

ANTH 3334
FANTASTIC ARCHAEOLOGY AND PSEUDOSCIENCE: LOST TRIBES, SUNKEN
CONTINENTS, AND ANCIENT ASTRONAUTS
May Term 2015
Location, Time TBD

Instructor: Dr. Maeve Skidmore.

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Dr. Skidmore is an SMU graduate and archaeologist whose studies focus on Pre-Columbian societies of South America. She first became interested in archaeology (and, unwittingly, pseudoarchaeology) as a kid when she learned about the tale of 'El Dorado' – a supposed lost city of gold located somewhere in jungles of South America. Dr. Skidmore eventually gave up her childhood dream of finding said city when she learned that archaeology and science offered far more mysteries to explore and help solve. She has taught Fantastic Archaeology three times and thinks it becomes more fun each time.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The popular culture that surrounds archaeology is filled with fantastic claims – lost tribes, continents sunk beneath the ocean floor, aliens making contact with the ancients. How do archaeologists weed through the outlandish to understand the human past? Using critical thinking skills and scientific reasoning and logic, this class will evaluate pseudo-scientific claims, hoaxes, and other spurious arguments about the human past. We will use the same skills to identify scientific controversies and distinguish these from pseudoscience. After discussing some of the most popular fantastic claims made about archaeological cultures, we will consider how such representations of archaeology impact various stakeholders in the past (e.g., the scientific community, communities descendant from the cultures that we study).

This course fulfills the Individuals, Institutions, and Cultures (Level 2) pillar; the Philosophical and Religious Inquiry and Ethics (Level 2) pillar; and Information Literacy and Oral Communication proficiencies and experiences.

Benefits to taking the class:

1. Students learn critical thinking skills in evaluating pseudoscience and misinformation. We will primarily discuss these as they relate to archaeology, but will also touch upon a other fields (e.g., diet/nutrition, medicine, zoology, human behavior). 'Baloney detection' skills developed in class can be applied widely to other disciplines, and to information we receive on an everyday basis from sources like the media or word-of-mouth.
2. Students will consider why pseudoscience is popular within American culture, and what individuals and groups stand to gain and lose by its proliferation.
3. Students will learn about world cultures of the past and participate in interactive exercises aimed at enhancing understanding of some of their greatest accomplishments.
4. In dissecting academic debates alongside fantastic claims, students will gain appreciation for the scientific process, and the difference between intriguing mysteries of the past and falsehoods and charlatanism spread to advance agendas.
5. Students will consider popular representations of archaeology for entertainment value and learn how this can jeopardize cultural resources, relationships with descendant communities of archaeological cultures, and enhanced scientific study of the past.

POLICIES

Students are expected to adhere to the SMU Code of Conduct, available at http://smu.edu/studentlife/studenthandbook/PCL_03_Conduct_Code.asp

Attendance is required and counts as part of the course grade. Emergency absences for lectures and exams will be considered on a case-by-case basis based on university policies. Students should contact the professor *before* missing class if at all possible. Arrangements to accept late work due to excused absences will be made on a case-by-case basis.

Cell phones must be switched off (unless arrangements have been made with the professor), and all laptops and other devices must have their wireless features disabled.

Attendance: Attendance is required and is necessary to succeed in this course. Students will be evaluated for punctuality, attentiveness, and participation in class activities and discussions.

Disability Accommodations: Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first contact Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS) at 214-768-1470 or <http://smu.edu/alec/dass.asp> to verify the disability and to establish eligibility for accommodations. They should then schedule an appointment with the professor to make appropriate arrangements. (See University Policy No. 2.4)

Religious Observance: Students that will miss class for religious observance of a holiday should notify the professor in writing at the beginning of the semester and at that time discuss acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)

Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities: Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity should be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor *prior* to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work. (University Undergraduate Catalogue)

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

All students are expected to come to each class meeting having read the assigned reading for the day. The assigned readings (below) will provide a structured introduction to the lecture, and students should be prepared to discuss them. The course grade will be calculated on the basis of two in-class exams, a research project and presentation, and several quizzes. Exams and student projects will serve as the basis for evaluating the student learning outcomes for the course, which are as follows:

Individuals, Institutions, and Cultures Level 2

1. Students will be able to analyze different theoretical or interpretive perspectives in the study of individuals, institutions, and cultures that shape economic, political and social experiences.

