



**Anthropology 332
Mesoamerican Archaeology**

Prof. Lisa Overholtzer

Email: lisa.overholtzer@mcgill.ca

Office Hours: 2:30-3:30 MW & by appt.

Office hours by Zoom:

<https://mcgill.zoom.us/j/2921378674>

Term: Fall 2020

Class Day: Monday/Wednesday

Class Time: 10:05-11:25 AM

Remote delivery

Please note that this course will be delivered remotely because of covid-19. Most (but not all) course content and activities will be delivered asynchronously in order to provide maximum flexibility for students. Class introductions during the first class period will be held synchronously, but will be recorded and uploaded to myCourses. There will be five discussion sections held synchronously by Zoom, and attendance at these is mandatory. Moreover, the last class period will provide students with the ability to provide synchronous peer feedback on their final projects. Students must have regular internet access, and a webcam and a microphone for synchronous discussions and the Florentine Codex presentation assignment. If any of these present a difficulty to you, please contact me as soon as possible so that I can try to find a solution.

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, Aztecs, and the Maya, among others. The first section of the course will provide an introduction to Mesoamerican archaeology and a culture-historical overview in order to orient students in time and space (weeks 1-8). The second section of the course (weeks 9-13) will provide students with a deeper engagement with the themes commonly addressed in archaeological research today, including gender, sexuality, and the life course; states, power, and politics; exchange and political economy; bodies and ontologies; and memory, time, and Indigenous history. All course activities and assessments are designed to build the knowledge and skills needed to complete the final project: the creation of a virtual museum exhibit featuring Aztec artifacts curated at the American Museum of Natural History. This project requires the application of course content from readings and lectures and the utilization of ethnohistoric sources, so students will, over the course of the semester, demonstrate their knowledge of basic Mesoamerican culture-history, their understanding of differences in theoretical framework and methods used in archaeological research, and familiarity with and comfort engaging primary sources.

Course goals:

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

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. Apply course readings and independent library research to interpret ancient Mesoamerican artifacts and present this interpretation to the public.

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. This also includes engaging content available online—from virtual site tours and museum exhibits to colonial codices—and applying course content to create their own understandings. Students will also prepare discussion questions in preparation for critical class discussions of readings, thereby facilitating long-term retention of knowledge and the development of communication skills. Once during the term, students will also present (in groups) on passages from the Florentine Codex that are of relevance to the day's readings, thereby facilitating the development of communication skills as well as research skills that will prepare students for the final assignment. For their final project, students will create a virtual exhibit featuring a selection of Aztec artifacts curated at the American Museum of Natural History; this assignment evaluates research skills and the novel application of course material to archaeological interpretation.

Grading:

- Reading quizzes, weeks 1-8 (10 points total)
- Five virtual archaeological site and/or museum tours (10 points total)
- Five Codex Mendoza annotations (10 points total)
- Attendance and participation in five class discussions (10 points total)
- Detailed discussion questions for five weeks, due to MyCourses at midnight the night before class (10 points total)
- Florentine Codex presentation (10 points)
- Final paper (virtual museum exhibit)
 - Benchmark (10 points)
 - Final draft (30 points)

To help keep you organized and on track, each week's folder in myCourses will have a checklist of to-do items, including readings, synchronous lectures, asynchronous activities, and other deadlines. However, I also highly recommend checking the course schedule in the syllabus for each week. The syllabus is the single-most important document for the course.

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.

McGill grading scale:

| Grade | Grade point | Percentages |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|
| A | 4.0 | 85 -100 |
| A- | 3.7 | 80 - 84 |
| B+ | 3.3 | 75 - 79 |
| B | 3.0 | 70 - 74 |
| B- | 2.7 | 65 - 69 |
| C+ | 2.3 | 60 - 64 |
| C | 2.0 | 55 - 59 |
| D (Conditional Pass) | 1.0 | 50 - 54 |
| F (Fail) | 0 | 0 - 49 |

Reading quizzes:

Assigned readings and lectures in the first section of the course (weeks 1-8) provide the chronological framework needed to be able to discuss and critically evaluate journal articles in the second section of the course (weeks 9-13). In order to ensure that you are completing and understanding the readings, you will complete short reading quizzes in weeks 1-8. All reading quizzes will be due by Friday at 11:59 PM. Because I understand that especially during a pandemic, people get sick, and unanticipated problems such as internet outages occur, so you may miss one of these reading quizzes without a drop in your grade. MyCourses will automatically drop the lowest quiz grade.

