

# KIIS Maya Mexico Winter 2024-2025

**HON 300 Topics: Cultural Expression in Modern Mexico (3 credits)**

**December 26, 2024 – January 6, 2025**



**Instructor:** Dr. Luis Sierra

**Email:** sierral@thomasmore.edu

*Syllabus subject to change*



## Course Description

This study abroad course, designed for students coming from all majors, asks, how can we better understand contemporary Mexico by identifying and analyzing diverse forms of Mexican cultural expression, past and present. Sources of cultural expression include (but are not limited to) artwork, music, museums, media, sporting events, archaeological and religious sites, graffiti, food and fashion. Individually and as a group, we deconstruct the nuanced meaning, motivation, and potential influence such expression has on Mexican national identity, which, much like that of the United States, is rarely singular or static. Open to Honors and non-Honors students with a 3.2 GPA or higher. 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 a week 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 Mesoamerican chinampas (floating agricultural patties) of Xochimilco, and perhaps a sporting event. 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 beach town of Playa del Carmen with student final oral presentations and a culminating program seminar-style debriefing. 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 2, 2024 (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. Advertising and cultural messaging in Mexican society
4. Innovation and heritage in Mexican society
5. The benefits and drawbacks of tourism in Mexican society
6. Cuisine and culture expression in Mexican society
7. Race, class and/or gender in contemporary Mexico
8. The legacy of the great Mexican muralists/artists (e.g. Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros)
9. Music and cultural expression in Mexican society
10. "Portraits" of three Mexicans (on-site oral interviews with three locals)
11. Race, class and/or gender in contemporary Mexico

### A. Pre-Departure Writing Assignment & Program Participation – 10%

In early-December, students will be provided two questions, one on our common reading (*Opening Mexico*, see below) and one on our common film ("Roma"). Each student will write a 1-page response to each question (meaning, two 1-page responses) and submit them by email by **December 23 at noon**.

### B. WhatsApp Written Reflections (on-site) – 20%

Regularly over the course of our study abroad (e.g. before entering a museum or heading on a Place as Text excursion), students respond to a series of WhatsApp questions or prompts. Your reflections will vary in length from one sentence to one page, and will serve as the basis for our class discussions.

**C. Digital Scavenger Hunt – 10%**

There is much to learn about Mexican culture by personal exploration, during site visits and free time students have. Students will be given a list of specific situations, stores, foods, experiences, etc., that they are expected to find over the duration of the program and document by photo or video.

**D. Short Essay (on-site) – 15%**

In a two-page reflective essay, students respond to a question that combines class reading and your on-site observations and reflections. This assignment helps prepares students for their end-of-program Final Oral Presentation. The question will be provided on-site.

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

In groups of two, students craft and lead a 30-minute oral presentation for the class (to be held at program's end in Playa del Carmen). The oral presentation combines preliminary investigations you make before program departure, common and self-selected readings, on-site observations and reflections, and elements from class discussions. A few days before your oral presentation, you and your partner 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 incorporated, and d) the ideas and questions you have formulated to help generate class discussion. This is your opportunity to synthesize and share key course themes (from readings, excursions, class discussion, etc.) tied to your self-selected topic. Students should not plan to rely on PowerPoint, Prezi or the like.

**F. Final Reflection (program's end) – 15%**

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

**Grading Procedures**

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

**Readings**

1. PRE-DEPARTURE: All students have **one common reading**, the first two chapters of Julia Preston and Samuel Dillon's *Opening Mexico: The Making of a Democracy* (2005). The three chapters are:
  - a. Chapter 1, "The Day of the Change" (28pp.)
  - b. Chapter 2, "From Disorder to Despotism" (31pp.)

