



Anthropology 380
Mesoamerican Archaeology

Instructor: Prof. Lisa Overholtzer
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Office Hours: T, 12-3pm and by appt.
Office: Leacock 529

Term: Fall 2015
Day: MW
Time: 8:35-9:55
Room: Arts 260

Course Description:

This course fosters knowledge of and appreciation for diversity in our world's cultures by introducing students to the archaeological and ethnohistoric study of ancient Mesoamerican peoples, including the Olmecs, Teotihuacanos, Toltecs, Zapotecs, Tlaxcallans, Tarascans, Aztecs, and the Maya, among others. The term begins with a culture-historical lecture overview in order to orient students in time and space. The remainder of the course emphasizes the relevance of a Mesoamerican social archaeology to today's society, focusing on such topics as gender, gender inequalities, and sexuality; household vs. state level economies, philosophies, and religious practices; ethnic identity, ethnic politics, and ethnic stereotyping and discrimination; war, conquest, imperialism and colonialism; and subordination, class disparities, and the naturalization of inequality. Weeks 5 through 13 will be dedicated to discussion of these issues, organized into three overarching themes: identity, political economy, and cosmogonies. We end with a discussion of Mesoamerican archaeology's colonialist and nationalist origins and how archaeologists today are working to decolonize the discipline.

Course goals:

This course aims to: 1) Engender knowledge of variation in ancient Mesoamerica across space (geographically), across time (diachronically), and within single cultures (synchronously); 2) Familiarize students with debates and approaches to the Mesoamerican past in archaeology; and 3) Encourage the development of evaluation, communication and research skills.

Learning outcomes:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- 1) Explain the fundamental differences between the Aztecs, Maya, Olmecs, and other ancient Mesoamerican groups.
- 2) Engage in sustained academic discussion on different approaches to the ancient Mesoamerican past.
- 3) Carry out a review of archaeological and/or ethnohistoric research on a topic and ancient Mesoamerican culture of their own choice and present it to their class colleagues.

Basis for evaluation:

Course assessments are designed to draw students in to course material, allow them to construct their own understandings, and foster the development of research, higher-order thinking, and communication skills. Over the course of the term, students will write final research papers characterizing archaeological and/or ethnohistoric research on a topic and specific ancient Mesoamerican culture of interest to them, and they will present their findings to the class at the end of the term. In this course, students will also prepare reading response papers in preparation

for critical class discussions of readings, thereby facilitating long-term retention of knowledge and the development of communication skills.

Grading:

- Active participation in class discussions (10 points)
- Reading response papers, due to MyCourses at 5 PM the night before class, weeks 5 on only (20 points)
- Culture-history exam (20 points)
- Final paper
 - Paper benchmark (10 points)
 - In-class presentation of paper (10 points)
 - Final draft of paper (30 points)

I review performance for the term when assigning grades and reserve the right to raise a final grade when on-time completion of assignments and an upward trend through the term make it clear that extra effort has been invested, or when poor performance on a single assignment is out of line with overall performance. Because of this, I do not entertain arguments over the grading of individual assignments aimed at moving a grade up marginally.

Active participation in class:

Attendance in class is mandatory. You should come to class prepared and ready to actively contribute to class discussions and activities. This is a discussion-based seminar course; the quality of the class experience depends in part on the active participation of the class learning community. You should expect to actively pose questions, make comments, and respond to other students during every single class period. I understand that life happens, people get sick, and unanticipated problems occur, so you may miss class twice without a drop in your grade. Additional absences will be reflected in your participation grade.

Reading response papers:

Beginning in the fifth week, each class meeting has assigned readings that will be discussed in class. In order to think through the readings and prepare yourself for discussion, you must write a 1-2 page (double spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, 1" margins) response to the readings. Your response should: 1) identify the core idea or argument from each reading; 2) discuss common themes or differences between the readings; 3) identify any confusing or unclear parts of the readings, or the most surprising point of the readings; 4) end with several specific or broad discussion questions that you can pose to the rest of the class. Reading response papers should be posted to the course website by midnight the evening before class. Again, because I understand that life happens, you may miss two response papers without a deduction in your grade. However, I will not accept any late reading response papers.