Archaeological site and/or museum tours:

In weeks 3-8, in lieu of attending a lecture, you will engage archaeological content online that I have selected that pertains to the week's historical time period. You will explore the website and engage with prompts (typically annotating a photo by applying course content and/or answering questions) in a short, ~1 page response. This exercise will help prepare you for your final project. Your TA and/or I will be available by chat during our class period if you have any questions. These exercises will be due by Friday the week they are listed by 11:59 PM. You will earn two points for each exercise you successfully complete. Each week we will select several excellent examples that we will anonymize and post to myCourses to help guide you. If you are not comfortable having your essay anonymized and shared with the class, please let us know.

Active participation in class discussions:

One class meeting for five weeks of the semester will be devoted to discussion of readings. You will sign up to attend discussion on **either** Mondays or Wednesdays during our regularly scheduled class time in Weeks 9-13. Virtual attendance by Zoom is required for these five class periods. You should come to the Zoom meeting prepared and ready to actively contribute to class discussions and activities. 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 meeting. I understand that especially during a pandemic, people get sick, and unanticipated problems such as internet

outages occur, so you may miss one of these discussions without a drop in your grade. Additional absences will be reflected in your participation grade.

Discussion questions:

In order to think through the readings and prepare for Zoom discussions in Weeks 9-13, you will write a discussion question that puts at least two of the assigned readings in conversation with each other, and that provides enough context/material to demonstrate that you have done the readings. Specific quotes are often helpful ways to frame a question because they point us directly to the author's words. More successful discussion questions tend to be more macro in scale, comparing or contrasting the articles in either theory or method—that is, how and why we study the Mesoamerican past. Discussion questions should be posted to the course website 24 hours **before** class. They will be graded credit/no-credit, and you will receive 2 points for each week's questions. Each week we will select several excellent examples that we will anonymize and post to myCourses to help guide you. If you are not comfortable having your discussion questions anonymized and shared with the class, please let us know.

Codex Mendoza annotations:

In weeks 9-13, in lieu of attending a lecture, you will engage the *Codex Mendoza* to find content related to the week's theme. You should find two images, and for each, list the folio number on which it is found, and explain in a short paragraph its significance and what it tells us about Postclassic or early central Mexico. The two images and two descriptions should be about one page. You should use course readings to guide your searches of the codex and to guide your understanding of its relevance and meaning, but you may not use an image from the codex that is included as a figure in the course reading itself. This exercise will help you prepare for your final project. Your TA and/or I will be available by chat during our class period if you have any questions. You will earn two points for each annotation you successfully complete. Each week we will select several excellent examples that we will anonymize and post to myCourses to help guide you. If you are not comfortable having your annotation anonymized and shared with the class, please let us know.

A color facsimile of the original codex is available at the Bodleian library site:

<https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/inquire/p/68210492-1fd1-499e-acee-188fa1226ca1>

You also have available to you an explanation of the visual representations and alphabetic glosses present in the codex. You can search this book to find relevant content:

Essential Codex Mendoza, edited by Frances F. Berdan and Patricia R. Anawalt (1997), pdf available on myCourses and at archive.org:

https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_JQeAQZHev0IC/mode/2up

Florentine Codex presentations:

Each week, beginning in week 5, approximately 8 students will present on selected passages from the *Florentine Codex*, discussing the content and its relevance for archaeology and the day's readings, in particular. The translated and annotated Florentine Codex is available online through the library via HathiTrust (search for Florentine Codex in the library website, then click eBook). The facsimile version is also available online, should you wish to use color images, at the World Digital Library website:

<https://www.wdl.org/en/search/?q=%22florentine+codex%22&qla=en>. You will sign up for a

specific day's readings and a specific set of terms to look up in the Index, and which your presentation will cover. Your presentation should be approximately 5 minutes in length (between 4-6 minutes) and should include some relevant figures from the codex. I recommend using a Powerpoint, but do not simply read from text on slides. Students who are **not** presenting that class period do not need to read the relevant passages. However, students must watch all presentations each week, because they will help students understand the codex's content and better use the resource in their final projects.

