



KIIS Japan Program, Summer 2024

EDU 400-1 Topics: Nature Education and Young Children

Instructor: Dr. Neil Mecham

E-mail:Neil_Mecham@berea.edu

Instructor's office hours: on site and by appointment

Syllabus subject to change

Course Description

Young children's curiosity and nature's diversity creates opportunities to learn about health, ecosystems, biology, food systems, astronomy, sustainability, economics, as well as develop cooperation, appreciation, sensitivity, creativity and wonder. Through a series of course readings, class discussions, and field experiences students will engage with nature, each other and hopefully children, while exploring a variety of disciplines. Emphasis will be placed on methods to engage children in exploration and inquiry. This course is applicable for students interested in teaching, working for summer camps, national or state parks, local parks and recreation offices, and anyone interested in children and nature.

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.

Course Objectives

As a result of completing the assignments for this class, students should be able to:

1. list and identify different types of outdoor learning environments with nature elements.
2. evaluate children's outdoor learning environments for elements of risk and opportunity.
3. explain how children's time in nature can benefit the whole child.

4. discuss how children's opportunities to enjoy nature can be increased.
5. identify the different disciplines which are engaged while engaging in nature exploration.
6. plan activities to guide children in inquiry while in nature settings.
7. observe, record and report on children's activities while in nature settings.
8. discuss their own relationship with nature and how their attitudes and opinions have changed.

Text

Kimmer, R. W. (2013). Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge, and the teaching of plants. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions.

Wilson, R. (2016) Learning is in bloom: Cultivating outdoor explorations. Lewisville, NC: Gryphon House Inc.

Course Activities

1. *Journaling*: The KIIS Costa Rica experience provides you with several opportunities to think about nature and children from different perspectives. a) The text and class discussions should stimulate students to think about nature and children in new ways. As you reflect upon the readings and discussions, you should write initial thoughts and feelings about topics in your journal. This will then provide a record of how your opinions and ideas change or solidify over the course of time. b) Being exposed to children in families in a different culture will also give you the opportunity to compare how their exposure to nature differs from your own experience. c) Being immersed in nature during excursions will provide opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of principles which can be presented to children.
Journals will be turned in periodically and journal entries should be used in your assignment papers.
2. *Assigned readings/class engagement*: Reading the assigned chapters in the text and other assigned readings **PRIOR** to discussions will help you understand the material discussed and allow you to ask questions to clarify difficult concepts. Information found in the chapters will be used to guide class discussions and activities and may be subject to quizzes.
3. *Quizzes*: Two or three quizzes based on the reading material will be given during the course.
4. *Homework*. As opportunities present themselves, assignments will be made which will be due within two days.

Grading Criteria

Observation/Activity Journals	25%
Reading Reflections	25%
Attendance/participation & quizzes	25%
Homework	25%

Grading Scale: 100% - 93% = A, 92% - 90 =A-, 89% - 87% =B+, 86% - 83% =B, 82% - 80 =B- ,
79% -77% =C+, 76% -73% =C, 72% -70% =C-, 69% - 67% = D+, 66% - 63% =D

Course Policies

Course policies address issues that influence the learning climate, develop responsible behaviors, and help manage the work associated with this course. While they are not requirements or assignments, failure to understand and adhere to these policies will negatively affect your grade.

1. *Disposition:* Class is not over when you are no longer in the proximity of the instructor. You are expected to be considerate and helpful to all study abroad companions, host families, guests, guides and strangers. You are expected to be responsible for your behavior and material, in short be a good citizen, guest, student and friend.
2. *Academic Honesty & Plagiarism:* Academic dishonesty of any kind is unacceptable. At a minimum, a grade of 0 will be earned on a compromised assignment. Plagiarism and other forms of dishonesty will be reported to the program director and KIIS administrators.
3. *Attendance:* 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.
4. *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 Admissions and Enrollment Specialist, 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 Admissions and Enrollment Specialist, 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.

5. Title IX / Discrimination and 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 Investigator, Michael Crowe (270-745-5429 / michael.crowe@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/eo/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.