2. Students will be able to evaluate critically the research outcomes, theory, and/or theoretical applications in the study of individuals, institutions, and cultures that shape economic, political and social experiences.

Philosophical and Religious Inquiry and Ethics Level 2

1. Students will be able to identify ethical issues within a particular domain, and to explain and evaluate responses to those issues in terms of both their factual and ethical presuppositions.

Information Literacy

1. Students will be able to select and use the appropriate research methods and search tools for needed information.
2. Students will be able to evaluate sources for quality of information for a given information need.

Oral Communication

1. Students will be able to select, organize and use appropriate evidence or information to suit a specific or targeted audience.
2. Students will be able to use appropriate vocal and visual cues to deliver a presentation to a specific or targeted audience.

GRADED COMPONENTS

Quizzes (15% total, 3% each): 5 short quizzes will be given throughout the course of the semester to assess comprehension of readings and class materials, and to encourage attendance. You should expect a quiz most days that another major activity is not planned (e.g., student presentations, class activities).

Research Project (35%total, 10% annotated bibliography, 10% essay, 15% presentation): Students will research and prepare a short project on case studies of pseudoscientific claims related to archaeology. A project guides will be posted on Blackboard and discussed early in the term. Each student will prepare a written evaluation of the claim (s)he has selected and give a presentation concerning the material to the class.

Exams (50% total, 25% each): Two in-class exams will be given. The exams will cover the material presented in the readings and in lectures.

Grade Scale:

A: 93.0+

A-: 90.0-92.9

B+: 87.0-89.9

B: 83.0-86.9

B-: 80.0-82.9

C+: 77.0-79.9

C: 73.0-76.9

C-: 70.0-72.9

D+: 67.0-69.9

D: 63.0-66.9

D-: 60.0-62.9

F: Below 60.0

Note: grades will not be rounded

Late work policy: Assignments turned in late will be penalized 10% for every 24-hour period following the deadline (including weekends, holidays). Missed quizzes can only be made up with an excused absence. No late work will be accepted past the final day of term without prior approval by the instructor.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Kenneth Feder (2014) *Frauds, Myths, and Mysteries: Science and Pseudoscience in Archaeology* (Eighth Edition). McGraw-Hill Humanities.

Supplementary readings will be made available on Canvas.

DATE	LECTURE AND ACTIVITIES	READING
May 12	<i>Review of Course Policies and Introduction</i> Archaeology, Science and Pseudoscience CLASS ACTIVITY: <i>Research Day</i>	Feder Chapter 1-2 Posted Reading (recommended): Archaeology 101
May 13	Why do spectacular claims gain popular interest? 'Baloney detection' CLASS ACTIVITY: <i>'Baloney detection'</i>	Posted Reading: Sagan 1996 Shermer 1998
May 16	Old World contact with the Americas: pseudoscientific claims and scientific controversies	Feder Chapter 5-7
May 17	Archaeological hoaxes FILM: <i>The Boldest Hoax</i> Review	Feder Chapter 3-4
May 18	EXAM Atlantis FILM: <i>Atlantis Uncovered</i>	Feder Chapter 8
May 19	Aliens and the ancients CLASS ACTIVITY: <i>Creating the Nasca Lines</i>	Feder Chapter 9
May 20	The secrets of ancient Egypt	Feder Chapter 10
May 23	Biblical archaeology, Creationism, Faith and Science FILM: <i>Noah's flood in context</i>	Feder Chapter 12
May 24	Archaeology, entertainment, and ethics FILM: <i>Who owns the past?</i>	Posted Reading: Hall 2004
May 25	Epilogue: Science, Pseudoscience and archaeology Presentation of class projects	Feder Chapter 13
May 26	FINAL EXAM	