

KIIS Maya Mexico Winter 2019-2020



HON 300 Topics: Visual Culture of the Maya and Aztecs

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Course Location: Yucatan and Mexico City, Mexico



Course Description:

This Honors course introduces students to the art, architecture, and other visual cultures of the Maya (in Yucatan) and the Aztec (in present-day Mexico City). This course explores the larger religious and political transformation of indigenous societies through their production of visual culture. Issues of cultural memory and myth will also be studied to understand indigenous conceptions of history and cosmology as well as the manner in which these fields shaped social, ritual, and political order. To explore these topics fully, this course will draw on "place as text" by studying and looking at Pre-Columbian iconography, architecture, and epigraphy to Colonial and modern ethnographic documents as well as contemporary and interdisciplinary scholarship related to specific sites we will be visiting during our time in two distinct regions of Mexico.

Course Objectives:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- *Identify and discuss essential information about Maya and Aztec visual cultures.
- *Evaluate various aspects of the art and cultures of Mexico through geographic and cultural immersion.
- *Demonstrate critical familiarity with visual, anthropological, and art historical concepts through discussion and written assignments connected to specific places in Mexico.
- *Identify and complete the essential steps to building a successful research program, including short verbal and written assignments as well as producing a final project.

Required Texts/Suggested Readings:

The following texts are suggested for the course. Certain assigned readings are to be completed before departure and others while in Mexico. Students are expected to engage with written material as well as experiences of places in Mexico in a critical and thoughtful manner.

Alfredo López Austin, et al. *Mexico's Indigenous Past (Civilization of the American Indian Series)*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005.

Michael D. Coe. *The Maya*, 8th Edition. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011.

Richard F. Townsend. *The Aztecs*, 3rd Edition. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2009.

TOOLS FOR ART ANALYSIS

As you consider many different works of art during the class, it may be helpful to have some “tools” on how to think about and understand art. We do not expect you to analyze art completely and accurately; instead, we want you to conduct active observation of a piece and draw conclusions from those observations. Then, check those conclusions against other criticism and research as you are able! You will become the “expert” on your piece. Here are some useful things to consider as you analyze a work of art:

Content, Composition, Form, Meaning

1. What is the subject and content of the work? What is the message the artist is trying to communicate?
2. How and where are the objects/places/themes presented? (i.e. idealized; realistic; indistinct; hidden; distorted; exaggerated; stylized; reduced to simplified/minimalist form; abstracted; suggested; blurred or focused) Do any of those objects serve as symbols of something else? What are the connections between indigenous visual culture and ritual? Why are these connections vital to our current understanding of indigenous visual cultures?
3. Consider the form and medium of the work. Helpful to consider is the use of color (light, dark, cool, warm), shapes and lines, space, textures, media (materials). What is the effect of all of these choices?
4. Does the work fall within an established genre that you can identify? (i.e. historical; mythical; religious; portraiture; landscape; still life; fantasy; architectural)
5. From what perspective does the viewer experience the scene? Are they part of it? Viewing from outside/inside/above? Is the viewer expected to move through the work?
6. What is your own reaction to the work? How might your own upbringing, beliefs and biases distort your interpretation of the artwork? Does your own response differ from the public response, that of the original audience and/or interpretation by critics?

Context, Purpose

7. Why do you think this piece was made? Was its purpose persuasion/social change, beauty/emotional expression, narration of an experience, or ceremonial in nature? Is it effective in achieving this purpose?
8. Who is the intended audience for this work? The general masses, high-society, or the highly educated? Is it targeting a specific group or market? Does the title change the way we see the work?
9. Where is the artwork located? Does its position in a public or private space alter how it is presented/received? By whom would it have been received/viewed? Is it part of a series? Has it been removed from its original intended location?
10. Consider the context in which it was created. Who was the artist? What is the approximate date of creation? In what historical context was it created? Who might be the influences of the artist?

