

ANTHROPOLOGY 3312:

MESO-AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

DALLAS JANUARY TERM 2020

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| Professor: | Alejandro J. Figueroa afigueroa@smu.edu |
| Course Time: | TBD |
| Course Location: | TBD |
| Office Hours: | By appointment |



Aztec warriors and prisoners in the Codex Mendoza.

Course Description

The goal of this course is to give you a broad understanding of the peoples and cultures of Precolumbian and colonial Mesoamerica, a culture area that includes the southern two-thirds of Mexico and the northern half of Central America.

We will explore the entire span of human occupation in this region, from its first settlement over 13,000 years ago to the present. We will focus in more detail on five of the most significant Pre-Columbian societies in a roughly chronological order: the great Olmec tradition of the Gulf coast, the Zapotec kingdom of the Valley of Oaxaca, the great metropolis of Teotihuacan in central Mexico, the Maya civilization in Central America and the Yucatan Peninsula, and the Aztec Empire of central Mexico. In examining these societies, we will discuss the political structure of these Pre-Columbian peoples, their worldviews and belief systems, their relationships with the environment, and their economic systems. These detailed case studies will provide a comparative sample to discuss the many similarities that these societies share, as well as some of the distinctions that separate them.

Throughout the course, we will also examine certain ancient practices and attempt to make sense of them in the context of their specific culture and worldview. For example: Why did Maya nobles pierce their tongues and genitals to draw their own blood? Why did the Aztecs perform massive human sacrifices that sometimes numbered in the thousands? What were the cultural reasons behind the practice of cannibalism? These “bizarre” practices will be addressed as scientific questions, and as we will discuss some of the various methods archaeologists use – deciphering past writing systems, interpreting art, examining indigenous landscapes, reading primary conquest accounts, and archaeological excavation. We will seek insights into the process of cultural evolution and the meaning of human difference. We will also cast a critical eye on how the Mesoamerican past is reconstructed, how it has been exoticized, and how these popular perceptions impact the indigenous people of today.

University Curriculum Requirements

This course fulfills the Historical Contexts and Individuals, Institutions and Culture Breadth Requirements, the History, Social and Behavioral Sciences Depth Requirement, as well as the Information Literacy and Human Diversity Proficiencies for the University Curriculum.

For the Individuals, Institutions, and Cultures Breadth Requirement:

- Students will identify the types of interactions and influences that arise between or among individuals, institutions, and cultures using methodologies from the social or behavioral sciences.
- Students will summarize basic empirical phenomena in the study of individuals, institutions, and cultures that shape economic, political and social experiences.

For the Historical Contexts Breadth Requirement:

- Students will contextualize, in their own prose, main events, actors, and primary sources in a defined historical period.

For the History, Social and Behavioral Sciences Depth Requirement:

- Using extensive primary and/or secondary sources students will explain, in their own prose, how and why historical changes occur in a particular time and society.

For the Information Literacy proficiency:

- Students will select and use the appropriate research methods and search tools for needed information.
- Students will evaluate sources for quality of information for a given information need.

For the Human Diversity proficiency:

- Students will demonstrate an understanding of the historical, cultural, social, or political conditions of identity formation and function in human society, including the ways in which these conditions influence individual or group status, treatment, or accomplishments.

The student learning outcomes relevant to this particular course are:

1. To define what constitutes Mesoamerica, culturally, ethnically, and geographically.
2. To identify and describe the major cultural and political developments that occurred in Mesoamerica from the Paleoindian period through the Contact period.

3. To appreciate the cultural, ethnic, and gender diversity that characterized the Pre-Columbian peoples of Mesoamerica expressed by sharing reflections verbally during discussions and on paper in exams and assignments.

These learning outcomes will form the basis for the exam, group assignments, and papers.

Textbook and Readings

There is one required textbook for this course. It should be available at the SMU bookstore or can be purchased online.

Ancient Mexico and Central America: Archaeology and Culture History, Third Edition (previous editions are ok) (2013). Susan Toby Evans. Thames and Hudson.

Canvas

This class uses Canvas. I will send class announcement alerts via Canvas to your SMU email account. ***It is your responsibility to check your SMU email account regularly to get these announcements.*** The syllabus, additional readings, and other materials will also be placed on Canvas for you. You also will be able to track your grade in the class through this system. ***You are responsible for monitoring your grades to catch any errors that may occur.***

Course Format and Grading

We will cover several major topics every day that relate to the prehistory of Mesoamerica. In order to do this, we will take full advantage of the many Mesoamerican cultural experiences Dallas has to offer, which involves taking two field trips around the city. Daily lectures will be complemented with field trips, discussion of assigned reading and films watched during class, and group projects. Readings should be completed by the start of class every day in order to facilitate understanding of the lectures and class discussions. Make sure to take notes on the assigned readings and bring written questions to class.