Culture history exam:

This exam in week 5 of the term assesses students' knowledge of the fundamental spatial and chronological frameworks used in Mesoamerican archaeology and ethnohistory studies (e.g., that the term Aztec refers to a Náhuatl speaking, ethnically Mexica group that ruled an expansive empire centered at the central Mexican capital of Tenochtitlan between 1428 and 1521). All

subsequent course readings are academic journal articles and book chapters that assume this basic understanding, so students will benefit from learning this material early in the term.

Final paper:

The final assignment for the course will be a critical review and analysis of scholarly archaeological and/or ethnohistoric approaches and findings on a specific topic and culture. This paper should be 8-10 double-spaced pages long, not including references and figures. It should be properly referenced and should cite course readings as well as a significant quantity of outside, independent library research. If the topic of most interest to you is covered in the last few weeks of class, I highly recommend doing those readings early so that you can begin to develop your final paper early in the term. In week 8, you will turn in a benchmark that briefly states the library research (topic, culture, and preliminary reference list) you intend to do for your final paper; this benchmark will allow me to provide more specific guidance and ensure that you are on the right track. You will present your findings to the class at the end of the term. Final papers will be accepted after the deadline, but 10% will be deducted for each day it is late.

Class Policies:

It is expected that students be on time, be prepared for discussion, have completed the appropriate reading, and participate actively. Cell phones should be turned to silent or turned off (not turned to vibrate) before class. Failure to meet any of these expectations will result in the lowering of the student's participation grade.

As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009, <http://www.mcgill.ca/tls/>.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

University Policy Statements:

- 1. McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).***
L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).
- 2. In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue).***

Required Texts:

Coe, Michael D. and Rex Koontz. 2013. *Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs*, 7th edition. Thames & Hudson.

Additional readings on MyCourses. Please note that you **must** also bring these additional readings to class, either in printed or digital form (only if your digital medium allows you to annotate your copy).

Course Schedule:

Please complete all readings before the dates listed.

Week	Date	Topic and Readings
1	9/4	Syllabus and Introductions, <i>Sentinels of Silence</i> short film http://vimeo.com/23712052
	9/7	NO CLASS: LABOR DAY
	9/9	What is Mesoamerica? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coe and Koontz, Ch. 1 ▪ Study the table on pp. 236 ▪ Kirchoff, 1943
2	9/14	Mesoamerica's Earliest Inhabitants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coe and Koontz, Chs. 2 and 3
	9/16	The Preclassic or Formative Period <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coe and Koontz, Chs. 4 and 5
3	9/21	The Classic Period <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coe and Koontz, Ch. 6 ▪ Webster, David. 2012. <i>The Classic Maya Collapse</i>.
	9/23	The Epiclassic and Early Postclassic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coe and Koontz, Chs. 7 and 8
4	9/28	The Late Postclassic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coe and Koontz, Chs. 9 and 10
	9/30	The Colonial Era <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coe and Koontz, Epilogue ▪ Oudijk, 2012, <i>The Conquest of Mexico</i>
5	10/5	Culture History exam

- 10/7 **Lines of evidence: Archaeology, Ethnohistory, Epigraphy**
- Smith, Michael E. 1992. Rhythms of change in Postclassic central Mexico: archaeology, ethnohistory, and the Braudelian model.
 - Overholtzer, Lisa. 2013. Archaeological Interpretation and the Rewriting of History: Deimperializing and Decolonizing the Past at Xaltocan.
- Remember: reading response papers and class discussions begin**
- 6 10/12 **NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING**
- 10/14 **Identity: Gender**
- Brumfiel, Elizabeth M. 1991. Weaving and Cooking: Women's Production in Aztec Mexico.
 - McCafferty, Sharisse D., and Geoffrey McCafferty. 1994. Engendering Tomb 7 at Monte Alban: Respinning an Old Yarn. Comments and reply optional.
- 7 10/19 **Identity: Age and the Life Course**
- Joyce, Rosemary A. 2000. Girling the girl and boying the boy: the production of adulthood in ancient Mesoamerica.
 - King, Stacie. 2006. The Marking of Age in Ancient Coastal Oaxaca.
- 10/21 **Identity: Death and Burial**
- Joyce, Rosemary A. 2001. Burying the dead at Tlatilco: social memory and social identities.
 - Beekman, Christopher S. and Luis Javier Galván Villegas. 2006. The Shaft Tombs of the Atemajac Valley and Their Relation to Settlement.
- 8 10/26 **Identity: Class and Social Status**
- Joyce, Arthur A. et al. 2001. Commoner Power: A Case Study From the Classic Period Collapse on the Oaxaca Coast.
 - Christine D. White, et al. 2004. Immigration, Assimilation, and Status in the Ancient City of Teotihuacan: Stable Isotopic Evidence from Tlajinga 33.
- 10/28 **Identity: Ethnicity and Race**
- Pollard, Helen P. 1994. Ethnicity and political control in a complex society: the Tarascan state of prehispanic Mexico.
 - Chance, John K. 2008. Indigenous Ethnicity in Colonial Central Mexico.
- Final paper benchmark due**