Final paper:

The final assignment for the course will consist of a museum exhibit of a selection of five Aztec artifacts from the American Museum of Natural History, featuring both text and images. The museum exhibit should present a coherent overarching perspective on the archaeological study of the Aztecs, presented in part through an introductory text and text for each artifact. The introduction should be approximately 500 words long and include a map, historical timeline, and at least one ethnohistoric illustration from the Florentine Codex and/or other sources. Each artifact text should be approximately 250 words long and be accompanied by at least one ethnohistoric illustration. Your exhibit should be properly referenced and should cite course readings, ethnohistoric sources, and some independent library research. In week 9, you will turn in a benchmark that identifies the five artifacts, states your thematic approach to the exhibit, provides a brief statement on the interpretive potential of each artifact (that is, what it tells us about Aztec society), and gives at least one course reading, one ethnohistoric source, and one library reference that will be used to interpret the artifact. This benchmark will allow me to provide more specific guidance and ensure that you are on the right track. Final papers will be accepted after the deadline, but 10% will be deducted for each day it is late.

Class Policies:

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. Given our current pandemic circumstances, which are indeed extraordinary, it is even more likely that changes will be made to the course content and assessments at some point in the semester.

Diversity and Inclusion Statement:

Science—a human discipline that exists within our social world—is by definition subjective. Moreover, science has historically reproduced the voices of a privileged few. In preparing this course syllabus, I have attempted to assign papers from a diverse group of scholars, but real limits on this diversity exist in the academy that constrain my choices. Integrating a diverse set of perspectives makes for better archaeology, but both overt and covert biases likely still exist in the readings because of the lenses through which they were written. Please let me know if you have any suggestions regarding how to improve course materials.

In addition to course materials, I would like to promote a classroom learning environment that celebrates diversity in student perspectives and experiences, and that honors your identities,

whether based on gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, religion, or ability. I ask that you honor and respect the diversity of your fellow classmates in discussions, and that you talk to me if something said in class (by anyone) was hurtful in this regard. I also ask that if you have a name and/or set of pronouns that differ from those listed in your McGill records, that you please let me know.

Policy on Children in Class:

Before the pandemic, I included on every syllabus my own policy that reflected my beliefs and commitments to student parents. It acknowledged that unforeseen disruptions in childcare often put parents in the position of either missing class or bringing the child to the classroom. Covid-19 has made childcare disruptions more frequent and online learning more routine for elementary and secondary students, and it has erased the divide between home and school, home and work. I fully expect that children—yours or mine—may be last minute adds as participants for synchronous Zoom sessions at some point in the semester, and I am sure we will all do our best in that situation.

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. 2019. *Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs*, 8th edition. Thames & Hudson. You must have the 8th edition, not an earlier one. This is an inexpensive and easy to read book. It is available in paperback through amazon.ca (search for the ISBN: 978-0500841785), and online as an eBook from the publisher:

<https://www.vitalsource.com/en-ca/products/mexico-from-the-olmecs-to-the-aztecs-eighth-michael-d-coe-javier-urcid-v9780500842829>

Additional readings are available on MyCourses. Please note that you **must** have your readings and reading notes in front of you, either in printed or digital form, for class discussions.

Course Schedule:

All lectures will be recorded and posted to myCourses. Asynchronous activities may of course be completed at any time during the week, but I will be available by chat during the class period listed for students who have questions. Only the first class, the five discussion periods, and the final class period will be held synchronously, during our normally scheduled class period.

| Week | Date | Topic and Readings |
|------|------|--|
| 1 | 9/2 | Course introduction and syllabus overview, synchronous via Zoom, and recorded and uploaded to myCourses <i>Sentinels of Silence</i> short film live discussion http://vimeo.com/23712052 |
| | 9/7 | LABOR DAY- NO CLASS |
| 1 | 9/9 | Filmed lecture: What is Mesoamerica? Readings and reading quiz: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Coe and Koontz, Ch. 1 (Introduction)▪ Study the chronological table on p. 260▪ Kirchoff, 1943 |
| 2 | 9/14 | Filmed lecture: Decolonizing Mesoamerican Archaeology Readings and reading quiz: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Trigger, Bruce G. 1984. <i>Alternative Archaeologies: Nationalist, Colonialist, Imperialist.</i>▪ Overholtzer, Lisa and Juan R. Argueta. 2018. <i>Letting skeletons out of the closet: the ethics of displaying ancient Mexican human remains.</i> |
| 2 | 9/16 | Filmed lecture: Mesoamerica's Earliest Inhabitants Readings and reading quiz: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Coe and Koontz, Chs. 2 and 3 (Early Hunters and the Archaic) SIGN UP FOR FLORENTINE CODEX PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSION GROUPS BY THE END OF THE WEEK (FRIDAY). |
| 3 | 9/21 | Filmed lecture: The Preclassic or Formative Period Readings and reading quiz: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Coe and Koontz, Chs. 4 and 5 (The Formative Period) |
| 3 | 9/23 | Asynchronous virtual site/museum visit activity Readings and reading quiz: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Carballo, David. 2012. <i>Public Ritual and Urbanization in Central Mexico: Temple and Plaza Offerings from La Laguna, Tlaxcala.</i>▪ Joyce, Rosemary A. 2000. <i>Girling the girl and boying the boy: the production of adulthood in ancient Mesoamerica.</i> |

