

Football, Culture and Identity

Instructor: Juan Manuel Montoro

Academic Unit: Vicerrectoría de Innovación

Target audience: The course is aimed at a broad and international audience, including football fans, professionals working in sport-related fields, journalists, communicators, students, and graduates from social sciences and humanities. While no prior academic background is required, theoretical training in social sciences, humanities, or communication studies will significantly enhance participants' engagement with the course content.

Format: Online

Language of teaching: English

Total workload: 16 hours

Day & time: Tuesdays, 14:00 to 16:00 (GMT-3); 19:00 to 21:00 (CEST)

Start date: Tuesday April 7th

End date: Tuesday May 26th

This course offers a unique interdisciplinary approach to football, combining semiotics, cultural studies, and political analysis. Timed strategically before the 2026 FIFA World Cup, it enables participants to interpret the event in real time using analytical tools rarely offered in continuing education programs. The course stands out for its conceptual rigor, global perspective, and accessibility to both academic and professional audiences.

General objective:

To provide participants with a comprehensive and critical understanding of football as a social, cultural, and political phenomenon, enabling them to analyze sports as a powerful mechanism of meaning-making, identity construction, collective memory, and global cultural circulation.

Specific objectives:

- 1- To introduce participants to semiotics as a flexible and applied toolkit for the analysis of sport and popular culture.
- 2- To contextualize football historically as a modern social practice linked to mass culture, media, and nationalism.
- 3- To examine football as a space of community-building, ritualization, and symbolic conflict.

- 4- To analyze football's role in global geopolitics, governance, and soft power strategies.
- 5- To explore how football produces and negotiates national, regional, urban, and local identities.
- 6- To critically assess football's relationship with media narratives and cultural industries.
- 7- To use the 2026 FIFA World Cup as a contemporary case for real-time cultural and social analysis.

Competencies to be acquired:

Upon finalization of the course, participants will be able to:

- Analyze football events, narratives, and practices using basic semiotic and cultural analysis tools.
- Interpret football as a producer of social meaning, collective memory, and identity at different territorial scales.
- Critically read media coverage, advertising, and political discourse related to football.
- Understand football's role within broader systems of power, governance, globalization, and cultural industries.
- Articulate informed and critical arguments about sport as a central component of contemporary popular culture.
- Connect national and collective identities to recurrent, mass, and contemporary cultural phenomena.

Methodology:

The course is conducted through **weekly synchronous online sessions (2 hours each)** and comprises:

- Interactive lectures combining theoretical concepts with concrete football-related examples.
- Collective analysis of media texts (match broadcasts, advertisements, ceremonies, journalistic narratives).
- Guided discussions and short debates during each session.
- Use of historical and contemporary case studies, especially linked to World Cups.
- Semiotics is used as an open, interdisciplinary toolbox rather than a rigid theoretical school.

There is **no asynchronous workload** and no formal evaluation.

Content:

Week 1 – Introduction: Semiotics of Sport and Football

- What is semiotics (and what it is not)
- Sport and football as systems of signs
- Meaning, ritual, narrative, and symbolism in sports
- How to “read” a football match beyond the scoreboard

Week 2 – Football and Modernity: A Social and Cultural History

- Origins of football in industrial modernity
- Football, class, urbanization, and mass society
- Professionalization and media expansion
- Football as a modern cultural institution

Week 3 – Football as Community Practice

- Football as a community-building practice
- Supporter cultures, rituals, chants, and colors.
- Clubs, cities, regions and local identities.
- Derbies, rivalries and collective memory
- Inclusion, exclusion, and symbolic boundaries

Week 4 – Media, Spectacle, and Globalization

- Television, digital media, and global audiences
- Narrative structures in football broadcasting
- Heroes, villains, drama, and myth-making
- Social media, memes, and digital football culture

Week 5 – Politics, Governance, and Football Geopolitics

- FIFA, confederations, and power structures
- Mega-events and global governance
- Soft power, sports diplomacy, and sportswashing
- Football, states, and international relations

Week 6 – Football and The Nation

- National teams and imagined communities
- The World Cup as a global ritual
- National memory, trauma, and glory
- Case studies from past World Cups

Week 7 – Football and Popular Culture

- Advertising, branding, and symbolic consumption
- Football in cinema, music, fashion, and videogames
- Gender, masculinities, and representation
- Football as a cultural industry

Week 8 – The FIFA World Cup: Football as a Global Ritual

- The World Cup as a recurring global event
- Ritual, spectacle, and suspension of everyday life
- National performance on a global stage
- Media agendas and narrative construction
- The 2026 World Cup as an object of analysis

Instructor:

Juan Manuel Montoro: PhD Candidate in Sport Sciences, University of Lausanne (Switzerland); MA in Semiotics, University of Bologna (Italy); BA in Social Communication, Universidad Católica del Uruguay. Juan Manuel Montoro began his professional career as a sports journalist between 2006 and 2010. He has since worked as a columnist and essayist focusing on social and cultural approaches to sport, with particular emphasis on Semiotics of Sport. His work has been published in Marca, CTXT, Letras Libres, El País (Uruguay), Revista Lento, La Diaria and Radio En Perspectiva.

Total cost: \$6.000 uruguayan pesos.

Financing available in up to 6 installments with credit cards. Cash payment accepted through collection networks or bank transfer. Benefits: UCU students 25% discount - UCU alumni 25% discount - UCU faculty and staff: please inquire. Inquire about agreements with other institutions.

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