

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

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

June 2 – June 29, 2024

Draft syllabus and schedule, subject to change



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 three 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 24 days in and around Havana, students spend 4 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 reflection papers – 33%

Final presentation – 16%

Final project – 17%

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

Students can purchase a Cuban SIM card at the airport to access Whatsapp and other messaging apps via their phones. Otherwise, internet is sporadic and very slow. Students should only expect internet access a couple evenings a week, and almost never during the daytime.

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 Politics (POL 371/571), 30 hours, 2 credits: Overview of the Cuban political system, its development during the post-Revolutionary period, and its relation to nationalist independence struggle, the Cold War socialist bloc, and tensions with the US. The course includes seminar discussions on the Cuban political system as well as visits to the Museum of the Revolution, historical sites, and discussions with community organizers, popular educators, and Communist Party members. Students will be able to situate the Cuban political system within the context 19th and 20th century historical developments, the impacts of the US embargo, and generational change within the country. Course objectives:

- Understand the structure and guiding principles of the Cuban political system.
- Understand the historical development of the political system during the post-Revolutionary period.
- Understand the intersections of politics with other dynamics, such as the education system, medical internationalism, and African culture.
- Understand the impacts of US-Cuba relations on the political system.
- Compare the Cuban political system to that of the US.
- Evaluate the stresses and shortcomings facing the Cuban political system.
- Synthesize proposals from within Cuba for alternative visions of self-determination 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.

Spanish (SPAN 280/380/480), 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. Classes are small (generally 5 to 8 students) allowing for close personal attention. Course objectives:

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

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. Danay Díaz Pérez, FLACSO- Cuba
- Amanda Olmos, MSSc, FLACSO- Cuba
- Dr. Stuart Schussler, Autonomous University of Social Movements
- Lisandra Quirós Izquierdo, M.Ed, Autonomous University of Social Movements
- Sabrina Melendez, Autonomous University of Social Movements

Bibliography:

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Schedule

Sunday, June 2- *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)

Monday, June 3

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

6:00 Dinner at homestays

Tuesday, June 4

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.

3:00 Spanish placement exam

6:00 Dinner at homestays

Wednesday, June 5

- 9:00 Tour of Old Havana, UNESCO World Heritage site
- 12:30 Lunch
- 1:30 Visit to the Artisan's Market "Almacenes San Jose"
- 5:00 Group meeting: first impressions of Cuba and our intercultural immersion process.
- 6:00 Dinner at homestays

Thursday, June 6

- 9:00 Spanish classes
- 12:30 Lunch
- 1:30 Visit to the Martin Luther King Memorial Center, a hub for people-to-people solidarity between Cubans and international visitors, and center for training in popular education and liberation theology.
- 3:00 Workshop with the MLK Center – introduction to popular education
- 6:00 Dinner at homestays

Friday, June 7

- 9:00 Weekly reflection on activities, pending questions, lessons learned, challenges, and the week ahead | **Reflection** paper #1 due
- 12:30 Lunch
- 1:30 Spanish classes
- 4:00 Office hours, a space for one-on-one conversations with program coordinators
- 6:00 Dinner with homestays
- 8:00 Fábrica de Arte, a former cooking oil factory turned cultural event space, art gallery, and night club.

Saturday, June 8

- 11:00 Exploring Havana – in small groups, students will test their ability to navigate the city's transportation system by visiting new neighborhoods, such as the historic Plaza de la Revolución, ritzy Vedado and scenic Miramar.
- 6:00 Dinner at homestays

Sunday, June 9

- 9:00 Visit to Ernest Hemingway's House
- 10:00 Visit to Santa Maria Beach, east of Havana
- 6:00 Dinner at homestays

Monday, June 10

- 9:00 Seminar: Colonial era and the independence struggle
- 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 11

- 9:00 Museum of the Revolution
- 11:00 Seminar: History of the Revolution
- 12:30 Lunch
- 1:30 Spanish classes
- 4:00 Community discussion: Homestay family elders recount their experiences of the Revolution, the attempted US invasion and missile crisis
- 6:00 Dinner at homestays

