

Framing Barcelona: Photography, Identity, & Urban Space

Course Details

Course Designator & Number: BCLA 3037

Number of Credits: 3

Language of Instruction: English

Contact Hours: 45

Instructor: xxx

Course Description

Photography has long shaped how we perceive the world, from early documentary images of city life to contemporary explorations of urban change. The first known photograph taken in Spain—a daguerreotype of Barcelona’s Sea Loggia in 1839—marks the city’s deep connection to the medium. In a place as visually and historically layered as Barcelona, photography has often been the lens through which space, identity, and memory intersect. Today, photography is digital and ubiquitous, allowing anyone to capture an image in an instant. This course explores Barcelona’s identity through its photographic representation while encouraging students to engage directly with the city. Through hands-on exercises and assignments, students will investigate how different districts reflect Barcelona’s past and present, using the camera as both a documentary and creative tool.

Students will develop a portfolio that reflects their engagement with the city while studying the history, geography, and visual identity of Barcelona. The course introduces key concepts in photography history and theory alongside technical instruction in digital photography, including camera operation, composition, and post-production editing. Through discussions, readings, site explorations, and guest lectures, students will develop visual literacy and a critical understanding of photography’s role in shaping urban identity.

Course Objectives

Through their participation in this course, students will:

- Explore how photography has shaped Barcelona's urban identity, from documenting social change and migration to influencing perceptions of tourism and gentrification
- Analyze the relationship between photography and the city, considering how documentary, reportage, propaganda, and artistic photography have captured Barcelona's transformation over time
- Engage with diverse visual and historical sources — including archival photographs, contemporary street photography, film, and photojournalism — to assess how Barcelona has been represented through the camera lens
- Develop technical and creative skills in digital photography, including camera operation, composition, and post-production editing, while critically reflecting on the ethics of urban image-making
- Investigate Barcelona's districts through field-based research, using site visits, photographic exercises, and local exhibitions to connect theoretical knowledge with firsthand exploration
- Consider the role of historically underrepresented perspectives in urban photography, including working-class communities, migrant populations, and grassroots artistic movements
- Create a cohesive photographic portfolio that documents Barcelona's diverse districts, demonstrating technical proficiency, visual storytelling, and a critical engagement with the city's evolving urban identity

Experiential Learning & Field Visits

Field study and experiential learning components may include:

- Arts Santa Mònica
- CCCB (Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona)
- Mapfre Photography Center
- Virreina Centre de la Imatge

Course Prerequisites

None

Required Reading / Materials

- ▣ Agustí Belart, David. *A Brief History of Barcelona*. Barcelona: Editorial Comanegra, 2014.
- ▣ Batchen, Geoffrey. *Photography: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2020.
- ▣ Edwards, Steve. *Photography: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- ▣ Marien, Mary Warner. *Photography: A Cultural History*. London: Laurence King Publishing, 2021.

Grading

Grading Rubric

Letter Grade	Score or Percentage	Description
A	93–100	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
A-	90–92	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B+	87–89	
B	83–86	
B-	80–82	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C+	77–79	
C	73–76	
C-	70–72	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to fully meet the course requirements.
D+	67–69	
D	60–66	
F	0–59	Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.

Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

Assignments	Percentage of Grade
Participation in class	15%
Quizzes (3 at 5%)	15%
Urban photo logs (10 at 3%)	30%
Final photo project (Midterm portfolio review 10%, photo essay 10%, written analysis 10%, presentation 10%)	40%
Overall grade	100%

Assessment Details

Active participation is essential in this course. Students are expected to attend each class session and all scheduled field study course components, as outlined in the CET Attendance Policy. Students must actively engage in discussions, participate in critiques, and demonstrate commitment to their photographic practice through weekly assignments. This course emphasizes hands-on photographic exercises. Each week, students will complete Urban Photo Logs, experimenting with different photographic approaches and presenting their work for feedback. Steady progress on their portfolio is expected, as the course builds toward the Final Photo Project, which documents Barcelona's districts through photography. All assignments must be submitted via Canvas unless otherwise noted.

Graded assignments include:

- **Participation:** Students are expected to actively engage in class discussions. Engagement will be assessed based on the quality of contributions, critical inquiry, and interaction with course materials and site visits.
- **Quizzes:** Quizzes on theory and context will assess engagement with photography history and theory. Students will complete three short quizzes with multiple-choice and

short-answer questions. (See Interludes in course content.)

