

KIIS Maya Mexico Winter 2023-2024

HIST 490 Topics: Mexico, Past and Present (3 credits)

December 26, 2023 – January 7, 2024



Instructor: Dr. Luis Sierra

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Syllabus subject to change



Course Description

This study abroad course, designed for students coming from all majors, asks, how can examining Mexico's rich historical past help us better understand the Mexico of today. Our exploration will identify the relationship between past and present using a wide range of cultural expression including archaeological and religious sites, monuments, sporting events, museums, and markets as well as media, graffiti, food, and fashion. Mexico's Pre-Colombian, colonial, and national histories all affect the present in myriad ways. Individually and as a group, we explore how cultural expression is both a mirror for contemporary notions of Mexican national identity and window for seeing how the past is present in cultural expression. We use our knowledge to deconstruct the nuanced meanings, motivations, and potential influence such expression has on the evolving notions of Mexican identity. This course is taught in English.

KIIS Study Abroad Mission Statement:

KIIS provides high-quality education abroad programs for students from all diverse backgrounds that promote deep international learning, are integrated into the curriculum, and encourage critical and creative thinking. Our goal is to help students understand the wider world and develop personal and professional skills for lifelong enrichment. We strive to go beyond generalizations and cultural stereotypes to help foster a nuanced appreciation of the world in which we live.

Students participating on KIIS study abroad programs aim to:

- 1) Understand contemporary issues of their host country/countries (i.e. KIIS program location).
- 2) Develop skills to interact comfortably in a global setting.

3) Understand other cultures.

Prior to your KIIS study abroad program, and again at the conclusion of your program, KIIS will ask each student to a) answer a few multiple-choice questions, and b) write a short reflective essay (two paragraphs in length) related to the elements detailed above. There is no right or wrong answer, and your responses will not affect your grade in any way. The purpose of the exercise is to help KIIS measure the effectiveness of its study abroad programs.

Academic Model

We employ a "Place as Text" teaching methodology, which inserts students into social environments and fosters close observation of the local culture. We make use of five basic learning strategies: mapping, observing, listening, discussing, and reflecting. A central goal is for students to take an active role in the direction of their learning by:

- self-selecting topics and readings (from among a selection provided by the instructor) that most interest them
- dedicating themselves to become "student-experts" in the chosen field
- participating in small group excursions that (safely) place them in culturally uncomfortable situations
- regularly synthesizing readings and on-site observations
- in pairs, leading a seminar-style oral presentation

Throughout the program, students develop an understanding of Mexican society, past and present. In the process, they also learn to work effectively in small groups, improve their oral presentation and analytical skills, and develop a heightened sense of confidence and leadership.

Student Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, students should be able to:

- Identify and explain five transformative moments in Mexican history
- Gain an understanding of how Mexican history and culture have been, and continue to be, expressed in art, media, museums, food, rituals, public spaces, and politics.
- Relate topics in Mexican history to current events
- Compare and reflect upon notions held about Mexico before and ideas developed during the study abroad program
- Work effectively in small groups and improve oral presentation skills
- Analyze and synthesize readings, observations and class discussions in short written papers

Program Calendar Snapshot

During this winter study abroad, we spend four days in Mexico City and eight days in the Yucatan Peninsula. In Mexico City, academic excursions include the Zocalo and Historic Center, the original artwork of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, the National Anthropological Museum, the city's rich markets and diverse neighborhoods, the famous temples of Teotihuacan, and a night of Lucha Libre. In the Yucatan, we explore the spectacular Mayan archaeological sites of Chichen Itza and Uxmal, the vibrant markets & neighborhoods of Merida, off-the-beaten-path *pueblos*, and a Mayan *cenote* (natural swimming pool). The program concludes in the funky artsy beach town of Holbox with student final oral presentations and a group discussion regarding the complex relationship between tourism and environmental sustainability. Throughout, we employ a "Place as Text" learning model, which inserts students into social environments and fosters close observation of local culture. Note: items above are subject to change. See the KIIS Maya Mexico Winter webpage (<https://www.kiis.org/programs/maya-mexico-winter/>) for a more detailed program calendar.