- 4 9/28 **Filmed lecture: The Classic Period**
 Readings and reading quiz:
 - Coe and Koontz, Ch. 6 (The Classic Period)
 - Webster, David. 2012. The Classic Maya Collapse
- 4 9/30 Asynchronous virtual site/museum visit activity
 Readings and reading quiz:
 - Hutson, Scott and Travis Stanton. 2007. Cultural Logic and Practical Reason: the Structure of Discard in Ancient Maya Houselots.
 - Christine D. White, et al. 2004. Immigration, Assimilation, and Status in the Ancient City of Teotihuacan: Stable Isotopic Evidence from Tlajinga 33.
- 5 10/5 **Filmed lecture: The Epiclassic and Early-Middle Postclassic**
 Readings and reading quiz:
 - Coe and Koontz, Chs. 7 and 8 (The Epiclassic and the Toltec State)
 Florentine Codex presentations
- 5 10/7 Asynchronous virtual site/museum visit activity
 Readings and reading quiz:
 - Morehart, Christopher T. 2017. Ritual Time: The Struggle to Pinpoint the Temporality of Ritual Practice Using Archaeobotanical Data.
 - Overholtzer, Lisa and Kristin De Lucia. 2016. A multiscalar approach to migration and social change at Middle Postclassic Xaltocan.
 Florentine Codex presentations
- 6 Oct 12- THANKSGIVING- NO CLASS
- 6 Oct 14 **Filmed lecture: The Late Postclassic**
 Readings and reading quiz:
 - Coe and Koontz, Chs. 9 and 10 (The Postclassic: Rival States and the Aztecs)
 Florentine Codex presentations
- 7 Oct 19 Asynchronous virtual site/museum visit activity
 Readings and reading quiz:
 - Brumfiel, Elizabeth M. 1991. Weaving and Cooking: Women's Production in Aztec Mexico.
 - Pastrana, Alejandro and Ivonne Athie. 2014. The Symbolism of Obsidian in Postclassic Central Mexico.
 Florentine Codex presentations

- 7 Oct 21 **Filmed lecture: The Colonial Era**
 Readings and reading quiz:
 - Coe and Koontz, Epilogue
 - Gasco, Janine. 2005. Spanish Colonialism and Processes of Social Change in Mesoamerica.
 Florentine Codex presentations
- 8 Oct 26 Asynchronous virtual site/museum visit activity
 Readings and reading quiz:
 - Oland, Maxine. 2017. The Olive Jar in the Shrine. Situating Spanish Objects within a 15th- to 17th-Century Maya Worldview.
 - Forde, Jamie. 2017. Volcanic Glass and Iron Nails: Networks of Exchange and Material Entanglements at Late Prehispanic and Early Colonial Achiutla, Oaxaca, Mexico.
 Florentine Codex presentations
- 8 Oct 28 **Filmed lecture: Lines of evidence—Archaeology & Ethnohistory**
 Readings and reading quiz:
 - Oudijk, Michel R. and Matthew Restall. 2007. Mesoamerican Conquistadors in the Sixteenth Century.
 - Overholtzer, Lisa. 2013. Archaeological Interpretation and the Rewriting of History: Deimperializing and Decolonizing the Past at Xaltocan.
 Florentine Codex presentations

NOTE: Weeks 9-13 will consist of synchronous discussion sessions during regularly scheduled class time, either Monday or Wednesday, based on your enrollment. You must complete the asynchronous Codex Mendoza activity by Friday at 11:59 pm, though I recommend completing it during the other regularly scheduled class period, when I will be available by chat to assist.