Grades are based on the following:

| | Pts. | % |
|-----------------------|------------|-------------|
| Class Participation | 50 | 10% |
| Group Projects | 200 | 40% |
| Short Research Papers | 150 | 30% |
| Take-Home Exam | 100 | 20% |
| Total | 500 | 100% |

Class Participation (10%):

Class participation is determined on the frequency, relevance, clarity, and creativity of contributions to in-class discussions. Students are expected to engage the course material, including lectures, readings, and films. Surfing the web, checking e-mails, texting, etc. is disruptive to your own learning and the learning of others and will not be tolerated. Cell phones should be switched to silent at the beginning of each class. Students who do not respect these rules will be asked to leave and will be marked as absent. Participating actively in the discussion also means showing an understanding of the required readings.

Group Projects (40%):

Group projects help break the class and give you hands-on experience with archaeological and cultural materials. These projects will require in-class group-based research and presentation. Groups will conduct activities related to the material assigned for that day. Group projects are designed to help you reflect upon some aspect of pre-Columbian Mesoamerican culture and/or apply some aspect of Mesoamerican archaeology to contemporary American life. Participation will be assessed through quantity and quality of individual contribution and involvement.

Research Papers (30%):

Two short papers (2-3 pages) are required for this class and will deal with the material culture associated with life in Mesoamerica. One paper will be based on an artifact/symbol you identify in one of our field trips. The second paper will ask you to discuss an aspect of past Mesoamerican cultures that is still alive today, be it social, economic, culinary, etc., as well as if and how it has changed to adapt to modern times.

Papers must be double-spaced and typed, with 12pt font and 1-inch margins. Sources (as well as direct quotes) must be acknowledged by citations in the text using typical social sciences citation conventions, as exemplified in your textbook and other readings. A list of references cited must also be supplied. Outside research and reading is required, and only legitimate scholarly resources will be accepted. In order to help you understand how to find and evaluate these sources we will perform much of the research for these papers in class using internet-based sources and the many resources available at the Fondren library. You will turn in an annotated bibliography before the paper is due so that I can evaluate your sources. All papers will be submitted through TurnItin to check for plagiarism.

Take-Home Exam (20%):

A list of questions for a Take-Home final exam will be distributed on the first day of class. You will be required to answer two (2) of these questions in a 3-page, double spaced paper (12pt font, 1-inch margins) due on the last day of class, **Wednesday, January 16**. The questions will be distributed well in advance of the due date in an effort to help guide your attention to certain aspects of the course. Concepts related to some questions may be covered more fully in class lectures and projects, while others will be discussed more thoroughly in class texts. There are no make-up exams.

Course Policies**Attendance**

Because of the intensive nature of this course, attendance to every class is mandatory and students are expected to be present for all classes and prepared to discuss topics, readings, and films. Students more than fifteen minutes late to class will be docked points from their final grade.

Excused absences will be given for the observance of religious holidays, participation in University extracurricular activities, documented cases of extreme illness, or documented personal emergencies. In cases of religious holidays and extracurricular activities, I must be provided with notification before classes begin on **January 6**.

***Religious Observance:** Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, 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)

Please be on time and respectful to your fellow students. If you miss a lecture, you are still responsible for the material that was covered, so I encourage you to obtain lecture notes from other students.

Incompletes and Withdrawals:

A grade of 'I' is given only in cases of documented emergency or special circumstances late in the semester, provided that you have been making satisfactory progress. Students are responsible for knowing the deadline for withdrawing from the course without grade penalty.

Disability Accommodations

Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS). Students can call 214-768-1470 or visit <http://www.smu.edu/Provost/ALEC/DASS> to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible, present a DASS Accommodation Letter, and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement (See University Policy No. 2.4).

University Honor Code:

In *all* work for the class you are expected to follow the SMU Honor Code. The Honor Code states, "Students and faculty members must mutually share the knowledge that any dishonest practices permitted will make it more difficult for the honest student to be evaluated and graded fairly and will damage the integrity of the whole University." If you have any questions about what that means, see:

<http://www.smu.edu/StudentAffairs/StudentLife/StudentHandbook/HonorCode>

Acts of academic dishonesty, cheating, and plagiarism will **not** be tolerated under any circumstances. Students who violate the SMU Honor Code will be subject to immediate disciplinary penalties including the submission of a Faculty Disposition form to the Honor Council, failure of the assignment, possible failure of the course, and/or dismissal from the University.

