KIIS Italy, Summer 2026

ITAL 105 Introduction to Italian Culture

Professor: Dr. Erik Liddell
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Syllabus subject to change

Course Description:
This course introduces students to Italian culture and history through a focus on the many ways in which Italian artists, writers, composers, architects, scientists, inventors, scholars, political leaders and more have contributed to Western and World Civilization, as well as through interactive experience with the social and cultural spaces of Italian cities. The course begins with a focus on the splendid and flourishing culture of the Italian Middle Ages and Renaissance in Florence and concludes with the incredible diversity of Rome, including highlights from the classical age of the Republic and Empire and the cosmopolitan bustle of the modern age and contemporary life. Significant concepts and aspects of Italian culture to be explored include *sprezzatura*, *comunità*, *la dolce vita, la bellezza* and *la piacere*.

This course may be used to fulfill General Education Requirements, which vary depending upon home institution. E.g., at EKU, the course could satisfy Element 3 Arts & Humanities or Element 6 Diversity. Check with your home institution's study abroad office.

Texts:
Required Texts:

1) Epiro, Peter D' and Mary Desmond. *Sprezzatura: 50 Ways Italian Genius Shaped the World*. Anchor Books 2001. ISBN: 978-0385720199. Must be purchased in advance: available in paperback or Kindle/E-Reader version. https://www.amazon.com/Sprezzatura-Italian-Genius-Shaped-World/dp/038572019X
2) Other materials to be made available in PDF (posted on the Google Classroom course page: Google Classroom Course Code and Invitation Link TBA)

Film (watch prior to departure):

PBS, *The Medici: Godfathers of the Renaissance*, 2012. Part 2, "The Magnificent Medici": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-YyCyrtSrQ

Recommended current events resources – consult and explore as part of your experience abroad and use as context for your Journal.

Regularly updated general sources:

- ANSA (Italian News Wire Service, like the AP or Reuters)
- The Florentine news and cultural features
- WantedInRome.com – news, events, stories
- New York Times – Italy stories
- The Guardian – Italy page
- BBC – Italy page
- NPR – Italy stories

Cultural Curiosities:

- Literary Italy podcast series (20-30 min episodes on lots of authors and places)
- Pasta Grannies (YouTube channel)

Recommended Novel about Leonardo and Michelangelo in Florence early 1500s:

- *Oil and Marble*, by Stephanie Storey (2016)

Student Learning Outcomes

This course will provide:

1) Knowledge of Italian cultural history, including:
    a. An informed acquaintance with major achievements of Italian culture, in the arts and humanities, especially, as well as in politics, the sciences, and social sciences
    b. An appreciation of the complexity and variety of Italian cultural life
    c. A historical perspective for understanding connections of past and present
    d. Class visits to major cultural sites in Florence, Rome, Siena and elsewhere
2) Intellectual and practical skills, including:
    a. Developed capacity for critical thinking
    b. Increased proficiency in reading, writing and speaking
3) Personal and social responsibility, including:
    a. An understanding of society and human behavior
    b. The role of artistic expressions in the development of cultural identity

Except for cameras and readers, no electronic devices are permitted while class is underway. Any student who uses an electronic device during class will be counted absent (see Attendance Policy).

Graded Work – submit via Google Classrooms page (CLASS CODE TBA) / Invite link: TBA

Students will participate in classes and program excursions, contribute to the course Discussion Forums (= attendance and participation grade, 25%), and keep a developing Journal (= coursework grade, 75%) to be submitted at 4 designated points throughout the course.

Separate Discussion Forums will be officially created for our stays in Florence and Rome, for open topic sharing of observations, recommendations, questions, etc., about any aspect of the readings, our excursions and your broader observations and experiences (with food, the cityscape, interactions with locals, etc.). We will also use WhatsApp for this element. You must participate

in the Discussions to qualify for full **Attendance + Participation credit, which altogether is worth 25% of the course grade**.

For the Journal work, see *Submit Journal* dates in the Schedule (below). Each time, the full developing journal must be submitted with a DATE provided for each new journal entry. By the end of the course, your Journal must include the following:

1) **6 Reading Reflections** of 300 words each. For full credit, each reflection must respond to significant aspects of the course readings (one the short stories, poems, essays, articles or poems, a chapter from *Sprezzatura*) and offer an interpretive response, by answering questions such as: How does the material relate to Florentine, Roman or Italian culture and history? What strikes you as most intriguing, surprising or interesting about the individuals (or groups or topics) in the stories or chapters from *Sprezzatura* (or other texts) and about their contributions to culture and society? Why? How does this material relate to your own experiences and observations? What does the article or story reveal about social, or political or personal life (at a given time and place)? In each case, you must discuss at least 2 specifics, with adequate development.

2) **3 "Connections" discussions** of 300 words each that highlight and reflect upon ways specific experiences you have had in Italy (official excursions or other experiences) connect to course readings (or other readings that you have done). How did the reading illuminate your experience and your understanding? How did the experience confirm or contest your expectations from the readings?

3) **3 "Culture Beat" reports.** Based on your personal observations, explorations, experiences and encounters outside of class, write a letter home, a journalistic-style report (like a travel magazine article or blog post) of 300 words that A) identifies a significant aspect or feature or curiosity of Italian culture, history or society beyond our course material and B) incites the reader's interest and curiosity by explaining its importance in lively, conversational terms.

