

Summer Study Abroad in Cuba Politics, Education and Culture of Cuba

A two-week, 4-credit study abroad program in Cuba
June 7 – June 21, 2023



Universal healthcare and education are two of the primary legacies of the Cuban Revolution. Yet under the crushing weight of the US embargo and with a generational change afoot in Cuban society, how do these projects fare today? Our classes, encounters, and visits will explore these questions, while also introducing you to Cuban politics and culture, in all their beautiful complexity.

Social justice framework

US students will encounter a reality in Cuba unlike anything they have experienced. The total absence of commercial advertisements, 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. All this creates the perfect conditions for a unique and rewarding educational experience.

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

- Decision-making processes and citizenship rights: What does democracy mean? What constitutes genuine political participation? How do political and economic systems impact the integrity of community? We explore these questions by discussing democracy vs paternalism, democratic centralism, bureaucracy vs autonomy, the role of mass organizations, formal elections vs popular consultations, collective vs individual rights, the role and meaning of community, the roles of leadership with particular focus on hierarchy vs broad-based leadership formation.
- Social justice vs wealth production: 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? We explore these questions by discussing rights vs responsibilities, market mechanisms vs socialization, material vs moral incentives.
- 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? We discuss legal vs social vs cultural rights, inter-relationships among race, class, gender and sexual orientation.

These are not simple debates over ideas. 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 two classes integrated into an interdisciplinary, modular system. This means we combine theoretical classes with workshops and experiential learning. Reading materials are drawn from history, journalism, and literature. Students meet for 8 hours of formal academic classes each week, including lectures, seminar discussion, and group reflection sessions. Connecting theory with practice, these classes are combined with daily meetings with Cuban academics, political leaders and social actors, experiential learning encounters, and museum visits. Experiential workshops may include visits to public schools, medical centers, cooperatives, NGOs, and popular organizations. Students participate in one or two cultural events each week, including Cuba's world-renowned cinema, dance, music, theater, sports events, etc. These immersive activities outside the classroom comprise 25 hours of instructional time per week.

Students also prepare a final project, in which they begin to think about their re-entry to the US and how they will put their experiences in Cuba to work both academically and socially. The final project may be a paper, written individually or collectively, or it may involve production of a play or video, development of an educational program for a US audience, production of art, planning a conference, production of a zine, etc., with subject matter determined in consultation with professors. Students whose final project consists of a performance, presentation, or work of art will also be asked to write a theoretical justification of their project. The final projects are presented in seminar-style format with fifteen minutes for presentation and twenty minutes for discussion/critique by fellow students and professors.

In addition to spending 11 days in and around Havana, students spend 3 days in the Viñales valley in western Cuba and 1 day at the beautiful Santa Maria beach east of Havana.

Grading rubric (0 to 10 point system):

Participation – 33%

Weekly reflections – 33%

Final Project – 33%

Housing and meals

Students live with families in Marianao, located 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 AUSM staff permanently based in Marianao. Homestays provide students with a unique opportunity to learn firsthand from Cuban families while also improving their Spanish.

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. Whatsapp – which also requires an internet connection – is the best mode of communication with people in the US.

Legality

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/pages/cuba.aspx>.

V. EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES - 31 C.F.R. § 515.565

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, US 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 US 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 US 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 US academic institution, not only through the institution at which the student is pursuing a degree.

Courses

Cuban Education (EDU 371/571), 30 hours, 2 credits: Overview of the Cuban education system, its development during the post-Revolutionary period, and the intersections of education with healthcare, the arts, and sexuality. The course includes seminar discussions on the Cuban education system as well as visits to the University of Havana, a primary school, the Museum of the Literacy Campaign, the Cuban Film Institute, the Latin American School of Medicine, and the Cuban National Center for Sex Education. Students will be able to situate the Cuban education system within the political and historical context of the socialist principle of universality, the impacts of the US embargo, and generational change within the country. Course objectives:

- Understand the structure and guiding principles of the Cuban education system.
- Understand the historical development of the educational system during the post-Revolutionary period.
- Understand the intersections of education with other social dynamics, such as healthcare, the arts, and sexuality.
- Understand the impacts of US-Cuba relations on the education system.
- Compare the Cuban educational system to that of the US.
- Evaluate the stresses and shortcomings facing the Cuban educational system.
- Synthesize proposals from within Cuba for alternative visions of education and translate these proposals to the US context.

