



KIIS Maya Mexico Winter 2024-2025

HIST 315 Topics: Markets, Murals and Memory in Mexico. (3 credits)

December 26, 2024 – January 6, 2025

Instructor: Dr. Luis Sierra

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Syllabus subject to change



Course Description

This interdisciplinary course assesses the history and culture of Mexico in three dimensions. Our readings on the Maya and the Mexica (Aztec) culture and the environment will orient students to the history of Mexico. Our on-site course will explore Mexican national, Mayan, and Mexica built environments and symbolic spaces, walk the various archeological and historical sites, and assess the murals. What is identity? What is national identity? How is it conveyed in Mexican art, murals, and museums?

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 Program and Learning Outcomes

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. The central goal is for students to take an active role in the direction of their learning by:

- self-selecting course topics and readings (from among selections provided by professors at orientation) that most interest them;
- Dedicating themselves before and during the program to become "student-experts" in their chosen field;
- Providing faculty ahead of departure with a list of three questions that they regard as the crux of their self-selected topic and readings;
- Participating in small group excursions that (safely) place them in culturally and geographically uncomfortable situations;
- In pairs, leading seminar-style class discussions on their chosen topic, including fielding questions from classmates and professors; and
- Synthesizing readings, observations, and class discussions in short papers submitted to the faculty.

In addition to acquiring knowledge of Mayan and Mexican society, past and present, students learn to work effectively in small groups, improve their oral presentation and analytical skills, and develop a heightened sense of confidence and leadership. Students are required to give oral reports, record their observations and reflections, and complete a final (creative) project. On average, there are 3.5 hours of instruction per day, in the form of excursions, seminars, and debriefings, for 38.5 total contact hours. Seminars and debriefings will be held in designated class space at our hotels (e.g. a small conference room) and at excursion sites (e.g. in a shaded area at a given Mayan site).

Program Design

We spend four days in Mexico City and then travel by plane to for the final 7 days in the Yucatan Peninsula (based largely in the city of Merida) and four days of the program. In Mexico City, we explore the Historic Center, the original works of Mexico's famous muralists Diego Rivera, and the home of Frida Kahlo, the National Anthropological Museum (which houses many of the original Maya artifacts found in the Yucatan Peninsula), e, the capital city's rich and diverse markets & neighborhoods, the Aztec Templo Mayor. While in the Yucatan, we explore the famous Mayan archaeological sites of Chichen Itza and Uxmal, the markets & neighborhoods of Merida and Campeche, small villages surrounding Merida, the ecological reserve of Celestun, two centoes (underground natural swimming pools used by the ancient Maya), a beach village, among other excursions.

At the pre-departure November 2024 program orientation, we will familiarize students with the Place as Text pedagogical approach. One important element will entail students dividing into small groups (2-3 students per group) based on common academic/intellectual interests. Each small group will self-selects one of the following program topics:

1. The construction of identity
2. Doing gender and ethnicity
3. "Selling" culture
4. Environment and sustainability
5. Art & social change
6. Mayan rituals and beliefs
7. The intersection of past and present
8. The influences/impacts of tourism
9. Museum and representation
10. Voices of history
11. Markets & neighborhoods

Each small group's responsibilities include:

1. Investigate your selected topic ahead of December 26 program departure. As a small group, develop three central questions you regard as the crux of your topic and wish to explore once in Mexico. Each group should email its three questions to all program professors by December 24 (the day before Christmas).
2. Self-select and closely read 3 of the 30 program articles (available in our Dropbox folder). Members of each small group should read the same three articles. **Students should read their three articles prior to program departure on December 26.** Bring your three articles with you to Mexico; you will need them to complete on-site assignments.
3. Once in Mexico, each group will organize and lead one class presentation/discussion on its chosen (pre-departure) topic. **The goal of the program is for each group to become student-experts on its self-selected topic.** Each group should plan on a 30-45 minute presentation to the class, and then generate class discussion and field questions from students and professors. Presenters should not rely on PowerPoint, Prezi, or other visual aids.

Presentations are based on a) pre-departure investigation of your self-selected topic, b) self-selected Dropbox readings, and c) on-site observations, reflections and analyses (in Mexico). Approximately two days prior to a group's presentation, members of the group will meet privately with Dr. Sierra and Dr. Brown to discuss group preparations, including a) how you intend to organize your presentation, b) which Dropbox articles you will use and how, and c) the ideas and questions you have formulated to generate class discussion. Following your class presentation, members of the group will submit a joint 2-page reflection paper on a salient aspect of their investigation (details will be provided on-site in Mexico).

4. In addition to the above group oral presentation, once in Mexico, students participate in Place as Text small-group excursion activities centered on observation and reflection. The composition of these excursion groups will be different from the above self-selected oral presentation groups (the professors will determine the composition of these excursion groups; the groups may differ from one small-group activity to the next). The Place as Text activities include, for example, a) "mapping" (broadly-defined) the neighborhood urban and rural areas we/you will visit; b) analyzing murals and other art forms; c) observing markets and public landscapes; d) interacting with locals; and e) sampling

local cuisine. Prior to each Place as Text small-group excursion, faculty provide students with a one-page sheet to help better prepare them. Following each Place as Text small group excursion, we hold a seminar-style reflection/debriefing; each student then prepares a 1-2 page written reflection paper for submission. Students are permitted to “skip” one of these written reflections on the program so they may concentrate more fully on their small group oral presentation (see #3 above). Further details provided on-site in Mexico.