Assignments

Students begin their academic preparation for this study abroad program at the pre-departure KIIS student orientation on November 6, 2021 (in Elizabethtown, KY). First, professors familiarize students with the Place as Text model (described above). Second, we discuss notions students hold about Mexico and begin to develop a (deeper) understanding of Mexican history and culture. Third, in groups of two, students self-select one of the following topics, which ultimately will serve as the basis for their on-site final oral presentation:

1. The relationship between the Mexican past and present
2. Political and cultural messaging in Mexican society
3. Race, class and/or gender in contemporary Mexico
4. Innovation and heritage in Mexican society
5. The benefits and drawbacks of tourism in Mexican society
6. Food and culture in Mexican society
7. Street activity in Mexican society
8. The legacy of Diego Rivera and/or Frida Kahlo (or any of great Mexican muralists)
9. The presence and role of religion in Mexican society
10. "Portraits" of three Mexicans (on-site oral interviews with three locals)
11. U.S.-Mexico Relations

A. Writing Assignment #1 (due pre-departure)

Students will be provided an image (e.g. photo, artwork, graphic, etc.) and an accompanying question. Each student submits a one-page essay response by **December 24 at noon**.

B. WhatsApp Written Reflections (on-site) – 30%

Regularly over the course of our study abroad in Mexico (e.g. ahead of select museum visits, archeological site visits, and other on-site excursions/learning activities), students will be asked to respond to a series of WhatsApp questions or prompts. Student reflections will vary in length from one sentence to one page.

C. Pre-Presentation Written Outline (on-site) – 15%

In the days ahead of their final oral presentation (to occur on the morning of January 6 in Playa del
3 (2023-2024 KIIS Maya Mexico Winter, HIST 490 syllabus)

Carmen), students will prepare a detailed written outline on their self-selected presentation theme (from among those listed above). Students will meet with the professor on-site to discuss their outline, receive feedback, and ultimately submit their written outline (one per group) on the day of their final oral presentation. The purpose of the written outline is to help students best prepare for their final oral presentation.

D. Oral Presentation (on-site at program's end) – 30%

Individually or in groups of two (formed at the November pre-departure student orientation), students come to craft and lead an oral presentation to the class at program's end (i.e. January 6 in Playa del Carmen), which will last 30-40 minutes. The oral presentation combines preliminary pre-departure student investigations (i.e. familiarizing themselves with their chosen topic), common and self-selected readings, and on-site observations and reflections. Approximately 2-3 days prior to the January 6th final oral presentations, each group will meet with the professor to discuss your preparations, including a) your central argument/thesis, b) presentation sub-elements/points aimed at developing your central argument, c) how you intend to organize your presentation, c) the readings you have selected, and d) the ideas and questions you have formulated to help generate some class discussion. The professor will provide each group oral feedback during preparatory meeting to help students improve/tweak their outline and upcoming presentation. Students should not plan to rely on PowerPoint, Prezi or the like.

E. Final Reflection – 15%

At program's end, students will answer one final question that asks them to reflect on their Mexico intellectual and cultural experience.

F. Writing Assignment #2 (on-site)

In a two-page essay, students respond to questions(s) that combine common class reading and on-site observations and reflections. Details will be shared prior to program departure.

G. Writing Assignment #3 (on-site)

In a two-page essay, students respond to questions(s) centered on their self-selected reading and on-site observations and reflections. This third short written assignment directly prepares students for their end-of-program Final Oral Presentation

H. Oral Presentation (on-site at program's end)

In groups of two (formed at the November pre-departure orientation), students craft and lead an oral presentation to the class at program's end that will last 30-45 minutes. The oral presentation combines preliminary investigations students make before program departure, common and self-selected readings, and on-site observations and reflections. Around two days before your oral presentation, each group will meet with the instructor to discuss your preparations, including a) your central argument, b) how you intend to organize your presentation, c) the readings you have selected, and d) the ideas and questions you have formulated to help generate class discussion. Students should not plan to rely on PowerPoint, Prezi or the like.

I. Final Photo Reflection

At program's end, the instructor will provide students with one final question. To respond, each

student will need to select one photo s/he has taken over the course of the study abroad program and write a one-page essay that speaks to the question and self-selected photo.

Grading Procedures

90 – 100 A
80 – 89 B
70 – 79 C
60 – 69 D
Below 60 F

The "Writing Assignments" listed above count for 25%. The "Oral Presentation" counts for 30%. The "Digital Scavenger Hunt" counts for 10%, the "Final Photo Reflection" counts for 15%, and participation counts for 10%.

