

History of Jazz

Last Updated: Mon, 01/05/2026

Course prefix: MUSI

Course number: 3630

Section: FC

CRN (you may add up to five):
31400

Instructor First Name: Frank

Instructor Last Name: Clark

Semester: Spring

Academic year: 2026

Course description:

This class will examine Jazz from its origins in early 20th century New Orleans to the multiplicity of styles in the present-day. Special attention will be given to pivotal figures in the history of Jazz such as Louis Armstrong, Bix Beiderbecke, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and Ornette Coleman. Throughout the course, the history and development of the Jazz language will be connected to the historical, social, and economic contexts in which it developed. The majority of class time will be spent listening to, analyzing, and discussing a wide variety of recorded Jazz performances as well as specific ideas and concepts presented in the documentary miniseries Jazz directed by Ken Burns. Outside of class you will be attending live Jazz performances, listening to recordings and reading about the artists that brought this music to life. The overarching course goal is to help you increase your understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of this great American art form, as well as developing listening skills and your ability to communicate clearly and intelligently about music.

Course learning outcomes:

By the end of this course, you will learn to:

1. Develop improved critical and analytic listening skills.
2. Acquire an ability to identify and discuss stylistic trends in Jazz through recognition of musical characteristics and performance practices.
3. Understand how, where, and why Jazz developed as it has.
4. Possess an awareness of the important innovators throughout Jazz history and know why they are considered as such.

5. Recognize and discuss the musical styles and cultural practices that influenced the evolution of Jazz.
6. Identify Jazz styles studied in the course and articulate the distinctive characteristics from each well-defined period of Jazz.
7. Have an increased awareness and understanding of the history of Jazz in terms of its place in the American cultural, political, economic and social fabric.
8. Be aware of issues of race and discrimination in America as they relate to Jazz music, musicians and their evolution.
9. Understand how the evolution of recording technology and radio broadcasts impacted Jazz and its development.
10. Listen to unknown examples – similar to those studied in the course – and based on the musical elements and stylistic characteristics, make conclusions about its historical context, possible artist, approximate date, and genre.
11. Utilize important terms and concepts in discussions about representative Jazz styles as portrayed through live performance and recordings.
12. Compare and contrast Jazz styles considered throughout the semester and relate their style characteristics to aspects of cultural history.

Required course materials:

None

Grading policy:

METHOD OF EVALUATION:

The following evaluative tools will be utilized in measuring progress towards obtaining the class objectives:

- Concert Report 1...15%
- Concert Report 2...15%
- Exam 1.....15%
- Exam 2.....15%
- Exam 3.....15%
- Exam 415%
- Quizzes (5).....10%

TOTAL.....100%

All Quizzes, and Exams, and Concert reports will be graded by points. The final grade for the course will be determined by dividing the total points earned by the number of points possible for each of the categories listed in Method of Evaluation. These numbers will be converted into a grade according to the following scale: A=100-90%, B=89-80%, C=79-70%, D= 69-60%, F= 59% and below.

LATE WORK:

As concepts and projects in this class build on each other, it is imperative that all reading and listening assignments as well as Concert Reports be completed on time. Concert Reports will lose one full letter grade for each day they are late or if they are returned for resubmission. For example, if a Concert Report is due on Monday and it is not turned in until Wednesday, then a grade of B would be lowered to a D. The only way to avoid this penalty is to obtain an extension in writing (or by e-mail) from the instructor in advance of the assignment deadline. Please note that Quizzes and Exams are due by the date listed in Canvas. Naturally, allowances can and will be made for documented illnesses, religious reasons, and family emergencies. Quizzes, Exams, and Concert Reports cannot be made up unless there is a valid, documented excuse.

EXTRA CREDIT POLICY:

There is an abundance of Extra Credit available in this course. The MUSI 3630 Individual Grade Calculator should be used to determine how Extra Credit can positively impact your final grade. Please note that NO EXTRA CREDIT WILL BE COUNTED TOWARDS THE FINAL GRADE unless the following criteria are met:

1. The two Concert Reports are submitted earning an average grade of 70 or above.
2. All four Exams are taken earning an average grade of 65 or above.
3. All five Quizzes are completed earning an average grade of 70 or above.

Attendance policy:

- This is a fully online course. Thus, no attendance in the traditional sense is taken.
- It is strongly recommended that you log in on a regular basis to stay up to date on content and complete assigned Quizzes, Exams, and Concert Reports.
 - There are many Announcements in Canvas throughout the course. It is important to review them as they contain critical course and content information.

Academic honesty/integrity statement:

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. All work submitted must be original and properly cited. Plagiarism, cheating, or any form of academic dishonesty will result in immediate consequences as outlined in the university's academic integrity policy.

Core IMPACTS statement(s) (if applicable):

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the Humanities area. Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.

- This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:

- How do I interpret the human experience through creative, linguistic, and philosophical works?
- Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcome:
 - Students will effectively analyze and interpret the meaning, cultural significance, and ethical implications of literary/philosophical texts or of works in the visual/performing arts.
- Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:
 - Ethical Reasoning
 - Information Literacy
 - Intercultural Competence