As commonly defined, plagiarism consists of passing off as one's own the ideas, words, writings etc., which belong to another (even if you have the permission of that person). If you have any

questions about how to properly use source material, especially from the web, I strongly encourage you to consult *Writing with internet sources*, produced by Harvard's Expository Writing Program or Gordon Harvey's (2008) *Writing with sources: a guide for students*:
http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic244006.files/writing_with_internet_sources.pdf
<http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic624846.files/WritingSourcesHarvard.pdf>

Suggestions for doing well in this course:

- 1) Learn *more* than what is covered in lectures and assignments.
- 2) Show a genuine enthusiasm about [at least some of] the course material.
- 3) Ask a good question in class every once in a while.
- 4) Come up after class and ask more about something that interested you.

If you are struggling in the course, talk to me ASAP. Do not wait until the end of the term for help. By then, it is too late. If you do not do as well as you would like on your assignments, come talk to me immediately so we can figure out how you can improve your performance in the course.

COURSE SCHEDULE

TX = Textbook

AR = Additional Readings available for download on blackboard and/or on reserve

Monday, January 6

Morning

- A primer on Mesoamerica: what defines it?
 - TX: Chapters 1-3 (skim pps. 47-58)

Afternoon

- Archaeology 101 – how archaeologists know what they know
- **Group Project 1: Making Space and Place**
- **Tour of SMU Anthropology Department archaeological labs and collections**

Tuesday, January 7

Morning

- The first Mesoamericans – the Preceramic period in Mesoamerica
 - TX: p. 61-70
 - AR: Scheffler et al (2012), Zeitlin and Zeitlin (2000)

Afternoon

- **Short Research papers assigned**
- **Field trip to the Dallas Museum of Art**

Wednesday, January 8

Morning

- The Olmec and Preclassic Maya: Place-Making and Sacred Objects
 - TX: Chapter 4, pp. 88-90
 - AR: Toby-Evans (2004), pp. 129-181 (it's not as many pages as you think)
- The Popol Vuh: Maya Ideology, Creation Myths, and the Ballgame
 - TX: Chapter 8
 - AR: Schele and Freidel (1992)

Afternoon

- Film: *Dawn of the Maya*
- Separating Facts from “Alternative Facts”: Visit to the SMU Fondren Library
- **Group Project 2: The Materialization of Myth**

Thursday, January 9

Morning

- The Classic Period in Mesoamerica, Part I: Political and economic achievements
 - TX: Chapters 10-11
 - TX: Chapter 4, Skim pp. 90-97, Read Chapter 7 pp. 186-192 and 196-199

Afternoon

- **Field trip to Oak Cliff**
- **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE VIA TURNITIN BEFORE 11:59PM**

Friday, January 10

Morning

- The Classic Period in Mesoamerica, Part II: Social and intellectual achievements
 - AR: Martin and Grube 1995
 - Film: *Cracking the Maya Code*
- Activity: Learning Maya Hieroglyphs
- **Group Project 3: As the Maya World Turns**

Afternoon

- The Maya Collapse in the Southern Lowlands
 - AM: Chapter 4, pp. 97-105
 - AM: Chapter 7, pp. 192-196
 - AM: Chapter 11, pp. 307-313
 - AM: Chapter 5
- Transition and Transformation in the Northern Highlands
 - AR: Aimers (2007)
- **PAPER 1 DUE AT 10 PM**

Tuesday, January 14

Morning

- Mesoamerican indigenous groups today
- **Group Project 4: Contemplating Contemporary Collapse**

Afternoon

- The Aztecs: Rise of an Empire
 - TX: Chapters 1, 2, 7
 - Film clips: *Aztecs: Engineering an Empire*
- **PAPER 2 DUE AT 10 PM**

Wednesday, January 15

Morning

- The Aztec world: Ritual, Social, and Economic dimensions
 - AR: skim Smith (2011): Chapters 3-6, 9-12
- **Group Project 5: Reading an Aztec Horoscope**

Afternoon

- Aztec Sacrifice and Cannibalism
 - AR: Smith (2010): review Chapter 1, Harris (1977), pp. 99-110, Harris (1979), pp. 333-341, Sahlins (1978)
- **Group Project 6: Cannibalism: Debating Consumption of the Other (other) White Meat**

Thursday, January 16

Morning

- The Mesoamerican Legacy – food, math, and ritual
- **Mesoamerican cuisine – a demonstration and tasting**

Afternoon

- The Encounter: Spanish and Indigenous visions of the Conquest
 - AR: *The Broken Spears*, Excerpts
 - AZ: Chapter 13, pp. 278-303
- Activity (and **EXTRA CREDIT!**): Patolli – an ancient Mesoamerican gambling game!
- **TAKE HOME FINAL DUE AT 10 PM**

Note: The syllabus and course schedule are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.