



FACULTY-LED  
STUDY ABROAD

## KIIS Maya Mexico Program, Winter 2026-27

### HON 300 Topics: The Rhetoric of Tourism and Travel

**Instructor:** Ashley Coker

**Email:** acoker@bsu.edu

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

*Syllabus subject to change*

**1. Course Description:** Tourism invites us with carefully crafted promises: *must-see wonders, authentic cultures, hidden gems, once-in-a-lifetime experiences*. These phrases—common across destinations worldwide—do more than encourage travel; they shape expectations, frame histories, and influence how places and people are perceived. Tourism teaches us what to value, what to photograph, what to remember, and what to overlook.

This course examines tourism and travel as rhetorical practices. Rather than treating tourism as a neutral act of movement, the course explores how destinations are shaped, promoted, experienced, and understood through persuasive narratives, images, symbols, and practices. Tourist sites, guided experiences, promotional materials, museums, and even travelers themselves function as rhetorical texts that construct meaning about place, history, culture, and identity. Through readings, discussion, critical analysis, and immersive field experiences, students will investigate how tourism influences what we see, how we see it, and how we understand both others and ourselves. The course introduces key concepts and theories related to the tourist gaze, authenticity, representation, and power, and applies them to real-world travel and tourism contexts, with particular attention to the ways tourism intersects with history, culture, sustainability, and global inequality.

## **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:** Because this is a study abroad course, much of the learning will be grounded in direct observation and reflection. By the end of the course, students will:

- Develop working definitions of tourism, tourist, and tourist experience
- Build a shared vocabulary for analyzing the motivations, practices, and impacts of tourism
- Explain why tourism is an important object of rhetorical and cultural study
- Analyze a range of tourism-related texts and spaces using rhetorical concepts
- Apply course theories to real-world travel and tourism contexts
- Critically reflect on their own roles as travelers and rhetorical actors within tourist systems

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

- Tourism and travel as rhetorical practices
- Defining tourism, tourists, and tourist experience
- The tourist gaze and ways of seeing place
- Narratives of authenticity, culture, and heritage
- Visual rhetoric and the marketing of destinations
- Representation, power, and whose stories are told through tourism
- Tourism, history, and collective memory
- Sustainability, eco-tourism, and ethical travel discourses
- Global inequality, labor, and the political economy of tourism
- Tour guides, museums, and curated experiences as rhetorical texts
- Tourists as rhetorical actors and ethical agents
- Reflexive travel and critical self-reflection in study abroad contexts

**5. Required Readings:** Readings for this course will be provided by the instructor. Rather than relying on a single textbook, the course draws on selected chapters from scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and shorter theoretical and reflective essays. Readings are intentionally selective and designed to support the experiential, field-based nature of this short-term study abroad course.

Course readings will come from a range of interdisciplinary sources, including:

- Foundational scholarship in tourism studies, including theories of the tourist gaze, authenticity, modernity, and the production of tourist experience
- Rhetorical and cultural studies perspectives on travel, representation, narrative, and persuasion
- Visual culture and media studies approaches to tourism imagery, destination marketing, museums, and heritage sites
- Critical examinations of tourism and power, including issues of inequality, privilege, labor, sustainability, and ethical travel
- Case studies exploring different forms of tourism, such as heritage tourism, religious tourism and pilgrimage, eco-tourism, luxury tourism, and “dark” or toxic tourism
- Analyses of museums, ruins, monuments, and curated spaces as rhetorical and touristic texts

In addition to scholarly readings, students will analyze a variety of tourism-related texts, such as promotional materials, guidebooks, museum exhibits, signage, and digital media encountered during the program. All required readings will be made available electronically.

Selected texts:

Readings for this course will be drawn from selected chapters and excerpts from the following kinds of works. Specific readings may vary by location and itinerary.

Culler, Jonathan. "The Semiotics of Tourism."

MacCannell, Dean. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*.

Urry, John, and Jonas Larsen. *The Tourist Gaze*.

## **6. Graded Assignments:**

Critical reading questionnaires	200 pts
Rhetorical field notebook	200 pts
Artifact Analysis Paper	200 pts
Final exam (oral)	200 pts
Graded discussions / misc participation	200 pts

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. 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.].”

## **9. 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.

## **10. 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.

## **11. 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/>.

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.