Wednesday, June 12

- 9:00 Seminar: Introduction to Marxism and Cuban political economy
- 12:30 Lunch
- 1:30 Spanish classes
- 4:00 Discussion with students from the Union of Communist Youth: Social movements in Cuba and the US
- 6:00 Activity: Cook dinner with homestay family

Thursday, June 13

- 9:00 Seminar: Cuba's healthcare system and the pandemic | **Reflection** paper #2 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 14

- 9:00 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.
- 11:30 Arrival to the Outlook in Hotel " Los Jazmines"
- 12:30 Lunch at the bed & breakfast
- 2:00 Visit to Paco's farm to meet a family that has cultivated tobacco for more than one hundred years
- 6:00 Dinner at the bed & breakfast
- 8:00 Noches Viñaleras brings music and traditional food and beverages to the streets of Viñales

Saturday, June 15

- 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
- 6:00 Dinner at the bed & breakfast
- 7:00 Visit to a youth art project

Sunday, June 16

- 11:00 Arrival to the National Park of the Viñales Valley, declared by UNESCO a World Heritage site in 1999. Lunch during the hike.
- 3:00 Weekly reflection on activities, pending questions, lessons learned, challenges, and the week ahead.
- 4:30 Free time in the city of Viñales
- 6:00 Dinner at the bed & breakfast

Monday, June 17

- 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
- 6:00 Dinner at homestays

Tuesday, June 18

- 9:00 Seminar: US-Cuba Relations
- 11:30 Reflection session
- 12:30 Lunch
- 1:30 Spanish classes
- 4:00 Visit to the Cuban Film Institute, established after the Revolution to advance film as a tool of social change.
- 6:00 Dinner at homestays

Wednesday, June 19

- 9:00 Visit the Organopónico de la Fresas - Learn about sustainable urban agriculture in Havana.
- 12:00 Lunch at Organopónico
- 1:30 Spanish classes
- 3:00 Seminar: History of the Special Period and the role of cooperative agriculture in Cuban food sovereignty
- 6:00 Dinner at homestays

Thursday, June 20

- 9:00 Seminar: Black liberation struggles in Cuba
- 11:00 Visit to La Granjita Feliz, a community agriculture and arts project for people with Downs Syndrome in the Havana neighborhood of Guanabacoa
- 12:30 Lunch at the community project, followed by a musical performance
- 2:00 Community discussion on the history and contemporary practice of African religions in Guanabacoa
- 6:00 Dinner at homestays

Friday, June 21

- 9:00 Weekly reflection on activities, pending questions, lessons learned, challenges, and the week ahead | **Reflection** paper #3 due
- 12:30 Lunch
- 1:30 Office hours to discuss final projects and presentations
- 6:00 Dinner with homestays

Saturday, June 22

Family activities with homestays, preparation of final presentations

Sunday, June 23

Family activities with homestays, preparation of final presentations

Monday, June 24

9:00 Seminar: Cuban education system

11:30 Visit a primary school, discussion with students comparing public education in the US and Cuba

12:30 Lunch

1:30 Spanish classes

6:00 Dinner at homestays

Tuesday, June 25

9:00 Visit to La Casa Tomada, a queer, Black community organizing and arts space in the Marianao neighborhood of Havana

11:00 Discussion at La Casa Tomada: Community organizing under socialism, in comparison with the US context

12:30 Lunch at La Casa Tomada

2:00 Reflection session: Enriching our struggles by bringing home lessons learned in Cuba

6:00 Dinner at homestays

Wednesday, June 26

9:00 Seminar: Gender and sexuality in Cuba and the new Family Code

11:00 Discussion on Cuban democracy and popular referenda through the experience of debating the Family Code

12:30 Lunch

1:30 Spanish classes

6:00 Dinner at homestays

Thursday, June 27

Free day, to prepare final presentations and for departure

Friday, June 28

9:00 **Presentation** of final projects (assignment due July 29)

12:30 Lunch

1:30 Final reflections and program evaluation

3:00 Free afternoon in Havana

7:00 Good-bye party with homestays

Saturday, June 29 – Departure Day