- 9 Nov 2 and 4 **Synchronous discussion section** and Asynchronous Codex Mendoza activity. FINAL PROJECT BENCHMARKS DUE.
Theme: Gender, Sexuality, and the Life Course
 - Robin, Cynthia. 2006. Gender, Farming, and Long-Term Change: Maya Historical and Archaeological Perspectives. **Comments and reply optional.**
 - McCafferty, Sharisse D., and Geoffrey McCafferty. 1994. Engendering Tomb 7 at Monte Alban: Respinning an Old Yarn. **Comments and reply optional.**
 - King, Stacie. 2006. The Marking of Age in Ancient Coastal Oaxaca.
 - Ardren, Traci and David Hixson. 2006. The Unusual Sculptures of Telantunich, Yucatán: Phalli and the Concept of Masculinity among the Ancient Maya.
 Watch Florentine Codex presentations

- 10 Nov 9 and 11 **Synchronous discussion section** and Asynchronous Codex Mendoza activity
Theme: States, Power, and Politics
- LeCount, Lisa. 2001. Like Water for Chocolate: Feasting and Political Ritual among the Late Classic Maya at Xunantunich, Belize.
 - Joyce, Arthur A. et al. 2001. Commoner Power: A Case Study From the Classic Period Collapse on the Oaxaca Coast.
 - Fargher, Lane, et al. 2011. Tlaxcallan: the archaeology of an ancient republic in the New World.
 - Pezzarossi, Guido. 2015. Tribute, Antimarkets, and Consumption: An Archaeology of Capitalist Effects in Colonial Guatemala.
- Watch Florentine Codex presentations
- 11 Nov 16 and 18 **Synchronous discussion section** and Asynchronous Codex Mendoza activity
Theme: Exchange and Political Economy
- Millhauser, John, Lane Fargher, Verenice Heredia-Espinoza, and Richard E. Blanton. 2015. The geopolitics of obsidian supply in Postclassic Tlaxcallan: A portable X-ray fluorescence study.
 - Garraty, Christopher. 2013. Market Development and Pottery Exchange Under Aztec and Spanish Rule in Cerro Portezuelo.
 - Levine, Marc. 2011. Negotiating Political Economy at Late Postclassic Tututepec (Yucu Dzaa), Oaxaca, Mexico.
 - Halperin, Christina. 2014. Circulation as Placemaking: Late Classic Maya Politics and Portable Objects.
- Watch Florentine Codex presentations
- 12 Nov 23 and 25 **Synchronous discussion section** and Asynchronous Codex Mendoza activity
Theme: Bodies and Ontologies
- Houston, Stephen and Karl Taube. 2000. An Archaeology of the Senses: Perception and Cultural Expression in Ancient Mesoamerica.
 - Geller, Pamela L. 2014. Sedimenting Social Identity: The Practice of Pre-Columbian Maya Body Partibility.
 - Hendon, Julia. 2017. Can Tools Have Souls? Maya Views on the Relations between Human and Other-than-Human Persons.
 - Walton, David. 2020. Bloodletting in Ancient Central Mexico: Using Lithic Analyses to Detect Changes in Ritual Practices and Local Ontologies
- Watch Florentine Codex presentations

- 13 Nov 30 and Dec 2 **Synchronous discussion section** and Asynchronous Codex Mendoza activity
Theme: Memory, Time, and Indigenous History
- Navarrete, Federico. 2000. The path from Aztlan to Mexico: on visual narration in Mesoamerican codices.
 - Diel, Lori Boornazian. 2005. Women and political power: The inclusion and exclusion of noblewomen in Aztec political histories.
 - Overholtzer, Lisa and Deborah Bolnick. 2017. The Archaeology of Commoner Social Memories and Legitimizing Histories.
 - Brumfiel, Elizabeth M. 2011. Technologies of Time: Calendrics and Commoners in Postclassic Mexico.
- Watch Florentine Codex presentations
- * Dec 3 (Make-up for holiday in earlier week of the semester)
Peer feedback on final project. We will do this synchronously, placing pairs of students in Zoom break-out rooms.

Final projects will be due to myCourses my 11:59 pm on December 10.