- 9 11/2 **Political Economy: States and Empires**
- Fargher, Lane, et al. 2011. Tlaxcallan: the archaeology of an ancient republic in the New World.
 - Blanton, Richard. 1996. The Basin of Mexico Market System and the Growth of Empire.
- 11/4 **Political Economy: Households**
- Hutson, Scott and Travis Stanton. 2007. Cultural Logic and Practical Reason: the Structure of Discard in Ancient Maya Houselots.
 - Levine, Marc. 2011. Negotiating Political Economy at Late Postclassic Tututepec (Yucu Dzaa), Oaxaca, Mexico.
- 10 11/9 **Political Economy: Food and Feasting**
- LeCount, Lisa. 2001. Like Water for Chocolate: Feasting and Political Ritual among the Late Classic Maya at Xunantunich, Belize
 - Rodríguez-Alegría, Enrique. 2005. Eating Like An Indian: Negotiating Social Relations in the Spanish Colonies.
- 11/11 **Political Economy: Obsidian and Metal Tools**
- Hirth, Kenneth G. 2009. Household, workshop, guild, and barrio: The organization of obsidian craft production in a prehispanic urban center.
 - Rodríguez-Alegría, Enrique. 2008. Narratives of conquest, colonialism, and cutting-edge technology.
- 11 11/16 **Political Economy: Market Exchange**
- Hirth, Kenneth G. 1998. The distributional approach: A new way to identify marketplace exchange in the archaeological record.
 - Halperin, Christina. 2014. Circulation as Placemaking: Late Classic Maya Politics and Portable Objects.
- 11/18 **Cosmologies: Codices**
- Klein, Cecilia F. 1982. Woven Heaven, Tangled Earth: A Weaver's Paradigm of the Mesoamerican Cosmos.
 - McCafferty, Sharisse D., and Geoffrey McCafferty. 2006. Weaving Space: Textile imagery and landscape in the Mixtec Codices.
- 12 11/23 **Cosmologies: The Calendar**
- Brumfiel, Elizabeth M. 2011. Technologies of Time: Calendrics and Commoners in Postclassic Mexico.
 - Sugiyama, Saburo. 1993. Worldview Materialized in Teotihuacan, Mexico.

- 11/25** **Cosmologies: Religious Practices**
- Manzanilla, Linda. 2002. Living with the ancestors and offering to the gods: Domestic ritual at Teotihuacan.
 - Gillespie, Susan. 2000. Maya ‘Nested Houses’: The Ritual Construction of Place”
- 13** **11/30** **Cosmologies: Sacrifice**
- Morehart, Christopher T., et al. 2012. Human Sacrifice During the Epiclassic Period in the Northern Basin of Mexico.
 - Brumfiel, Elizabeth M. 1998. Huitzilopochtli's conquest: Aztec ideology in the archaeological record.
- 12/2** **Cosmologies: The Ballgame**
- Santley, Robert S., et al. 1991. The politicization of the Mesoamerican ballgame and its implications for the interpretation of the distribution of ballcourts in central Mexico.
 - Blomster, Jeffrey P. 2012. Early evidence of the ballgame in Oaxaca, Mexico.
- 14** **12/7** **Decolonizing Mesoamerican Archaeology**
- Trigger, Bruce G. 1984. Alternative Archaeologies: Nationalist, Colonialist, Imperialist.
 - Overholtzer, Lisa. 2015. The Field Crew Symposium: A Model for Initial Implementation of a Collaborative Archaeology Project.

Final papers are due and final presentations will be given during the normally scheduled final exam time.