

Summer Study Abroad in Cuba

Offered by the University at Albany-SUNY and the Centro Memorial Martin Luther King

History, Culture and Politics of Cuba

A five-week, 6-credit study abroad program in Cuba

May 21 – June 26, 2014

Social justice framework

US students will encounter a reality in Cuba unlike anything they have experienced. The total absence of commercial advertisements, the existence of mass organizations structured by the State, free universal health care and education, lack of ready access to many consumer goods - all these things, and many more, will quickly turn students' worlds upside down. The social, political and historical realities of Cuba generate many questions, challenge pre-conceived notions, and quickly move students outside their comfort zones, providing the perfect conditions for a unique and rewarding educational experience.

In this context, a social justice framework provides students with a set of paradigmatic questions that are familiar enough to generate energetic debate and questioning, while the Cuban context moves students outside of the debate parameters and political/social discourses that generally mark their experiences in the US. Among the key social justice questions students face in Cuba are:

- Decision-making processes and citizenship rights – democracy vs paternalism, democratic centralism, bureaucracy vs autonomy, role of mass organizations, formal elections vs popular consultations, collective rights vs individual rights, role and meaning of community, roles of leadership with particular focus on hierarchy vs broad-based leadership formation. What does democracy mean? What constitutes genuine political participation? How do political and economic systems impact the integrity of community?
- Social justice vs wealth production – rights vs responsibilities, market mechanisms vs socialization, material vs moral incentives. Is wealth creation more important than equity? What are proper incentives for labor? Is it possible to build a social consensus around labor norms that are not based solely on wage levels?
- Race, class, gender and sexual orientation – legal vs social vs cultural rights, inter-relationships among race, class, gender and sexual orientation. Does the State have the final, or even most important, say on questions of gender and racial equity? What is the impact of historical legacy on current social relations? Are race and gender inequalities automatically overcome in a classless society? What is Cuba's history with issues of sexual orientation and AIDS treatment?

These questions and contradictions are not simple abstractions. They manifest themselves in grocery store discussions, at family dinners, in the mainstream media, and in government discourses. They unfold in a particular historical context impacted by an often contentious relationship with the US government, and grounded in nationalism built on foundations of sovereignty, equity and Cuba's particular brand of Marxism.

Core program

The core program consists of three classes integrated in a modular system that utilizes an interdisciplinary pedagogy combining theoretical classes with workshops and experiential learning. Instruction focuses on a distinct theme each week. Reading materials are drawn from sociology, political science, anthropology, economics, history, literature, and other relevant disciplines. Students meet for 12 hours of formal academic classes each week organized around discussion of assigned readings and facilitated by some of Cuba's world-renowned academics. Experiential learning and cultural events offer students the opportunity to connect theory and practice, and experience everyday life on the island. Experiential workshops may include visits to public schools, medical centers, cooperatives, NGOs, and popular organizations. Students write two reflections each week: three pages in English or Spanish on the assigned readings for the week, and three pages in Spanish on their experiences during the week.

In addition to spending 4 weeks in and around Havana, students spend a week in central Cuba and at least one weekend at Cuba's world famous beaches.

Housing and meals

Students live with families associated with the Martin Luther King Memorial Center in the Marianao barrio on the southwest side of Havana, about 20 minutes from the city center. It is a popular barrio with a large Afro-Cuban population. Families are carefully screened by the MLK Center, perhaps Cuba's most important non-governmental organization with a 25 year history of work in Marianao and throughout the island. Home stays provide students with a unique opportunity to learn firsthand from Cuban families while also improving their Spanish. Breakfast is eaten with families, while lunch and dinner are prepared at the MLK Center.

Communication with the US

Internet is sporadic and very slow. Students should only expect internet access a couple evenings a week, and almost never during the daytime. Skype does not work in Cuba. Phone calls to the US are possible at a cost of about US\$1.50 per minute. Students can receive phone calls at the MLK Center (assuming their families or significant others are willing to bear the high costs).

Legal issues

Because of restrictions under the US embargo of Cuba, the home institution of each student must accept the program for credit toward an undergraduate or graduate degree, and provide a letter to the student signed by the on-campus staff or professor designated to manage travel to Cuba. For more information on the nature of travel restrictions to Cuba for US citizens, the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) administers the embargo and the relevant regulations are reproduced below. The full regulations are available at http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/cuba_tr_app.pdf.

V. EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES - 31 C.F.R. § 515.56

General license for certain educational activities of accredited U.S. graduate or undergraduate academic institutions – 31 C.F.R. § 515.565(a):

Section 515.565(a) sets forth a general license authorizing accredited U.S. graduate and undergraduate degree-granting academic institutions, including faculty, staff, and students of such institutions, to engage in travel-related transactions and such additional transactions that are directly incident to:

- (a)(1) Participation in a structured educational program in Cuba as part of a course offered for credit by the sponsoring U.S. academic institution;
- (a)(2) Noncommercial academic research in Cuba specifically related to Cuba and for the purpose of obtaining a graduate degree;
- (a)(3) Participation in a formal course of study at a Cuban academic institution, provided the formal course of study in Cuba will be accepted for credit toward the student's graduate or undergraduate degree;
- (a)(4) Teaching at a Cuban academic institution by an individual regularly employed in a teaching capacity at the sponsoring U.S. academic institution, provided the teaching activities are related to an academic program at the Cuban institution and provided the duration of the teaching will be no shorter than 10 weeks;
- (a)(5) Sponsorship, including the payment of a stipend or salary, of a Cuban scholar to teach or engage in other scholarly activity at the sponsoring U.S. academic institution; or
- (a)(6) The organization of, and preparation for, activities described in (a)(1)-(5) above by members of the faculty and staff of the sponsoring U.S. academic institution.

General licenses constitute blanket authorization for those transactions set forth in the relevant regulation. For persons satisfying all criteria and conditions in a general license, no further permission from OFAC is required to engage in transactions authorized by that general license. Each person engaging in transactions, including travel-related transactions, under a general license must be able to document how he or she qualifies under the general license.

Note: It is a requirement of the general license that travelers to Cuba authorized pursuant to this provision carry letters on official letterhead signed by a designated representative of the sponsoring academic institution (defined as a person designated by the relevant dean or the academic vice-president, provost, or president of the

institution as the official responsible for overseeing the institution's Cuba travel program). Please refer to the relevant subsection within section 515.565(a) for more specific information concerning the necessary contents of such letters. In addition, U.S. academic institutions and individual travelers must retain records related to the transactions authorized pursuant to this provision. See 31 C.F.R. §§ 501.601 and 501.602.

The general license authorizes all members of the faculty and staff (including but not limited to adjunct faculty and part-time staff) of the sponsoring U.S. academic institution to participate in the activities set forth in the general license. A student currently enrolled in a graduate or undergraduate degree program at any accredited U.S. academic institution is authorized pursuant to the general license to participate in the academic activities in Cuba set forth in the general license through any sponsoring U.S. academic institution, not only through the institution at which the student is pursuing a degree.

Courses

Cuba, Yesterday and Today, 30 hours, 2 credits: Overview of recent Cuban history and the social and political dynamics on the island today. The course covers independence struggles, the 1959 revolution, the social impacts of the revolution, and the special period, with particular emphasis on US-Cuba relations and recent social and political changes. Students will be able to situate an analysis of contemporary Cuba within an historical context. Workshops, meetings and museum visits compliment formal academic classes.

Course objectives:

- Understand the historic cultural/political influence of the US on the island.
- Understand the development and meaning of nationalism.
- Understand the dynamics and impact of the 1959 revolution.
- Understand the stages of development of the revolution, with special focus on the economic, social and cultural changes.
- Understand the development and impact of the "special period."
- Understand and evaluate the economic and social changes announced during the 6th Congress of the Communist Party.
- Understand current social dynamics, particularly regarding race, gender and sexual orientation.

Professors:

- Fernández Martínez Heredia: Author, political analyst and President of the Instituto de Investigaciones Culturales Juan Marinello.
- Thomas Hansen: Professor at the Autonomous University of Social Movements.
- Rev. Raul Suarez, founder of the CMMLK and representative in National Assembly
- Tomas Fernandez Robaina, specialist in race and ethnic studies at the Biblioteca Nacional
- Gladys Hernandez, Researcher at the Center for Research on the World Economy
- Isabel Moya, specialist in gender studies, journalist.
- Alfredo Prieto, specialist in US-Cuba relations and editor of the journal Temas
- Juan Vlades Paz, sociologist at the University of Havana and the Instituto Superior de Relaciones Internacionales Raul Roa Garcia.
- Lesbia Canovas, former assistant director of the National Education System

Bibliography:

- Gott, Richard, *Cuba: A New History*
- Castro, Raul, "Central Report to the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba"
- Tulchin, Bobea, Espina Prieto, Hernandez, "Changes in Cuban society since the nineties"
- LeoGrande, William, "The Cuban Communist Party and electoral politics: Adaption, succession and transition"
- Benjamin, Jules R, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution*
- Azicri, Max, *Cuba Today and Tomorrow: Reinventing Socialism*
- Angotti, Tom, "Fifty years of rectification"
- Evenson, Debra, "Opening paths to renewed popular participation"

