

PARIS AS A CULTURAL CROSSROADS: MUSIC, ARTS, AND GLOBAL NARRATIVES

Professor: **Alejandro Abbud Torres Torija**

Session: **July 2026**

Language of instruction: **English**

Number of hours of class: **24h**

Format: **On campus & visits in Paris**



Objective of the Course

This course introduces students to Paris as a unique cultural ecosystem shaped by artistic production, international movements of artists, intellectual exchanges and transnational cultural flows. It examines how the city has functioned as a site of encounter and circulation, where diverse traditions have intersected and new artistic modernities were imagined and forged.

It explores how music, literature, cinema and the visual arts have contributed to the making of Paris as a global cultural capital. Because so many major aesthetic movements took shape there, the city remains associated with powerful shared imaginaries and collective memories that continue to inspire artists worldwide. At the same time, the course emphasizes that Paris did not create these traditions in isolation. Artists, writers and intellectuals from across Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia have decisively shaped its cultural life through migrations, diasporas and transnational exchanges. By focusing on these international flows, the course seeks to tell a more interconnected story of Paris that speaks directly to an international classroom and invites students to recognize how their own histories and experiences extend these ongoing networks of cultural exchange.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the course, students will have acquired:

- A critical understanding of Paris's cultural footprint through music, literature, cinema, and visual arts in their historical, political, and social contexts.
- An awareness of how memory, intangible cultural heritage, and cultural imaginaries shape urban identities.
- Insight into transnational cultural networks and Paris's role as a site of mobility, exile, and artistic exchange.
- A comparative perspective on cities and cultural identity, connecting Parisian cultural history to the students' own backgrounds.
- Practical and analytical skills in cultural mapping, urban observation, and interdisciplinary interpretation of artistic sources.



Summary

Long imagined as a global capital of culture, Paris has been a laboratory of artistic creation and a crossroads for international movements, diasporas, and creative communities. This course explores the city both as a physical site of artistic production and as a symbolic space constructed through literature, music, cinema, visual arts, and transnational memory.

Through lectures, discussions, cultural mapping exercises, and urban excursions, students investigate how Paris has been represented, imagined, and reinvented across time and place. They discover the visible and invisible layers of the city's cultural history, while contributing examples from their own cultural contexts to co-construct a shared and plural cultural map of Paris.



Organization of the course

- **Session 1 - Introduction and Methodology**

Knowing a city: Urban History and Cultural Imaginaries. Overview of course themes and approaches.

- **Session 2 - Paris: Urban History and Cultural Formation**

Long-term historical trajectories, key transformations, and the making of Paris as a cultural capital.

- **Session 3 - What Makes Paris “Paris”?**

Comparative perspectives with other European cities.

- **Session 4 - Field Visit (Urban Exploration)**

On site observation of Parisian spaces related to cultural history, heritage, and artistic life.

- **Session 5 - Paris and Music**

We will discuss the multiple musical roles Paris has played through its history up to today, including musical cultures, spaces of performance, international center of musical instrument manufacture, and the role of Paris in the circulation of musical forms.

- **Session 6 - Paris and Literature: Writing the city**

Paris as setting in the works of French authors but also in literary diasporas: American Lost Generation, Russian waves of migration, Latin American “Boom”, its place in the global literary imagination and its long tradition as a global literary hub.

- **Session 7 - Field Visit (Parisian Cultural Institution)**

Exploration of a key venue connected to the course (e.g the Philharmonie de Paris or another site depending on availability).

- **Session 8 - Cinema and Visual Arts**

Representations of Paris in cinema and visual arts, contemporary practices, the role of Paris in the development of these art forms and concluding synthesis with student presentations



Bibliography

A list of required and suggested readings will be provided at a later stage. Short texts, excerpts, musical or audiovisual materials may also be distributed before each session to support discussion and thematic preparation.



Requirements for validation

- ✓ Active participation, engagement in discussions, exchange, co-construction of knowledge.
- ✓ **Reflective learning journal (individual):** Maintain a personal journal to document observations, connect course themes to your own experiences, and critically analyse insights gained throughout the course. (written or multimedia).
- ✓ **Final project (teamwork):**
 - Collective cartography of cultural Paris (mapping people, works, places)
 - Curated playlist with analytical commentary
 - Creative or analytical essay
 - Oral presentation integrating course materials and personal perspectives



Professor's Biography



Alejandro Abbud is a Franco Mexican professional with over 20 years of international experience across Europe and the Americas. Since 2014, he has taught as an international lecturer at institutions including Sciences Po Paris, ESPOL Lille, Sciences Po Saint Germain en-Laye and Central European University in Budapest. He has also designed and led a wide range of international seminars and study visits in Europe for universities, local administrations, business delegations and student groups from Latin America, Asia, Africa and Europe.

He has lived in Paris, Berlin, Rome, Vienna, Munich, St. Petersburg, Interlochen, Aspen and Mexico. These experiences inform his global and intercultural approach to teaching. Previously, Alejandro worked in international relations at the OECD, UNESCO and the Mexican Embassy in Berlin.

His courses include *Music and Power*, *Sounds of the World: Music as a Mirror of the Intimate and the Collective*, *Being an Actor of the City* and *Languages of the World / World of Languages*. A classical guitarist and multilingual cultural guide in English, Spanish, French, German, Italian and Russian, he holds a Master's degree in International Relations from Sciences Po Paris.