

Soccer & Global Politics

Last Updated: Sat, 08/02/2025

Course prefix: INTA

Course number: 3242

Section: A

CRN (you may add up to five):
93697

Instructor First Name: Kirk

Instructor Last Name: Bowman

Semester: Fall

Academic year: 2025

Course description:

In October 2008 a terrible kidnapping took place outside of the city of São Paulo, Brazil. A 21-year-old took his former girlfriend hostage, eventually murdering her. The event was played out for over 100 hours live on national television, yet some of the most dominant discourses were not about violence but about soccer. Indeed, the president of the Palmeiras Soccer Club rushed to the kidnapping site to try to negotiate the release of the hostage, only to have his good intentions crushed by fans that started chanting team songs, forcing his negotiations with the kidnapper to halt. After the episode ended in tragedy, the director of the SWAT team that botched the hostage rescue attempt lamented that the week was horrible, but it would end much better if only Palmeiras would win the following Sunday.

Many traditional scholars would analyze this story as an example of mass hysteria resulting from Latin American identity formation. The explosion of research on identity in the region has largely ignored sport since it has been viewed as an end, not as a cause. Instead, many scholars have focused on Anderson's Imagined Communities, which points to print culture as a critical factor in national identity construction, or Tilly, Centeno, and Weber who argue that national wars against foreign enemies make states and national identity. For Latin Americanists, both sets of arguments are unconvincing, yet rarely have other causal factors been established as part of a systematic explanation of identity formation for South America.

Soccer is both the global game with 4 billion fans, uniting continents and nations, and a source of intense local identity and fracturing of national identity, resulting in street battles and violence in many cities. The pulling of identity towards a larger identity in Italy, Africa, and Brazil and the use of soccer to weaken national identity and favor local ideas of

nationalism and citizenship is what makes soccer a fascinating and enduring element in international and comparative politics. This course will use readings, lectures, film, and a research project to explore soccer and politics. The students are expected to do the readings before class, to participate in class discussions, and to gain an understanding of the political dimensions of the beautiful game.

Identity is not the only political or social manifestation that can be highlighted through soccer. In fact, soccer is an excellent lens to examine and understand a great many of the key features of global politics, such as: Inequality, elections, gender representation, war, ethnic and religious divisions, global human trafficking, human rights, processes of globalization, dictatorship, corruption, diplomacy, propaganda, secession, institutions, imperialism/colonialism, fascism, racism, democracy, state recognition, and more.

This class will provide an orientation to soccer and politics. Books, newspaper readings, lectures, discussion, library assignments, and film will be the vehicles to gain an understanding. This course is reading intensive. You must be willing to engage the literature, focusing and turning off distractions. If you do not enjoy reading and are not willing to read before class, please drop the class.

Course learning outcomes:

Student will demonstrate the ability to describe the social, political, and economic forces that influence social behavior.

Cultural and ethical awareness. Students will become more aware of the diversity of cultural and ethical systems in the world. Able to understand and articulate key issues with respect for a range of different variables.

Students will demonstrate understanding of soccer as both a lens for understanding political and social concepts and dynamics and as a causal variable for change.

Students will demonstrate the ability to write a persuasive compelling argument.

Students will demonstrate the ability to understand the relationship between technological change and social/political change through soccer and the effect of technology on the game.

Required course materials:

We will heavily rely on the class Youtube page for videos at <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLGiYM9UI0QPS5sDEcXErjyXp1IOcOeSMI> .

Many of the readings are from the forthcoming books *Globalization, Innovation, and Soccer: The Beautiful Game in the 21st Century*. Routledge. Edited by Kirk Bowman and John Boyd; and *Bloody Hell: How soccer transforms our world and explains society's most perplexing puzzles*. Bloomsbury. Felipe Arocena, Kirk

Bowman and Alberto Fuentes.)

Grading policy:

Grading:

Midterm: 25%

Final: 30%

Team research project with presentation: 25%

5 of 7 reading discussion sheets: 20%

There may be extra credit opportunities.

Attendance policy:

There will be no attendance and no quizzes, but there are discussion questions for each session and those will be collected at **the beginning** of class on 7 random days (5 will count for 20 percent of your grade). If you turn in late during class, there will be a 20% deduction. Exams will be at least 50% from lectures. If you do not attend, make sure you have someone in class that you can get good notes from. Videos, podcasts, and short timely readings will also be assigned along with the readings. The discussion questions, videos, and any additional short readings will be posted by Sunday of each week.

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 Social Sciences 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 understand human experiences and connections?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcomes:

- Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior, and how historical, economic, political, social or geographic relationships develop, persist or

change.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Intercultural Competence
- Perspective-Taking
- Persuasion