



FACULTY-LED
STUDY ABROAD

KIIS Italy Program, Summer 2027

ITAL 105: Introduction to Italian Culture

Instructor: Dr. Alyssa Granacki

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Instructor's office hours: on site and by appointment

Syllabus subject to change

1. Course Description:

This course introduces students to Italian culture, both its contemporary iterations and its historical trajectory. We will explore the contributions Italy has made to art, religion, politics, and intellectual culture throughout the centuries. We will investigate major expressions of Italian culture from power and religious faith to intellectual achievement and artisanal craft, tracing how history continues to shape everyday life in Italy still today. Combining on-site experiences in Rome and Florence – including interactive encounters with social and cultural spaces as well as visits to major historical monuments – along with readings, film, and firsthand observation, students will consider why the world continues to look to Italy for inspiration in law, art, design, and style.

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:

Students will:

- Identify and describe major developments in Roman, Renaissance, and modern Italian history, such as law, religious institutions, artistic movements, and craft traditions, and explain their continued influence on Italian life today.
- Analyze works of art, architecture, and literature by situating them within their historical, religious, and social context.
- Compare historical and contemporary expressions of Italian culture (e.g., ancient civic space and the modern piazza; Renaissance patronage and “Made in Italy” branding) to evaluate how the past continues to shape present-day institutions, politics, and daily life.
- Compare and contrast Italian cultural practices and social norms with students’ own cultural backgrounds, in order to develop cross-cultural understanding and communication skills.
- Evaluate their own positionality as visitors in Italy, and assess how travel and firsthand observation shape perceptions of a foreign culture.

4. Major Topics covered in the Course:

- **Politics, Law, and Rome:** How did ancient Rome organize, project, and sustain power across an empire — and what of that system survives today? Students examine Roman engineering, civic infrastructure, and legal systems as tools of power, and trace their afterlife in Western law, urban planning, and the daily rhythms of public life in a modern Italian piazza.
- **Faith, Spectacle, and Sacred Power:** How did the Catholic Church use art and architecture to persuade, and what role does the Church still play in Italian public life? Students explore the Counter-Reformation and Baroque period as a deliberate strategy of emotional persuasion through art, then consider the Vatican’s continued influence on Italian politics, ritual, and identity today.
- **The Renaissance Mind:** What conditions allowed Florence to become the center of a cultural rebirth, and why does that period still define how the world sees Italian genius? Students investigate humanism, Medici patronage, and civic ambition as drivers of Renaissance art and architecture, and consider how ideas first coined in Florentine workshops and academies still shape intellectual and cultural life.
- **“Made in Italy”:** How did Renaissance workshop culture become the foundation for Italy’s global reputation in design, fashion, and craftsmanship? Students trace the throughline from the medieval and Renaissance bottega to contemporary Italian artisanship, examining how “Made in Italy” functions today as both an economic brand and a cultural inheritance.

5. Fulfillment of General Education Requirement:

Under review to fulfill University of Kentucky Core requirement Inquiry in the Humanities.

6. Required Readings and Materials:

- Physical notebook (can be any size as long as it is portable and convenient for student) and writing utensil to take notes while on site visits.
- A smart phone (or similar) for taking photos, videos, and audio while out in the city. You will also need a device that can access Google Classroom.
- Required readings come from various sources and will be available via Google classroom either via hyperlinks or posted as PDFs. All materials will be available to

download before departure since WiFi abroad may be unreliable. See Tentative Schedule for more specifics.