Assignments

Graded assignments consist of regular written reflections (2 pages each), in-depth oral commentaries and presentations, and a final “digital storytelling” project. The instructor will provide students with a written handout detailing each assignment on-site in Mexico. Emphasis throughout is placed on place-as-text active-student learning, which is described in detail at the November 2, 2019 pre-departure KIIS Student Orientation.

Attendance Policy

KIIS program participants are expected to be punctual to and in attendance at all classes, presentations, meetings and required excursions, and to remain with the program for the full academic period. Unexcused absences from classes and/or mandatory meetings will result in a lowering of the student’s final grade, as will excessive tardiness. Multiple unexcused absences could result in expulsion from the program. Any absence from an academic class session must be excused for medical reasons.

Disability Accommodation

KIIS will make every reasonable effort to provide accommodations for program participants with special needs or disabilities, but we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. Be aware that many foreign countries do not have comprehensive legislation comparable to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). As a result, businesses and other establishments operating in foreign countries may not be able to provide accommodations.

If you have a disability accommodation need, we recommend you contact your KIIS Campus Representative, <https://www.kiis.org/about-kiis/contact-us/campus-representatives/> early in your program selection process so that s/he has time to discuss any specific needs, including which KIIS programs may be best suited. You also are welcome to contact KIIS Assistant Director, Rebekah Golla, rebekah.golla@wku.edu, to discuss your disability accommodation needs (e.g. housing, transportation, excursions, class schedule, etc.).

Immediately after acceptance, notify KIIS Assistant Director, Rebekah Golla, or KIIS Office Manager, Haley McTaggart, haley.mctaggart@wku.edu, if you have a special need or disability

that might require any form of accommodation abroad. Failure to notify KIIS may prevent you from participating on your KIIS program.

If you require any accommodations abroad, you must provide KIIS Assistant Director, Rebekah Golla, or KIIS Office Manager, Haley McTaggart, an accommodation letter from your home campus' disability accommodation office that lists the accommodations you are eligible to receive. Please do not request accommodations directly from your KIIS Program Director or other KIIS Faculty; the KIIS Office will notify your KIIS Program Director and/or Faculty after we have received your above accommodation letter.

In some cases, you may need to make arrangements for a caregiver to join you on your KIIS program, should your physician, campus disability accommodation office, or KIIS make such a recommendation or require it.

Title IX / Discrimination & Harassment

Recent attention to gender discrimination and sexual harassment at colleges and universities reminds us of the importance of adhering to standards of ethical and professional behavior. KIIS Study Abroad is committed to supporting and encouraging safe and equitable educational environments for our students, faculty, and program directors. Students, faculty, and program directors are required to be civil and treat each other with dignity and respect. As such, harassment and/or discrimination of any kind will not be permitted or tolerated.

Sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, sexual assault, and sexual/dating/domestic violence) and sex discrimination are violations of KIIS policies. If you experience an incident of sex/gender-based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct, you are encouraged to report it to a) KIIS Assistant Director Rebekah Golla (+1-270-779-8091) or KIIS Executive Director, John Dizgun (+1-270-227-2288), b) WKU's Title IX Coordinator, Andrea Anderson (270-745-5398 / andrea.anderson@wku.edu) or WKU's Title IX Investigators, Michael Crowe (270-745-5429 / michael.crowe@wku.edu) or Joshua Hayes (270-745-5121 / joshua.hayes@wku.edu). Please note that while you may report an incident of sex/gender based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct to a KIIS program director and/or faculty member, KIIS program directors and faculty are considered "Responsible Employees" of Western Kentucky University and MUST report what you share to WKU's Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Investigator.

If you would like to speak with someone who may be able to afford you confidentiality, you may contact WKU's Counseling and Testing Center, <https://www.wku.edu/heretohelp/> at 270-745-3159.

For more information on KIIS Title IX, see <https://www.kiis.org/students/health-safety/title-ix-clery/>; additional Title IX resources can be found here <https://www.wku.edu/eoo/documents/titleix/titleixbrochure.pdf>.

Everyone should be able to participate on a KIIS program, attend a KIIS event, or work in a KIIS environment (e.g. KIIS office) without fear of sexual harassment or discrimination of any kind. Be respectful of each other.