PRE-DEPARTURE: All students **also should watch the following film** (available on Netflix):  
*Roma* (2018, Director Alfonso Cuarón)

2. **Each group (of two) then will self-select and closely read any 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).
- Azcárate, "Fueling ecological neglect in a manufactured tourist city - planning, disaster mapping and environmental art in Cancun Mexico" (2018)
- Becker and Muller, "The Securitization of Urban Space and the "Rescue" of Downtown Mexico City: Vision and Practice" (2015).
- Berg & Polo - Three Takeaways from Mexico's New Local Political Landscape - June 2023.
- Block, Hoffman-Jeep, "Fashioning National Identity, Frida Kahlo in Gringolandia" (1999).
- Boudreau, "City of Repair: Practicing the Future in Mexico City" (2022).
- Brenner and Aguilar, "Luxury Tourism and Regional Economic Development in Mexico" (2002).
- Bunten, "More Like Ourselves: Indigenous Capitalism Through Tourism" (2010).
- Carpenter, "Tlatelolco 1968 in Contemporary Mexican Literature Introduction" (2005).
- Carter, "Painting the Revolution - State, Politics and Ideology in Mexican Muralism" (2014)
- Castañeda, "NAFTA's Mixed Record - The View From Mexico" (2014)
- Castañeda, "We Are *Not* Indigenous!": An Introduction to the Maya Identity of Yucatan" (2004).
- Castillo Cocom, "Lost in Mayaland" (2004).
- Ceron Anaya, "Privilege at Play. Class, Race, Gender, and Golf in Mexico" (2021).
- Courtney, O'Hearn, Franck. "Frida Kahlo: Portrait of Chronic Pain" (2017).
- Eiss, "Constructing the Maya" (2008).
- Figuroa and Tanaka, "'We Are Not Racists, We Are Mexicans' - Privilege, Nationalism and Post-Race Ideology in Mexico" (2016).

Flores and Telles, "Social Stratification in Mexico - Disentangling Color, Ethnicity and Class" (2010)

Gómez and Barrón, "Impacts of Tourism and the Generation of Employment in Mexico" (2019)

Havard, "Frida Kahlo, Mexicanidad and Máscaras: The Search for Identity in Postcolonial Mexico" (2006).

Hawn and Tison, "Tourism and Political Choices of Indigenous Populations in Yucatán" (2015)

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

Jaimes, "Filosofía del muralismo mexicano- Orozco, Rivera y Siqueiros" (2012)

Jones, "Racism and Classism in Mexican Advertising - Exhibition of Visual Messaging" (2019)

Jordan, "The Eternal Return of the Past: Pre-Columbian Imagery in Mexican Street Art" (2014)

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).

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

Lomnitz and Piccato, "Building the Mexican State - the Notion of Citizenship" (2013).

*Los Angeles Times*, "500 years later, Mexico recalls but doesn't celebrate Spanish conquest" (August 13, 2021).

*Los Angeles Times*, "Mexico's new culture war: Did a pyramid light show 'decolonize' or rewrite history?" (October 16, 2021)

Mallot, "How a Few Individuals Brought about a Cultural Cusp: from a Mexican Mural Program to a Movement" 2019)

Medina, "Commoditizing culture-Tourism and Maya Identity" (2003)

Mello, "Manuel Gamio, Diego Rivera, and the Politics of Mexican Anthropology" (2004)

Morgan and Leventhal, "Maya of the Past, Present, and Future: Heritage, Anthropological Archaeology and the Study of caste War of Yucatan (2020)

Munoz, Transnational Tortillas - Race, Gender, and Shop-Floor Politics in Mexico and the United States (2008)

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

Reis, "Frida Kahlo, The Complexity of Being" (2017)

Rojek, "The Feminist Street Art from Western Part of Mexico: the Art of Mónica Barajas" (2020)

Shain, "The Mexican-American Diaspora's Impact on Mexico" (2000)

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

Vigil and Lopez, "Race and Ethnic Relations in Mexico" (2004)

Werner, "Diego Rivera and His Mexico" (1960)

Wilson, "Economic and Social Impacts of Tourism in Mexico" (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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:ena.demir@wku.edu)) or WKU's Title IX Investigator, Michael Crowe (270-745-5429 / [michael.crowe@wku.edu](mailto: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.