Soccer is the most popular sport on the planet and is played by hundreds of millions people around the world today. However, despite its global popularity, during most of the twentieth century it was a marginal sport in the US—most immigrants who would play it in their home countries adopted baseball as the path to assimilation because soccer was considered un-American. The situation is very different now: Millions of boys and girls play youth soccer, and in the last decade the professional league (MLS) has prospered significantly, up to the point that the league has the third-highest attendance among U.S.-based professional leagues. This class proposes an interdisciplinary approach to the history of soccer in Spain and the Americas and my aim is to make students aware of the multiple facets of soccer—a sociological, political, cultural and economic reality. Preliminary arrangements have been made to organize Skype talks with the social anthropologist Eugenio Paradiso, noted expert on hooligan violence in Argentinian soccer, and sports journalist Quique Peinado, recent author of a book on soccer and politics. Some of the course highlights include:

The political undertones of the Real Madrid-FC Barcelona rivalry during Franco’s rule (1939-75) in Spain, and the continuing politics behind this clash of giants.
Soccer and democracy in Brazil: Socrates, the greatest Brazilian player who never won a world cup (and Brazil holds the record number of five world titles), was an athlete who became a medical doctor at 24 and transcended the boundaries of sports when he became a symbol of resistance against the military dictatorship in the late 1970s.

The figure of the cultural icon Diego Armando Maradona: from his handball goal against England thanks to what he said was “the Hand of God” in the 1986 World Cup, to the recent creation of a church in his name (the iglesia maradoniana).

Sports, gender and media, or why women are to blame when goalkeepers fail? We will look at the story produced by the English daily The Telegraph on how the near presence of the reporter Sara Carbonero was the reason behind Iker Casillas’ poor performance against Switzerland in Spain’s first game of the 2010 World Cup. After Spain’s surprising defeat against the Swiss, the story went viral and haunted the national team during the whole tournament—despite the fact that the national coach banned their player’s access to social media. The story had a happy, and quite surprising, ending when Carbonero herself got to interview Casillas minutes after Spain’s conquest of the World Cup.