



FACULTY-LED  
STUDY ABROAD

## KIIS Costa Rica Program, Summer 2026

**SPAN 200 Latin America, Past and Present**

**Instructor:** Prof. Erin Howard

**Email:** erin.howard@kctcs.edu

**Instructor's office hours:** on site and by appointment

*Syllabus subject to change*

**1. Course Description:** In this course, we will engage in an interdisciplinary introduction to the cultures and societies of Latin America. You will gain an understanding of the major processes that have shaped Latin America in the past and continue to affect the region today. Special attention will be given to the context of these processes in Costa Rica. "On site" learning will be a critical component of the course. This course is a foundational course for students in Latin American Studies. Students registering for this interdisciplinary course may select either SPAN 200, GEOG 200, HIST 200, or PS 200.

### 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:** Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- A. **Describe** key historical, political, and cultural processes that have shaped Latin America, with emphasis on Central America and Costa Rica.
- B. **Analyze** the influence of U.S. intervention and foreign policy on development, migration, and political dynamics in Central America.
- C. **Interpret** Latin American and U.S. Latino/a/x cultural expressions—such as literature, music, and visual arts—as forms of identity, resistance, and social commentary.
- D. **Evaluate** the role of migration, urbanization, and economic opportunity in shaping Latin American societies and regional relations.
- E. **Reflect critically** on the diversity of Latin American identities and how they are constructed, represented, and challenged in both historical and contemporary contexts.

**4. Major Topics covered in the Course:**

- A. **Colonization, Independence, and Nation Building**  
Exploration of the pre-Columbian period, Spanish and Portuguese colonization, and the political and cultural formation of independent Latin American nations.
- B. **U.S. Intervention and Foreign Policy in Central America**  
Analysis of U.S. political and economic involvement in the region and its impact on governance, development, migration, and public perception.
- C. **Migration and Human Mobility**  
Study of internal and cross-border migration patterns, push-pull factors, and the lived experiences of migrants within and beyond Latin America.
- D. **Cultural Expression and Resistance**  
Examination of literature, music, art, and performance as tools for expressing identity, preserving memory, and resisting oppression across Latin America and the Latino/a/x diaspora.
- E. **Identity Formation and Representation**  
Critical investigation of how identity is constructed, expressed, and challenged across Latin America, with attention to national, regional, ethnic, and diasporic perspectives.

**5. Course materials:**

- A. *Excerpts from Harvest of an Empire: A History of Latinos in America* by Juan Gonzalez, Revised edition (ISBN-13: 9780143119289) and *The Costa Rica Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. By Steven Palmer and Iván Molina will be provided.
- B. Most Reading Materials will be made available in pdf. A google file will be provided at orientation for materials to be downloaded and/or printed prior to program departure.

- C. A composition notebook or composition, pens, pencils and colored pencils, camera/phone camera

## 6. Graded Assignments:

Assignment/Component	Description	Weight
<b>1. Participation</b>	Pre-departure readings, FLIP /Padlet Responses and In-class activity, discussions, and cultural engagement	15%
<b>2. Daily Reflections (14 total)</b>	Written responses to readings, visits, and experiences	20%
<b>3. Mapping the Journey</b>	Observations, field notes, and documentation from site visits	20%
<b>4. Interviews</b>	Conducting, documenting, and reflecting on community interviews	15%
<b>5. Final Group Presentation</b>	Teaching project with visual aids, analysis, and collaborative work	30%
		<b>100%</b>

Work will be graded on this scale:

90 – 100 A

80 – 89 B

70 – 79 C

60 – 69 D

Below 60 E (F)

### Course Assignments and Activities

- A. Active and Collaborative Participation: Participation will be assessed on an ongoing basis, and students are expected to contribute meaningfully to class discussions, literary analysis, and reflective activities. In addition to completing assigned readings in advance, students will be asked to collect and share current news articles, images, flyers, and other cultural resources that connect with course themes, including migration, international relations, and Costa Rican cultural expressions. Students are expected to ask questions and participate in discussions at all site visits. Pre-departure and in-country activities will include FLIP video diaries, Padlet responses, and in person discussions.
- B. Critical Reflections (in English, Spanish or Spanglish): Students will write DAILY (14 TOTAL) reflections in the language of their choice in response to course readings, discussions, guided visits, and personal experiences throughout the program. Each reflection must include a thoughtful analysis responding to the following prompts:
- What? What did you learn? What stood out to you, felt new, excited you, or challenged you?
  - Why? Why does this learning matter to you or your home community? Why is it important in the context of your education or the broader world?
  - Now what? How will you apply what you've learned? Has this experience changed your perspective, worldview, or cultural understanding?

- How? How does this learning connect to current issues such as immigration, social justice, or U.S.–Central American relations?
  - Illustrate- Add a drawing collage (flyer, news article, pamphlet, etc) or photograph that illustrates or supports what you learned, why the learning matters, or how you will apply the learning personally or professionally or how it connects to the course topics overall.
- C. Mapping the Journey- Field Visits and Academic Observations: We will visit farms, educational institutions, community organizations, and cultural landmarks. Students will create a digital or physical map documenting their observations:
- Names of contacts and organizational information
  - Key questions asked and responses received
  - Cultural, linguistic, and personal observations as they relate to course content/themes
  - Multimedia Project and Living Literature: Students will gather visual and audio documentation of their experience in Costa Rica. This may include:
    - Photographs (with consent) with brief captions in Spanish that highlight course-related themes such as identity, cultural resistance, or migration
    - Collected music, poems, stories, or oral expressions encountered during the program
- D. Interview: Costa Rican History, Identity, and the Future- Each student will conduct an interview with a Costa Rican student or community member on the topics of history, national identity, and future aspirations.

#### Structure

- Introduction: Who is the interviewee? (name, studies, interests, place of birth, goals)
  - Body: What are their views on Costa Rican history, the role of the U.S. in the region, and the future of Costa Rica?
  - Conclusion: What did you learn? How did this interview shift or reinforce your views?
- E. Final Presentation: Teaching Project: The final presentation will be a collaborative project that integrates literary, cultural, and political analysis. Each group will select a topic related to the course (e.g., migration, ecotourism, diplomacy, Afrodescendant identity) and prepare an educational presentation with the following components:
- Use of academic resources and materials collected during the course
  - Visual aids (slides, handouts, maps, photos, etc.)
  - Prepared discussion questions to engage the class
  - Digital summary sheet, key vocabulary, and academic references (MLA format)

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 KISS/WKU does not award +/- grades, only full letter grades.)

## Course Calendar Forthcoming

### 8. 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 KISS/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.]”

## **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](mailto: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](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 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](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.