7. Graded Assignments:

- **Participation (15%):**
Participation is evaluated on: punctuality and preparedness for site visits; active, respectful engagement in discussion; and respectful conduct with local guides, vendors, and site staff. In a short, place-based course like this one, being a thoughtful and reliable presence in the group is part of what you are learning and part of representing the program well while abroad.
- **Site Captures (5%):**
After each site visit, keep a single running document titled "Site Captures — [Your Name]." Each entry should be dated and include a few bullet points or fragments describing something specific you noticed: a detail, a sound, a smell, a question you had. No polish required! The goal is to capture what you saw while it's fresh, not to write a finished reflection. You will share this document with the instructor at the start of the semester, and it may be spot-checked throughout the course. This is also your own archive to draw from later — both for your Weekly Synthesis Entries and for choosing a touchstone for your Final Project.
- **"Then & Now" Weekly Synthesis Entry (4) (30%):**
Once a week, draw on your Site Captures to write a short synthesis entry (300–400 words) connecting one course topic or site visit to that week's "then vs. now" question (for example: How is this piazza used today compared to how a Roman forum functioned?). Include one photo or sketch from your own visit, describe what you observed, and respond to the week's guiding prompt using specific details.
- **Rome Assignment: Mini-Talk (15%):**
At a Rome site of your choosing deliver a short recorded spoken analysis (2–3 minutes, notes only) explaining how the space is designed to communicate power, spectacle, or emotion. Draw on specific details you can only notice by standing there: scale, light, material, sightlines, sound.
- **Florence Assignment: Artisan Encounter (15%)**
Visit a workshop, market stall, or artisan shop in Florence. We will do one visit as a class, but you may also make an additional visit on your own time or to another maker, if you prefer. Observe and, if possible, briefly speak with a maker. Produce a short annotated piece: a photo or sketch of one object, plus a 150–200 word reflection connecting what you saw to Renaissance bottega and patronage culture. What survives from that workshop tradition, and what has changed?
- **Final Project: A Cultural Comparison (20%)**
Over the semester, you've encountered dozens of sites, objects, and rituals that reveal something about how history shapes present-day life in Italy. For your final project, choose one touchstone from anywhere in the course, such as a historical site, an object, a ritual, or a tradition, that resonated with you. Pair it with a comparable (or contrasting!) touchstone from your own cultural background.
This project will include:
 - 3–4 artifacts total: 1–2 photos or notes from your Italy touchstone (pulled from your Site Captures), and 1–2 images or descriptions representing your home-culture comparison.
 - Short annotations (50–75 words each): what each artifact shows and why you picked it.
 - One comparative paragraph: What does putting these two things side by side reveal? Where do they diverge, and why might that be?

- A short live share-out (2–3 minutes): a quick in-class share or short recorded walkthrough explaining your pairing in your own words.

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 KIS/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 KIS/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, 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.

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) 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/>.

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.

12. Tentative Schedule

Week 1: Law, Power, and the Eternal City

Read:

- Smithsonian Magazine, "[Explore Rome's Hidden Underworld, Where a City Lurks Beneath a City](#)" (2025)
- Excerpts from Livy, *History of Rome* (ca. 9 BCE)
- Excerpts from Cicero, *Pro Caelio* (ca. 56 BCE)

Watch:

- Clips/Trailers for *Gladiator* (2000)
- Clips from *The Great Beauty* (2013)
- Trailer *Suburra: Blood on Rome* on Netflix (2017)

Visit:

- Colosseum
- Roman Forum
- Res Gestae of Augustus
- Pasquino statue (Via del vecchio governo)
- Trastevere, Piazza di San Calisto

Week 2: Faith, Spectacle, and Sacred Power

Read:

- Giovanni Boccaccio, Day 1, novella 2, from *Decameron* (14th century)

- Dante, canto XV, *Purgatory* (14th century)
- Pope Leo, excerpts from “Magnifica Humanitatis” and responses

Watch:

- *Conclave* (2024)
- *Clips, The Agony and the Ecstasy* (1964)

Visit:

- Vatican City (St. Peter's Basilica, The Sistine Chapel)
- Santa Maria della Vittoria (Cornaro Chapel)
- The Pantheon
- Piazza Navona, including Sant'Agnes in Agone

Week 3: The Renaissance Mind

Read:

- Letters, Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna (16th century)
- Excerpt, Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve*
- Excerpts, Dante, *The Divine Comedy* (14th century)

Watch:

- Selected episodes, *The Medici*, available on Netflix.

Visit:

- Casa di Dante
- Uffizi Gallery
- Palazzo Pitti
- Palazzo Strozzi

Week 4: Craft, Style, and “Made in Italy”

Read:

- “[Made in Italy](#)” according to the Italian government
- “A Fashion Stylist's Guide to Made in Italy Crafts” in [Italy Segreta](#)
- Anastasiia Kirpalov, “Inside a Renaissance Workshop: How did it work?” in [The Collector](#).
- Excerpts from Benvenuto Cellini, [Autobiography](#) (16th Century)

Watch:

- *Salvatore, Shoemaker of Dreams* (2020)

Visit:

- Laurentian Library
- Sant'Ambrogio market
- Ponte Vecchio
- An artisan jewelry workshop in the Oltrarno district (instructor contact)

Present

- Final Projects