Cuban Society (SOC 380/580), 30 hours, 2 credits: Overview of Cuban society and culture, the role of US-Cuba relations in shaping society, innovative solutions to obstacles (such as agroecology), and the challenges triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. The course includes seminar discussions on Cuba-US relations and the impact of the pandemic on social services, as well as visits to the Museum of the Revolution, an Afro-Cuban cultural space, and agroecological projects in Havana, the Las Terrazas sustainable community, and the Viñales valley. Students will be able to analyze Cuban society from historical, institutional, racial, and ecological perspectives. Course objectives:

- Understand the political structures and state institutions that shape Cuban society.
- Understand the historical development of Cuban society during the post-Revolutionary period, with special emphasis on the role of US-Cuba relations and the recent transformations since the pandemic.
- Understand the role of agroecology within Cuban society and situate its development within the political context of US-Cuba relations.
- Compare US and Cuban society in historical, institutional, racial, and ecological terms.
- Evaluate impacts of the US embargo on Cuban society.
- Synthesize proposals from within Cuba for alternative social arrangements and translate these proposals to the US context.

Professors:

- Dr. Marta Rosa Muñoz Campos, Director of FLACSO- Cuba
- Dr. Reynaldo Jiménez, Academic Coordinator of FLACSO- Cuba
- Dr. Enrique Verdecia, FLACSO- Cuba
- Dr. Luisa Iñiguez, FLACSO- Cuba

- Dr. Marta Rosa Muñoz Campos, FLACSO- Cuba
- Msc. Danay Díaz Pérez, FLACSO- Cuba
- Stuart Schussler, Autonomous University of Social Movements, PhD (ABD)

Bibliography:

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Schedule

Wednesday, June 7- *The activities of the day will depend on the arrival time of the group.*

- Arrive in Havana
- Lunch
- Greet homestay families
- Initial orientation
- Dinner at homestays
- Visit to La Rampa and Havana's Malecón (Boardwalk)

Thursday, June 8

- 9:00 Orientation on health, safety, schedule
- 11:00 Marianao Scavenger Hunt - Students walk around the neighborhood of Marianao, get to know their surroundings, learn about food prices, interact with local shop owners, look for public transportation, etc.
- 12:30 Lunch
- 1:30 Visit to the Museum of the Literacy Campaign and tour of Ciudad Escolar Libertad. Ciudad Libertad is a former Military Camp, turned educational complex after the Revolution
- 5:00 Debrief of Scavenger Hunt + **Reading & Reflection:** Greene- *Our Man in Havana*
- 6:00 Dinner at homestays

Friday, June 9

- 9:00 “Finding your way in Havana” activity – Together with homestay families, students take public transportation and find their way to places of interest, such as libraries, recreational centers, or the local hospital.
- 12:30 Lunch
- 1:30 Tour the University of Havana, the institutional home of FLACSO in Cuba and one of Latin America’s oldest and most prestigious universities.
- 6:00 Dinner at homestays

Saturday, June 10

- 9:00 Tour of Old Havana, UNESCO World Heritage site
- 12:30 Lunch
- 1:30 Visit to the Artisan’s Market “Almacenes San Jose”
- 6:00 Dinner at homestays

Sunday, June 11

- 9:00 Visit to Ernest Hemingway’s House
- 10:00 Visit to Santa Maria Beach east of Havana
- 5:00 Reading & Reflection: Hemingway- *The Old Man and the Sea*
- 6:00 Dinner at homestays