4) **1 Photo Essay or Video Montage, with interpretive captions or commentary**. By the end of the course, curate a Photo Essay (of around a dozen images) that captures something of the essence of your understanding of Italy. In each case, add a short interpretive caption (25 words) that helps the viewer to understand the significance of the image and its contents. You can choose to present this in a basic photo format or in a video montage with text or voice over commentary (e.g., create a YouTube or MP4 or similar video with the images, text and music).

Thus, your Final Journal Submission must have 13 total entries. All individual items are of equal weight. The Journals altogether count as 75% of your grade.

With each submission Journals must include 3 additional contributions that meet the minimum requirements. Otherwise, you will receive not receive full credit (i.e., missing or insufficient entries get a zero). Thus, you may work ahead but you may not fall behind and then make up work later.

Journals will be evaluated in terms of completeness, carefulness and clarity of expression.

Journals must be submitted to the course Google Classroom page (CLASS CODE: TBA / Invite link: TBA/Page: TBA) (preferred) or in case of glitches or other difficulties they may be submitted in PDF or DOCX format electronically to erik.liddell@eku.edu or they may be delivered on a flash drive in PDF or DOCX format, or they may be submitted in hard copy. Handwritten journals or pictures thereof are also acceptable so long as they are entirely and readily legible.

Students must participate in all classes.
Graded quizzes may be given on any class day's material.

Assignments will be graded on a 100-point scale.
These requirements are weighted as follows in calculating final grades:
• Journals: 75%
• Attendance and participation, including "Discussion" contributions on course WhatsApp and Google Classroom: 25%

All formal assignments will be graded on a 100-point scale and converted to letter grades on the following basis: 90-100=A; 80-89=B; 70-79=C; 60-69=D; below 60=F. Final grades will not be rounded up; so, for example, an average of 89.9 is a B, not an A. Students who miss a quiz will have the opportunity to make up the assignment by writing a essay.

All work submitted for grade should be your own or properly attributed. Cases of plagiarism or dishonesty will result in a failing grade for the course and will be reported to the appropriate university authorities.

Students with learning disabilities or any other difficulty which might prevent them from fulfilling the course requirements should speak with the professor early in the semester. Together we can consider alternative methods of evaluation.

Materials and Preparation
***Sprezzatura* must be purchased by students in advance of the course**. It is available in paperback and electronic format. Additional materials, such as online resources, extra readings, will be made available electronically in PDFs and online links. Assigned readings must be completed by the dates given in the syllabus. In order for the class to have lively discussions about the material, everyone needs to complete assignments on time and be prepared to share thoughts about them.

Attendance Policy and Class Notes.
Attendance is mandatory and roll will be taken for all course components (classes and excursions). It is vital that you attend and register at each class meeting—and this is *your* responsibility. Any student who uses an electronic device during class, other than as a camera or a reader or map, and any student who appears more than fifteen minutes after class begins, will be counted absent. If you miss two classes your final grade will be reduced by 5 points on the 100-point scale. If you miss three classes your final grade will be reduced by 10 points. If you miss four or more classes you will receive a failing grade (F) for the course. You are advised to take accurate and detailed notes about all course elements. These, augmented by required readings, will provide the material for your written reflections and responses.

KIIS ITALY 2026– Schedule - TBA

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.

Generative AI Policy:

Generative AI is permitted/encouraged in some ways, with proper attribution, but prohibited in other ways.

Students are allowed, encouraged, and even required to use Generative AI in some ways but are prohibited from using it in other ways. Keep in mind that any content produced by generative AI can "hallucinate" (produce false information), so students are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of any AI-generated content. Examples of citing AI are available at: https://libguides.wku.edu/stylewrite/ai.

Students are permitted and encouraged to use generative AI in the following ways:

- Brainstorming: You may use generative AI to stimulate creativity, generate ideas, or brainstorm topics for papers, presentations, and discussions. The generated content must serve as a steppingstone, not a final product.

- Citation Assistance: AI tools can be used to manage, format, and organize citations and references, promoting adherence to academic writing standards and specific style guides required for individual assignments.

- Grammar and Style Checking: AI-powered writing enhancement tools may be used to help with spelling, grammar, syntax, and stylistic errors.

- Concept Understanding: Generative AI can be used to explain or simulate concepts taught in class, aiding in a deeper understanding.

- Research Assistance: AI can be used to conduct initial research, compile data, and summarize articles, books, or papers. It should not replace traditional research methods but rather enhance them.

You may not use generative AI in coursework in the following ways:

- Plagiarism: Using AI-generated content as your original work without attribution. This includes essays, papers, presentations, and exam answers.

- Data Manipulation: Using AI tools to alter data or create misleading information.

- Misrepresentation of Skills: Using generative AI to complete tasks that are meant to assess your knowledge and skills.

- Confidentiality Breach: Using AI tools that might violate KIIS/university policies or laws related to data privacy and confidentiality.

Metacognitive Reflection. In addition to a proper citation, the student should include the following statement with any assignment where generative AI is used for assistance.

"I used generative AI [INSERT NAME OF PLATFORM] for assistance in the following ways on this assignment: [INSERT WAYS USED, such as brainstorming, citation assistance, grammar and style checking, concept understanding, and research assistance, 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 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.

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.