



## KIIS Italy Program, Winter 2026-27

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### ITAL 105: Introduction to Italian Culture

**Instructor:** Ian Hagarty

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

*Syllabus subject to change*

#### **1. Course Description:**

##### **Art, Society, & Everyday Life**

This course explores Italian culture by examining both its deep historical roots and its modern expressions. Students will engage with Italy's artistic, architectural, social, and political heritage and consider how contemporary Italian society reflects and builds upon these traditions. Beyond its art and history, Italy is known for its food, fashion, sports, and social customs—each playing a role in shaping a national identity. This course will explore the various regional culinary traditions, the influence of Italian designers on global fashion, the deep-seated passion for soccer (calcio), and the social and political dynamics that comprise contemporary Italian society, including issues related to immigration, urban life, and cultural preservation. Discussions will also address how modern Italy balances tradition with innovation, particularly in areas like sustainability and tourism.

Students will reflect on their experiences through discussions, short essays, and creative projects that encourage them to connect historical and contemporary aspects of Italian culture. Significant cultural sites and gathering spaces throughout Florence and Rome will serve dual roles as both our classroom and topics for discussion and observation. No prior knowledge of Italian studies is required, and students from all academic backgrounds are welcome. This course provides an immersive look at Italy as both a cultural touchstone and a modern, evolving society.

#### **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 KISS study abroad program, and again at the conclusion of your program, KISS 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 KISS measure the effectiveness of its study abroad programs.

### **3. Course Objectives and Specific Learning Outcomes:**

**By the end of this course, students will have the ability to:**

- Develop a foundational understanding of Italian culture, including its historical, artistic, social, and regional influences.
- Analyze key cultural themes in Italy, such as tradition versus modernity, regional identity, the role of art and architecture, and the impact of historical events on contemporary society.
- Identify, critically assess, and discuss significant works of Italian literature, film, art, and music, considering their broader cultural and historical contexts.
- Strengthen observational and analytical skills through direct engagement with Italian cultural artifacts, spaces, and traditions.
- Collaborate with peers to explore cultural themes, drawing connections between Italian history, society, and contemporary global influences.

**During the course, students should be prepared to:**

1. Attend all class sessions, excursions, and scheduled site/museum visits.
2. Participate actively in in-person class discussions and/or virtual discussion boards facilitated by the instructor.
3. Work in small groups to analyze cultural topics and complete assigned tasks.
4. Evaluate key cultural artifacts, historical sites, or artistic movements through structured analysis, considering their significance and relevance in Italian society.
5. Complete short, informal reflection papers (~300 words) on topics related to assigned readings, site visits, and/or class discussions.
6. Submit two approximately 600-word (or two pages) cultural analysis essays that expand on themes explored in previous reflections and incorporate readings and independent research. This paper will demonstrate an understanding of Italian cultural traditions and their evolution over time.
7. Develop a cultural portfolio documenting key insights from site visits, lectures, and independent research. This portfolio will include original photographs and/or videos, research-based reflections, and contextual analysis of selected cultural topics.

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

What is Italian culture? How is it expressed through art, history, language, and tradition? How has it evolved over time, and how is it preserved and shared today? What can we learn from different forms of cultural representation?

These questions will guide our exploration of Italy as we examine its culture and history through various projects and case studies. Students can expect to engage with topics such as historical archives, artistic traditions, cultural preservation, language and literature, museum curation, and contemporary interpretations of Italian heritage.

### **6. Required Readings and Materials:**

Required readings, videos, and other course materials will be provided digitally using Google Classroom. Students can either print readings and bring them abroad, or they may access them digitally with a device such as a tablet, smartphone, or laptop.

**Students will be required to capture digital photos during the course.** The final project will require students to provide original digital photography and/or videography they create throughout the course and during their travel in Italy. A camera phone will produce image and video files sufficient for this purpose, but students may choose to bring a digital camera if it is their preference.

While it is not required to bring a laptop on the trip, students will be expected to access and transfer files to a digital presentation software platform (such as MS PowerPoint, Canva, Prezi, Google Slides) using a computer, laptop, or device to complete their final project. It is recommended to bring a device that will allow you to efficiently do this during the trip.

## 7. Graded Assignments:

Progress in the course will be measured and assessed in the following ways:

Final Project – Cultural Portfolio	150 points
Cultural Analysis Essay (2 total worth 75 points each)	150 points
*Active Participation (attendance, discussions, & excursions across 10 days)	75 points
Reflection Journals (5 total at 25 points each)	125 points
	<hr/> <u>500 points</u> <hr/>

Grade Scale:

A = 450 – 500 points

B = 400 - 449

C = 350 - 399

D = 300 - 349

F = Below 299

**Please note KIIS/WKU does not award +/- grades.**

\*What constitutes active participation?

1) Arriving promptly to class and excursion sites

2) Engaging in discussions with professor and/or classmates during class time and visits to, during, and from excursion sites

3) Completing assigned readings and other assignments.

These items represent the minimum expectations for your participation in my course. Students who exceed these expectations will earn a higher grade in this area.

## 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 KISS Title IX, see <https://www.kiss.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 KISS program, attend a KISS event, or work in a KISS environment (e.g. KISS office) without fear of sexual harassment or discrimination of any kind. Be respectful of each other.