

KIIS Maya Mexico Winter 2026-2027



SPAN 306 Experiencing Spanish Abroad: Mexican Culture & Identity

Voces del Yucatán: Communication Across Cultures (3 credits)

December 26, 2026 – January 6, 2027

Instructor: Dr. Ruth Brown

Email: ruth.brown@uky.edu

Instructor office hours: On site and by appointment

Syllabus subject to change

1. Course Description

Mexico is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the Americas, and the Yucatán offers a window into how languages coexist, blend, and shape daily life. This course explores linguistic identity through the interplay of Spanish, Yucatec Maya, and English. Visits to markets, archaeological sites, art spaces, and multilingual community settings encourage students to examine how spoken, written, and visual language shape social life and define both individual and collective identities. Through these experiences, students will strengthen their own communicative abilities in Spanish and develop their own flexibility and fluency as Spanish speakers in multilingual contexts. Taught in Spanish.

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 Student Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, students should be able to utilize the Spanish language in order to:

- Identify primary factors and historical influences that make up the contemporary linguistic landscape of the Yucatán.
- Evaluate the interplay of Spanish, Yucatec Maya, and English in select social, historical, artistic, and narrative contexts.
- Tell the story of their own linguistic identity in relation to the Spanish language through digital, textual, or visual media

4. Major Topics Covered in the Course

- Visual and textual communication in Pre-Colombian Mesoamerica
- Spanish in Colonial Mexico
- Yucateco Maya
- Indigenous language protection & promotion
- Informal and regional variations
- Multilingualism in the Yucatán

5. Spanish Language Commitment and Expectations

Success in this class is intimately linked to living abroad, you are strongly encouraged to take advantage of the abundant opportunities for conversation that you will find around you while living and traveling in Mexico. It is essential that **you take initiative to create opportunities for interpersonal exchange in Spanish** with those around you, including the students in your Spanish course, your professor, and people you encounter in the community. All assignments will be completed in Spanish. Due to the nature of this interdisciplinary program, there will be times when it is appropriate or polite for Spanish students to use English with fellow students who do not speak Spanish. In these situations, English will be necessary, and the student will not be penalized.

6. Required materials and readings

- Course materials for required readings, homework, and other activities will be provided via Google Classroom.
- Access to a Spanish/English dictionary either through a print edition or online on Wordreference.com.

7. Graded Assignments

Assignments are organized into the following categories and the overall class grade is determined based on these category weights:

- Homework and “Place as Text” activities 25%
- Website project and presentation 30%
- Participation 25%
- Pre-departure and final reflections 20%

Homework and “Place as text” activities 25%

Reviewing assigned materials, studying related vocabulary, and preparing in advance will help you feel more confident and benefit from our class meetings and excursions. We will also take advantage of

living and traveling in Mexico by completing Place as Text reflection activities based on our group excursions. These activities will be assigned on Google Classroom: “Homework” activities will help you prepare for class meetings and can be completed at any point prior to the assigned date, including before departure. “Place as text” activities should be completed *after* excursions on site.

Website project and presentation 30%

This project encourages students to combine their pre-departure study with experiences on site to explore and develop expertise on a topic related to the course themes of linguistic identity and cross-cultural communication. Students will work in groups to create a page for our class website before departure, then will present their site and engage in a discussion that connects the topic with their experiences on site. This assignment will be accomplished in the following steps:

- Pre-departure:
 - The instructor will provide a list of suggested topics.
 - Students will self-select into groups and work together to research and prepare an overview of their topic for the class website. Their website page should reference at least two of the assigned course materials and include a variety of input sources (textual, visual, and at least one video or song).
- During the trip:
 - On the day that their topic will be discussed in class, groups will present the information included on their page and engage in a discussion on the topic with their peers. They should not count on being able to show their page as they present but can assume the class has read it.
 - On each presentation day, a *different* group from the one that is presenting will be expected to take the lead on the class discussion by creating questions and sharing observations that connect the presentation with our on site experiences.

Participation 25%

Students are encouraged to engage with the Spanish language as much as possible during the program, both during class meetings and beyond. Taking initiative to speak, read, listen, and write the language with your peers, professor, and in the community will help you increase flexibility and fluency as Spanish speakers in multilingual contexts. You will receive 3 participation grades during the program, each will reflect your engagement in class meetings and your Spanish language usage outside of class meeting times.

Class meetings will provide low-stress, supportive space for guided speaking practice. We will start each class meeting with a 1:1:1 activity in which the instructor will ask students to share 1 thing (*Algo...interesante, sorprendente, molesto*) that stood out to them recently. You should plan on contributing to this warm up activity at least four times total over the course of the program, so keep an eye out for events, people, and experiences to share. Then, we will have conversations and complete activities to examine specific course topics in light of our experiences in Mexico.

Pre-departure and final reflections 20%

These activities will encourage you to reflect on your goals, expectations, and experiences on the program.

- For the pre-departure essay, the instructor will provide a photo prompt and guiding question.
- For the final reflection you will tell the story of your own linguistic identity as a Spanish speaker through the digital, textual, or visual media of your choice. Some format possibilities for the final reflection include: photo essay, Instagram story, Tik Tok video(s), audio narration, collage of materials collected during the trip, artistic production, or short video.

Grading Scale

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::

90 – 100 A

80 – 89 B

70 – 79 C

60 – 69 D

Below 60 F

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 stepping stone, 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.
- 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.
- With Instructor Approval: AI-powered writing enhancement tools may be used to help with spelling, grammar, syntax, and stylistic errors when permitted by the instructor.

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

- Plagiarism: Using AI-generated content as your original work. 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.].”

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, 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.

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) 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.