Monday, June 12

- 9:00 Seminar: Colonial Era and the Republic | **Reading:** Gott- *Cuba: A New History* ch.s 3-4; Hansing & Hoffman- “When racial inequalities return”; Binns- “Race Matters”
- 12:30 Lunch
- 2:00 Visit to Callejon de Hamel, an alleyway turned Afro-Cuban cultural space
- 6:00 Dinner at home stays
- 8:00 Salsa Classes at Centro de Musica

Tuesday, June 13

- 9:00 Seminar: Cuban education system | **Reading:** Bowles- “Cuban Education and the Revolutionary Ideology”; Spain- *Che: A Graphic Biography*; Castro- “Cuba is a Socialist Nation”
- 12:30 Lunch
- 2:00 Visit a primary school
- 4:00 Reflection
- 6:00 Activity: Cook dinner with homestay family

Wednesday, June 14

- 9:00 Museum of the Revolution
- 11:00 Seminar: History of the Revolution | **Reading** Velfort- *Goodbye, My Havana*, ch.5
- 12:30 Lunch
- 2:00 Visit to the Cuban National Center for Sex Education | **Reading:** Kirk- “Setting the agenda for Cuban sexuality”
- 6:00 Dinner at homestays
- 9:00 Fabrica de Arte, a former cooking oil factory turned art gallery and night club

Thursday, June 15

- 9:00 Seminar: Cuba’s welfare system and the pandemic | **Reading:** Nayeri and Lopez-Pardo- “Economic Crisis and Access to Care”; Canler- “The Miracle of the Cuban Economy” | **Reflection** paper #1 due
- 11:30 Visit to Family Doctor
- 12:30 Lunch
- 2:00 Visit the Latin America School of Medicine (ELAM) - students will learn about the Cuban international medical educational system, its solidarity work around the world, and its values
- 6:00 Dinner at homestays
- 8:00 Salsa classes

Friday, June 16

- 8:00 Travel to Viñales, a municipality in the western Pinar del Rio province. Its unique limestone *mogotes* (precipitous hills called 'mounds') form the rich soil that allows Viñales' intergenerational farming families to produce the world's best tobacco.
- 10:30 Arrival to the Outlook in Hotel " Los Jazmines"
- 11:00 Arrival to the National Park of the Viñales Valley, declared by UNESCO a World Heritage site in 1999.
- 1:00 Lunch
- 2:00 Visit to Paco's farm to meet a family that has cultivated tobacco for more than one hundred years
- 7:00 Dinner
- 8:00 Noches Viñaleras brings music and traditional food and beverages to the streets of Viñales

Saturday, June 17

- 9:30 Volunteer work at the Agroecological Farm "El Paraíso"
- 12:30 Lunch at the farm
- 2:00 Visit to the Cueva del Indio, a subterranean river
- 6:30 Dinner
- 7:00 Visit to a youth art project

Sunday, June 18

- 9:00 Departure to Las Terrazas, a sustainable development tourism community in the province of Artemisa. Located in the Cordillera del Rosario, Las Terrazas was declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1985.
- 10:00 Walking tour of the community
- 1:00 Lunch
- 3:00 Return to Havana

Monday, June 19

- 9:00 Seminar: US-Cuba Relations | **Reading:** Ferrer- *Cuba: An American History*
- 11:30 Reflection session | **Reflection** paper #2 due
- 12:30 Lunch
- 2:00 Visit to the Cuban Film Institute, established after the Revolution to advance film as a tool of social change.
- 6:00 Dinner at homestays

Tuesday, June 20

9:00 Visit the Organoponico de la Fresas - Learn about sustainable urban agriculture in Havana.

12:00 Lunch at Organoponico

1:00 **Presentation** of final projects (assignment due June 30)

3:00 Free afternoon in Havana

7:00 Good-bye party with homestays

Wednesday, June 21 – Departure Day