- Hernandez, Dilla, Dugan Abbassi, Diaz, "Political culture and popular participation in Cuba"
- Luciak, Ilja, "Gender and democracy in Cuba"
- Muphy, Schutte, Slagter, Lopez, "Feminism in Cuba: Report from the 3rd conference of North American and Cuban philosophers"
- Grunig. Larissa A., "The Cuban Women's Federation: Organization of a feminist revolution"
- Casal, Lourdes, "Revolution and Race: Blacks in Contemporary Cuba"
- De la Fuente, Alejandro, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality and Politics in Twentieth Century Cuba*
- Gasperini, Lavinia, "The Cuban education system: Lessons and dilemmas"
- Royce, Frederick, "Agricultural Production Cooperatives: The Future of Cuban Agriculture?"
- Randall, Margaret, "The family code"
- Kirk, Emily, "Setting the agenda for Cuban sexuality: the role of Cuba's CENESEX"

Supplemental readings:

- Perez, Jr., Louis A, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality and Culture*
- Chomsky, Aviva, Barry Carter and Pamela Maria Smorkaloff (eds), *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics*
- Olson, Gary, "Cuban internationalism as engaged empathy"
- Krook, Daniel, "Cuban internationalism in Angola, 1975-1991"
- Torres, Nelson, Henshall Momsen, and Niemeier, "Experiment or transition? Revisiting food distribution in Cuban agromercados from the 'special period'"
- Ibarra, Jorge, Ideologia Mambisa
- Morena, Friginals, El ingenio
- Revista Caminos, Raza y racismo
- Fernandes, Sujatha, *Cuba Presente: Cuban Arts, State Power and the Making of New Revolutionary Cultures*
- Friedman, Douglas, "Centro Memorial Martin Luther King Jr.: Cuban Civil society and Popular Education"
- Henthorne, George, Williams, "The evolving service culture of Cuban tourism: A case study"
- Nayeri and Lopez-Pardo, "Economic crisis and access to care: Cuba's health care system since the collapse of the Soviet Union"
- Font, Mauricio (ed), Cuba today: Continuity and change since the 'periodo especial'
- Cluster, Dick, "Northamericans looking at Cubans, *Cubanos mirando a los yumas*"
- Morales Dominguez, Esteban, *United States-Cuba Relations: A Critical History*
- Erlich, Reese, *Dateline Havana: The Real Story of US Policy and the Future of Cuba*
- Alzugaray Treto, Carlos, "Continuity and change in Cuba at 50: The revolution at a crossroads"
- Harris, Richard L, "Cuban internationalism, Che Guevara, and the survival of Cuba's socialist regime"
- Huish, Robert and John M. Kirk, "Cuban medical internationalism and the development of the Latin American School of Medicine"
- Smith, Wayne S, *The Closest of Enemies: A Personal and Diplomatic Account of US-Cuba Relations since 1957*

Spanish (beginning, intermediate, or Spanish for native speakers), 30 hours, 2 credits: Focus on conversational Spanish, reading and writing using popular education techniques. Readings and newspaper articles by Cuban authors, theater, music, and film provide generative themes, which are used to create conversation and develop vocabulary and grammar. Weekly writing assignments of three pages in Spanish encourage students to reflect on the events of the week. Readings and generative themes are closely related to topics in other academic classes so that students develop intellectually in both Spanish and English. Students take an initial placement test to determine their level of instruction, with three levels available – beginning, intermediate and Spanish for native speakers. Classes are small (generally 5 to 8 students) allowing for close personal attention.

Course goals:

- Manage vocabulary and grammar appropriate for academic discussions about other courses in the program.
- Improve verbal, reading and writing skills in a structured environment.
- Improve verbal communication skills in unstructured social environments.

Professors:

- Olga Lidia Rodríguez Medina, Master in Didáctica de Español como lengua extranjera en el ISPEJV, 31 years of experience teaching Spanish as a second language
- Marianela Morán Canto, Master in Educational Psychology, 31 years of experience teaching Spanish as a second language.
- Reina Luisa Peña Castro, Licenciatura in Education from Instituto Superior Pedagógico de Lenguas Extranjeras **ISPLE**, 34 years of experience teaching Spanish as a second language.

Cuban cinema, 30 hours, 2 credits: Experience the world of Cuban cinema. Along with tropical music, Cuban is known worldwide for its production of original and sophisticated cinema. Professor Richard Reitsma of Canisius College teaches this course, using such classic Cuban movies as:

- Strawberry and Chocolate
- Memories of Underdevelopment
- Death of a bureaucrat
- I am Cuba
- Lucia
- Lista de Espera
- Habana Blues