

Don't cry for me, Columbia; I'm in Argentina

A confession: These last few weeks, while I've been chiding the legislature and advising the curators, to no appreciable effect in either case, I've been doing it from a safe distance. Well, maybe not a safe distance, but a considerable distance. Thanks to the wonders of the Internet, I can keep up with Columbia from my temporary home in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

I'm down here teaching a course to a handful of adventurous MU journalism students and learning what I can about the country. I didn't know much when I got here a little over a month ago. If, like me, you get most of what you know about the rest of the world from the news, you probably don't know that much either.



**GEORGE
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A quick search of the Missourian's electronic archives shows that the most recent story we published that did more than mention Argentina in passing was a feature last September that recounted how my J-School colleague Byron Scott was inspired to introduce the tango to a Columbia production of "Macbeth" by his sojourn here just a year ago. Sadly, I lack both Scotty's thespian skills and his ear for music.

Even the New York Times, my second-favorite source, largely ignores Argentina, except when Hugo Chavez comes in from Venezuela with a fresh load of anti-Americanism. That last happened a few months ago, when President Bush was visiting across the river in Uruguay.

Those of us who lead with our bellies think of Argentina for its red meat and red wine, both of which, I'm happy to report, live up to expectations. The farmers of my acquaintance are occasionally inclined to worry about the

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impact of Argentina's huge exports of soybeans. (They'll be sorry to know that a record harvest is nearly complete, with prices at all-time highs and the biodiesel makers and the Chinese in competition for the crop.)

And, of course, who can forget Madonna as Eva (Evita) Perón, singing her poignant farewell from the balcony of the presidential palace? The real Evita is still widely revered here. These days, you can only view that balcony through a high security fence, made necessary by the frequent protest rallies that fill the Plaza de Mayo, just as in Perón's time.

Argentine politics is interesting, even

for a semi-literate foreigner. Ours isn't the only country where the leading presidential candidate is a presidential spouse, currently a senator. The difference is that Christina Kirchner's husband is the current president, who the polls show as a heavy favorite for re-election but who seems inclined to hand off to his wife.

Another difference is that, down in the southern province from which the Kirchners come, the residents refer to themselves as "penguins." So President Kirchner, who doesn't like the press any more than our president does, likes to tease inquiring reporters by promising that the candidate will be either a "penguino" or a "penguina." That's probably funnier when he says it.

In other news, ski season is ready to open. There's so much snow that the highway passes across the Andes to Chile are closed, stranding hundreds of truckers.

That's your Buenos Aires report for this week. Stay tuned.