexcused absences are permitted per semester. If you miss more than **two** classes without prior communication with the instructor, you **will not** receive a passing grade for this course. *You may use cell phones and other electronic devices in class unless needed to access course materials during specified times.*

Preparation. The course will make extensive use of audio-visual materials and participatory examples that relate to the readings. Most of the class discussion will be in Spanish, with readings in both English and Spanish. Most musical examples for this course will be available through links on Blackboard or in our Spotify class Playlist (under Weekly modules), often in the form of YouTube videos and streaming audio. **ALL READINGS, VIEWING, LISTENING, AND WEB-SEARCHING ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE FINISHED BEFORE THE WEEKLY CLASS MEETING.**

Participation. The course will combine different class formats. Class sessions will include instructor-centered lectures, discussions, guest lectures, listening and viewing activities, open-format discussions, and student-led facilitation of daily focus questions based on assigned readings.

Key Terms and Identifications Assignments (20%)

For each class session, students will have 8-10 key terms and identifications posted to Blackboard based on the reading, listening, and viewing components of their assignment. **On days that are marked with an asterisk,* all students will complete written responses.**

Reading. Students are responsible for identifying and defining the given terms or identifications (geographic origin of music; individual performer; musical current, etc.) as it is employed in the assigned reading. You should take notes on the genre, time period, and social context of the musical practice as it relates to our course goals.

Listening/Viewing. Listening and viewing components constitute a significant part of the class. You will be responsible for recognizing and identifying elements of this music (like genre, instrumentation, time period, history, context, social significance, etc.) on quizzes and written Key Terms and Identifications Assignments.

Two Journal Entries (20%)

Students will reflect on how their own position influences their observations, interpretations, and analysis of listening to different musical genres or observation/ participation in Latin American dances. Your reflection will include:

- The region/country with which it is associated
- What the lyrics of the piece discuss

- The instrumentation of the piece
- The typical contexts in which it is performed, i.e. its social context and relationship to race, class, gender, and other questions of social positionality
- The formal musical characteristics that define the genre

Each journal entry will be **600 word**, and it will define, describe, and analyze your own activities, multi-sensory experiences, and challenges that inform your holistic immersion in the chosen music practice.

Student Presentation (15%)

Each student will prepare one 15-minute (max) presentation that will consist of two separate components.

First, the student will provide a “testimonio musical” to share with the class a personal, favorite song (any genre, country of origin, or language) and discuss using the terms of the Semana 2 Turino reading “Why Music Matters.” Based on Turino’s description of Peirce’s system of signs, see if you can analyze aspects of the song that correspond to each of the following: the iconic (cultural recognition), indexical (co-occurrence of song and person), and symbolic (socially agreed upon). (5 mins)

Second, you will share your understanding of the day’s readings based on the “key terms and identifications,” which must include independent research on background information on the day's readings and/or screenings, and the preparation of a new, original question about the reading to promote class discussion. (5-10 mins)

Group Music Project: Participant Observation (15%)

A multitude of cultural studies researchers use participant observation to collect evidence about the dynamics of people within a particular space. With music, this type of method essentially involves the researcher visiting a specific social space where people might gather to participate in music practices and document their observations. The outcome of this fieldwork needs to be documented in the form of detailed field notes, pictures, and short videos. You will present this in the last week of the semester. (2-3 students per group).

Final Assignment (15%)

Students will submit a 1500-word critical analysis of their favorite song or genre examined over the course of the semester, with emphasis on the situated identities and social context of the genre and singers.

An MLA or APA-formatted bibliography will include **three to five** academic sources.

****You may also record a podcast instead** of turning in the written assignment; however, your podcast will still need to be a researched narrative, and it will include brief music samples throughout. Your podcast will be between 15-20 minutes.

IMPORTANT DATES	
January 20	First day of classes
January 27	Last day to register for Spring 16-week Session
March 9-14	Spring Break - no classes
April 17	Last day to drop with an automatic "W"
May 4	Last day of scheduled classes
May 6-12	Final examinations
May 10	Submit Final Teaching Portfolios on Blackboard (11:59pm)

**See the official academic calendar for Spring 2026 [here](#).*

