



KIIS Japan Program, Summer 2025

JAPN 115 Study Abroad: Introduction to Japanese Culture

Instructor: Prof. K. Sheehan

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Instructor's office hours: on site and by appointment

Syllabus subject to change

Course Description: This course examines aspects of Japanese popular culture. These aspects of Japanese popular culture will be examined through the country's respective arts, literature, philosophy, and media to provide an insight into Japan. Using the course textbook and supplementary sources, this course will examine aspects of culture, such as anime, toys, music, and technology among others. This course will also help students to see the importance of historical and cultural contexts that formulate a modern country and shape popular culture.

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.

Course Objectives and Specific Learning Outcomes: Through critical reading and interpretation of the various Japanese texts, students will gain insights into the Japanese language, literature, and culture. Students will gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of a culture different from their own. Upon completion of this course, students

will be able to think critically, as well as improving analytical skills that can be used to critically evaluate aspects of culture.

Fulfillment of General Education Requirement: (If applicable, i.e. if you feel that your KISS course will fulfill/satisfy a Gen. Ed. requirement at your institution— more likely a possibility if you are teaching a non-Topics course— please list briefly the way your KISS course will fulfill the Gen. Ed. requirements. If this section is not applicable to your course, you may delete this section (#5) from your syllabus.)

Required Readings and Materials:

- Matt Alt. *Pure Invention: How Japan Made the Modern World*. New York: Crown, 2021. ISBN 9781984826718—students can use the audible or eBook version of this textbook.
- PDFs of short stories provided by instructor

Graded Assignments:

Students will submit assignments by the start of class. Students will be evaluated through the following assignments and grading scale:

Grading Scale: A 100-90; B 89-80; C 79-70; D 69-60

- 1. First Impressions (10% of grade):** Write a 300-word reflection of your initial impression of Japan so far. Has it met your expectations? What are you looking forward to? What connections to the textbook can you make so far? What sort of popular culture will you want to research this semester? This reflection needs to be free of errors, written in complete sentences, and contain at least one cited quote from the textbook. It will be graded based on quality, clarity, and thoughtfulness.
- 2. Reading Assignments (10%):** Students will respond to a short series of questions based on the assigned readings using Google Forms. Questions may ask multiple choice questions, to identify themes or concepts from the reading, ask students to compare their own respective culture to Japanese culture, as well as general self-reflection on the course materials. This assignment will also encourage thinking about the final assignment. Responses to the short answer questions should be in full and complete sentences, must provide properly cited quotes and evidence from the course materials, and avoid generalizations or opinion. These assignments are also graded on clarity and quality, in addition to ability to follow directions.
- 3. Popular Culture in Real Life (15% of grade):** Students will write at least a 600 word that focuses on observations from their actual experiences in Japan that connect to specific elements or topics of discussion in the textbook. This will also be a good time to consider what the final In this essay, students should make specific connections to the textbook or an outside scholarly source and a such as a television show, music, etc. For instance, consider social class, the role of gender in the culture, how historical and cultural contexts have shaped Japan as observed and synthesize how these elements inform certain understandings of Japanese culture. The essay must use cited quotes from the textbook, 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, and may use any citation method (MLA, Chicago Style, APA, etc.) so long as it is consistent.
- 4. Personal Excursions Journal (20% of grade):** Students are encouraged to keep a journal, and outline or write general notes during the first three weeks of the program. The journal should be used to write a short essay of 500 words on the student's

experiences in Japan, discussion of two site visits, and one personal excursion, in addition to their understanding of how their interactions with Japanese students engage in Japanese popular culture. The journal essay must include citations from and connections to the readings from their textbook and lectures, as well as one quote from a Japanese student about popular culture. This assignment should be 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, and may use any citation method (MLA, Chicago Style, APA, etc.) so long as it is consistent. This assignment will be graded based on thoughtfulness, clarity, quality, properly cited evidence, and ability to follow instructions.

- 5. Soundboard Rough Draft (20%):** This assignment requires students to start generating thought about an aspect of Japanese popular culture that has interested them over the course of the semester. Some aspects to consider for research or focus on might be anime, manga, video games, and cosplay among others. Some questions to help guide potential topics are: What is something that you could argue or research concerning Japanese popular culture? What are some outside scholarly sources that could strengthen your topic focus? What are some examples (such as film, manga, etc.) for your proposed topic or question? Once students have formulated their topic or research question, they will compose a brief 250-300 word draft or outline about their proposed topic/research question. Students are asked to use scholarly sources from outside of this course such as journals, books, or documentaries. **Students need to locate outside sources and not ones that have been provided by the instructor. Do not use non-scholarly sources such as Wikipedia, travel blogs, Britannica, TikTok, Medium, or YouTube for your sources.** Students are recommended to use their respective university library databases, Google Scholar, or to reach out to the instructor for help with resources. Students will also need to peer review a classmate's draft and provide at least one suggestion for improvement or consideration, and share one potential source that they might use.
- 6. Final Project (25%):** The Final Project is a mini-research paper builds up on previous assignments in the course. The research paper should be at least 1500 words. The paper needs a title, introduction, clear thesis, and a conclusion. If a student does a creative project, they must consult with the instructor and an accompanying essay of at least 800 words explaining the choices for the creative project. Both the mini-research and the creative project require an annotated bibliography is not included in the word count, and should contain at least 3 outside scholarly sources (i.e. journals, books, documentaries, etc.). Students need to locate outside sources and not ones that have been provided by the instructor. **Do not use non-scholarly sources such as Wikipedia, travel blogs, Britannica, TikTok, Medium, or YouTube for your sources.** Each source should have a full paragraph explaining the source, its strengths, and its relation to the student's proposal topic. The paper may be on any topic as long as it pertains to Japanese popular culture, and should be written in Times New Roman 12-point font, double-spaced, and in an appropriate citation format (i.e. MLA, Chicago Style, etc.).

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.

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.

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.