- **Urban photo logs:** For each of Barcelona's 10 districts, students will produce a six-image photographic narrative exploring a theme or concept, accompanied by a 200–300 word text explaining creative choices and approach.
- **Final photo project:** Students will select one Barcelona district and produce a curated photo essay of 10–12 images, accompanied by an 8–10-page written analysis. This paper should reflect on their conceptual approach, technical choices, and the district's history, geography, and identity. The project includes a midterm portfolio review for feedback and refinement, and concludes with a presentation following the final submission.

Course Content

Unit 1

Introduction to Barcelona: History, Geography, & Visual Identity

- Barcelona's urban evolution from Roman Barcino to the modern metropolis
- Barcelona's geography—from river to river, between the Mediterranean and the Collserola hills
- Visual representation and urban identity through history

Unit 2

Ciutat Vella: Roman, Medieval, Modern

- History: a city within a wall
- Geography: Five neighborhoods (Gòtic, Raval, El Born, La Ribera, Barceloneta)
- Key identities: urban density, gentrification, migration and tourism

Unit 3

Eixample: The Grid, Modernisme, & Urban Expansion

- History: the city under siege and Cerdà's urban grid
- Geography: the block and the grid's orientation
- Key identities: legacy of Modernisme (Gaudí, Domènech, Puig i Cadafalch), the bourgeoisie

Interlude 1

The Birth of Photography & Urban Documentation

- The invention of photography and its early use in cities
- 19th-Century photography and the visual archive of Barcelona
- Daguerreotypes, early street photography, and the tension between documentation and artistic vision

Unit 4

Gràcia & Sant Andreu: Neighborhood Identity & Resistance

- History: two independent towns absorbed by Barcelona
- Geography: urban density and distance from Ciutat Vella
- Key identities: anarchist and socialist movements, Catalan identity, popular traditions

Unit 5

Horta-Guinardó & Nou Barris: Working-Class Struggles & Urban Peripheries

- History: from rural landscapes to Franco-era mass housing projects
- Geography: hills, valleys, and self-built neighborhoods on the city's periphery
- Key identities: anti-Francoist movements, squatting culture, and contemporary urban struggles

Unit 6

Sants-Montjuïc: Industry, Expositions, & the Olympic Transformation

- History: industrial heritage, the 1929 International Exposition, and the 1992 Olympics
- Geography: from Poblesec and the railway hub to Montjuïc's slopes and exhibition spaces
- Key identities: working-class resistance, urban renewal, and the visual politics of spectacle

Interlude 2

The Photographic Gaze: Documentary, Tourism, & Propaganda

- o The ethics of photography in shaping urban narratives
- o How tourism and photojournalism construct an image of Barcelona
- o Civil War photography, propaganda, and the politics of representation

Unit 7

Sant Martí: Industrial Ruins & the 22@ Gentrification Project

- History: Poblenou as Barcelona's "Manchester" and the decline of its industrial economy
- Geography: empty spaces, new architectures
- Key identities: worker cooperatives, post-industrial landscapes, and the impact of urban renewal

Unit 8

Les Corts & Sarrià-Sant Gervasi: Wealth, Power, & the Elite City

- History: Aristocratic estates and Barcelona's financial expansion

- Geography: hills, gated communities, and high-end commercial zones
- Key identities: private schools, elite institutions, and the aesthetics of privilege + Camp Nou

Interlude 3

Photography in the Digital Age: Memory, Surveillance, & Social Media

- How smartphones and digital platforms change urban photography
- Who controls the city's image? Public vs. corporate photography
- AI, algorithms, and the future of visual documentation

Unit 9

Barcelona in the Future: Challenges & Possibilities

- Tourism and gentrification: Rising housing prices, mass tourism tensions, and the ecological impact of airport expansion and cruise ship influx.
- Sustainability and climate resilience: Superblocks, pedestrianization, cycling infrastructure, and green urban planning.
- Evolving identity: Balancing Catalan identity with multicultural influences and immigration as a driver of cultural and social dynamism.

Policies

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes while abroad. Many instructors assess both attendance and participation when assigning a final course grade. Attendance alone does not guarantee a positive participation grade; the student should be prepared for class and engage in class discussion. See the on-site syllabus for specific class requirements.

University of Minnesota Policies & Procedures

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

Student Conduct

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct. This information can be found [on the Learning Abroad Center website](#).