



FACULTY-LED
STUDY ABROAD

KIIS Taiwan Program, Summer 2025

ARC 401 Topics: Religions of East Asia

Instructor: Prof. Matthew Wells

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Instructor's office hours: on site and by appointment

Syllabus subject to change

1. Course Description:

This course explores the religious traditions of East Asia through Taiwan's rich history as a crossroads of global religious practice. In addition to reading scholarly sources and excerpts of original texts from the various religions found in Taiwan, students will take advantage of Taipei's vibrant temple life to conduct field work to better understand the contemporary practice of religion. The purpose of the course is to provide a basic understanding of the historical development of Taiwanese religious life by asking how Taiwan's religious landscape has been shaped by the influence of mainland China, the folk beliefs of local people and immigrants, colonization by the Dutch, Manchu, and Japanese empires, Western missionary activity, and the policies of the Republic of China. Students will explore how this complex history is reflected, ignored, or redefined in local religious sites.

2. Overall KIIS Program Student Learning Outcomes:

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.

3. Course Objectives and Specific Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the class, students who have conscientiously and thoughtfully listened to the lectures, completed all the required readings, and participated in the class discussions, should have a clear grasp of the early foundations of Chinese religions and practices such as ancestor worship, Confucianism, Daoism, and early cosmology; understand the transformative influence of Buddhism on East Asian civilization; be able to identify the impact of empire building by colonial powers on Taiwan's religious life; and understand the temple culture of Taipei and Taiwan more broadly.

4. Major Topics covered in the Course:

Confucianism
Daoism
Buddhism
Ancestors and their rites
Folk religion
Cosmology and mythology
Colonialism
Shinto
Chinese salvation movements
Western missionary activity
Government policy post-1949
Japanese Empire
Manchu Empire
Temples of Taipei

5. Fulfillment of General Education Requirement:

6. Required Readings and Materials:

Primary and secondary source readings are to be found on course Canvas.

7. Graded Assignments:

Attendance and Class Participation (20%). Because this is a lecture-and-discussion course, a significant portion of your grade is based on your attendance and participation in class discussions. Participation in the class discussions should be based on careful reading of the works listed under the relevant class meeting. Readings should be completed before class. You should always bring the assigned readings or your careful notes on the reading to class with you as we will refer to them in detail. I recommend that you take notes as you go through the readings and that you bring those notes, and any questions you have about the readings, with you to class.

Presentation and Discussion Leading (20%). Each student is required to give an initial presentation on a tradition or text from a list provided by the instructor. Students will sign up for their topics on the Google Doc that specifies the date of each presentation. Two students will form a group and work on the topic. Each presentation should be approximately 15 minutes long. Your presentation should include as much information as possible. You must send me your PowerPoint the day before your presentation. To conclude your presentation, you will provide discussion questions for the class

Short writing assignments (20%). Short in-class writing assignments and reflections addressing specific questions posed by the instructor or classmates.

Field Notes (20%). Students will conduct a site visit to an area temple and take notes on what they find, including activities, deities, worship services, history, iconography, and layout. A guide to conducting this research and important etiquette for being a good visitor and guest will be provided in advance. Notes will be typed and submitted as Word documents along with any sketches, photos, and other materials.

Final Presentation (20%). A final presentation on your site visit to your classmates. Each presentation will be 15 minutes and use PowerPoint. Your presentation will introduce the temple, its history, deities and gods, rituals and other practices of the temple, its iconography and physical layout, and how the temple informs and deepens our understanding of that tradition.

Work will be graded on this scale:

90 – 100 A

80 – 89 B

70 – 79 C

60 – 69 D

Below 60 E (F)

This course will be graded on this basis, without regard to other scales (i.e., plus-and-minus) which may apply at your college or university. Note KIIS/WKU does not award +/- grades, only full letter grades.)

8. 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.

9. 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 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 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.

10. 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.