5. Final project: Students will create a storyboard, digital-story, photo-essay, or other approved creative project that encapsulates one or more of their central program reflections. Guidelines provided on-site in Mexico.

Grading Procedures

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

The small group presentation to the class and accompanying 2-3 page reflection paper (see item #3 above) counts for 40% of your final grade. The small group Place as Text excursions and accompanying 1-2 page reflection papers (see item #4 above) counts for 40%. The final project (see item #5 above) counts for the remaining 20%.

Summary of Your Pre-Departure Academic Responsibilities

1. Investigate your self-selected topic with other members of your group.
2. Read closely your three Dropbox readings. Bring copies with you to Mexico.
3. In English or in Spanish, read the one common group text, Carlos Fuentes’s “Chac Mool” (Dropbox).
4. Together with the other member(s) of your group, devise your three core questions (see item #1 above). Email them (one email per group) to all program faculty by December 24.
5. In no more than one page, each student should answer the following question: “How would you define the authentic Mexican experience?” Email your individual response to the program faculty by December 24 too.

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend every program activity, including group seminars, excursions, and presentations. KIIS requires that any unexcused absence result in grade reduction, and multiple unexcused absences may result in expulsion from the program.

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.

Texts and References

1. Prior to departure, all students and professors will read one common text: famed Mexican novelist **Carlos Fuentes's** short story, "**Chac Mool**" (**Dropbox**)

2. **Each group will self-select and closely read three of the following articles (Dropbox):**

Alexander, "Maya Settlement Shifts and Agrarian Ecology in Yucatán, 1800-2000" (2006).

Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983).

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).

Bautista, "Spatial distribution and development of soils in tropical karst areas from the Peninsula of Yucatan, Mexico" (2011).

Bunten, "More Like Ourselves: *Indigenous Capitalism Through Tourism*" (2010).

Castañeda, "We Are *Not* Indigenous!": An Introduction to the Maya Identity of Yucatan" (2004).

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

Cronon, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (1996).

Dehoorne, Murat and Petit-Charles, "El ecoturismo en el centro de las estrategias de desarrollo. Elementos de reflexión a partir de experiencias caribeñas" (2010).

Eiss, "Constructing the Maya" (2008).

Ellis, "Is community-based forest management more effective than protected areas? A comparison of land use/land cover change in two neighboring study areas of the Central Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico" (2008).

Figuroa Magaña, "El país como ningún otro: un análisis empírico del regionalismo yucateco" (2013).

Folan, "Triadic Temples, Central Plazas and Dynastic Palaces: A Diachronic Analysis of the Royal Court Complex, Calakmul, Campeche, Mexico" (2001).

Gabbert, "Social Categories, Ethnicity and the State in Yucatán, Mexico" (2001).

- Gillespie, "Body and Soul Among the Maya: Keeping the Spirits in Place" (2002).
- Hostettler, "Rethinking Maya Identity in Yucatan, 1500–1940" (2004).
- Inomata, "The Classic Maya Palace as Political Theater" (2001).
- 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).
- Lucero, "The Politics of Ritual: The Emergence of Classic Maya Rulers" (2003).
- McAnany, "Perspectives on Actors, Gender Roles, and Architecture at Classic Maya Courts and Households" (2001).
- Medina, "Commoditizing Culture: Tourism and Maya Identity" (2004).
- Pyburn, "Consuming the Maya" (1998).
- Schmook, "Agricultural Policy, Market Barriers, and Deforestation: The Case of Mexico's Southern Yucatan" (2009).
- Stuart, "Kings of Stone: A Consideration of Ancient Stelae in Maya Ritual and Representation" (1998).
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (1984).
- Torres, "Toward a better understanding of tourism and agriculture linkages in the Yucatan: Tourist food consumption and preferences" (2002).
- Van Dooren, "The Insertion of Rural Areas into Global Markets: A Comparison of Garment Production in Yucatán and La Laguna, Mexico" (2003).
- Wells, "Modernizing Visions, "Chilango" Blueprints, and Provincial Growing Pains: Mérida at the Turn of the Century" (1992).
- Wilson, "Introduction: The Impacts of Tourism in Latin America"(2008).

General Reading on the Maya (optional)

Coe, Michael D. *The Maya*, London, 1999.

Demarest, Arthur A. *Ancient Maya: The Rise and Fall of a Rainforest Civilization*, Cambridge, 2004.

Freidel, David — Schele, Linda — Parker, Joy. *Maya Cosmos: Three thousand Years on the Shaman's Path*, New York, 1993.

Henderson, John S. *The World of the Ancient Maya*, Ithaca, 1997.

Miller, Mary Ellen. *Maya Art and Archeology*, London, 1999.

Sharer, Robert J. *The Ancient Maya*, 6th Edition, Stanford, 2006.

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 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/titleix/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.