Readings

1. Prior to departure, students and professors will read two common texts, which we will discuss on-site. Both common reads will be made available at the November KIIS Student Orientation.
2. **Each group will self-select and closely read at least two of the following articles (Dropbox):**
 - Aguilar-Rodriguez, "Cooking Modernity: Nutrition Policies, Class, and Gender in 1940s and 1950s Mexico City" (2007).
 - Andersen, "Remembrance of an open wound: Frida Kahlo and post-revolutionary Mexican identity" (2009).
 - Ávila-García, Sánchez and Furio, "The Environmentalism of the Rich and the Privatization of Nature: High-End Tourism on the Mexican Coast" (2012).
 - Ayora-Díaz, "Regionalism and the Institution of the Yucatecan Gastronomic Field" (2010).
 - Azcárate, "Contentious Hotspots: Ecotourism and the Restructuring of Place at the Biosphere Reserve Ria Celestun" (2010).
 - Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2012. → Wrestling Excerpt
 - Becker and Muller, "The Securitization of Urban Space and the "Rescue" of Downtown Mexico City: Vision and Practice" (2015).
 - Block, Hoffman-Jeep, "Fashioning National Identity, Frida Kahlo in Gringolandia" (1999).
 - Bunten, "More Like Ourselves: Indigenous Capitalism Through Tourism" (2010).
 - Carmean, *House of the Waterlily: A Novel of the Ancient Maya World* (New York: Berghahn, 2017).
 - Carpenter, "Tlatelolco 1968 in Contemporary Mexican Literature Introduction" (2005).
 - Castañeda, "We Are *Not* Indigenous!": An Introduction to the Maya Identity of Yucatan" (2004).

Castillo Cocom, "Lost in Mayaland" (2004).

Cowgill, "State and Society at Teotihuacan, Mexico" (1997).

Davis, "Zero-Tolerance Policing, Stealth Real Estate Development, and the Transformation of Public Space- Mexico City" (2013).

The Economist, "Why Mexico Has Not Become More Prosperous - and How it Could" (2018).

Eiss, "Constructing the Maya" (2008).

Friedman, Thomas, "How Mexico Got Back in the Game" (2013).

Helland, "Culture, politics, and identity in the paintings of Frida Kahlo" (1990).

Hostettler, "Rethinking Maya Identity in Yucatan, 1500–1940" (2004).

Inomata, "The Classic Maya Palace as Political Theater" (2001).

Isendahl and Smith, "Sustainable Agrarian Urbanism_ The Low-density Cities of the Mayas and Aztecs" (2012).

Juarez, "Ecological Degradation, Global Tourism, and Inequality: Maya Interpretations of the Changing Environment in Quintana Roo, Mexico" (2002).

Kroshus Medina, "Commoditizing Culture Tourism and Maya Identity" (2003).

Labrecque, "Cultural Appreciation & Economic Depreciation of the Mayas of Northern Yucatán, Mexico" (2005).

Little, "Living within the Mundo Maya Project: Strategies of Maya Handicrafts Vendors" (2008).

Mahon and Macdonald, "Anti-Poverty Politics in Toronto and Mexico City" (2010).

Miller, Shawn William, *The Environmental History of Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), → Chapter One: "An Old World Before It Was New"

Osmond, "Photographs, Materiality and Sport History: Peter Norman and the 1968 Mexico City Black Power Salute" (2010).

Smith, "Life in the Provinces of the Aztec Empire" (2013).

Wilson, "Introduction: The Impacts of Tourism in Latin America" (2008).

Zolov, "Showcasing the 'Land of Tomorrow- Mexico and the 1968 Olympics" (2004).

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.

Academic Honesty Policy

Cheating, plagiarism (submitting another person's material as one's own), or doing work for another person which will receive academic credit are all impermissible. This includes the use of unauthorized books, notebooks, or other sources in order to secure or give help during an examination, the unauthorized copying of examinations, assignments, reports, term papers, or the presentation of unacknowledged material as if it were the student's own work. Disciplinary action may be taken beyond the academic discipline administered by the faculty member who teaches the course in which the cheating took place.

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, Maria Canning, maria.canning@wku.edu, to discuss your disability accommodation needs (e.g. housing, transportation, excursions, class schedule, etc.).

Immediately after acceptance, notify KIIS Assistant Director, Maria Canning, 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, Maria Canning, 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, Maria Canning (+1-859-200-1000) or KIIS Executive Director, John Dizgun (+1-270-227-2288), b) WKU's Title IX Coordinator, Ena Demir (270-745-6867 / ena.demir@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/eeo/titleixbrochure2020.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.