

ANTHROPOLOGY 3312:
MESO-AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY
SMU - DALLAS JAN TERM 2022

Professor: Dawn M. Crawford | dcrawford@smu.edu
Course Time: M,T,W,Th,F 9am-12pm, 1pm-4pm
Course Location: Heroy Hall 0129
Office Location: Heroy Hall 307 and Zoom
Office Hours: By appointment



Mural of Noble Woman and Maya Commoner from Calakmul, Campeche, Mexico

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 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

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

Additional reading will be available on Canvas.

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 one field trip around the city. Daily lectures will be complemented with discussion of assigned reading and films watched during class, and group projects. Readings should be completed by the start of class every day 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.	%
Attendance & Professionalism	50	10%
Group Projects	150	30%
Short Research Paper	150	30%
Take-Home Exam	150	30%
Total	500	100%

Attendance and Professionalism:

Due to the short nature of Jan Term courses, attendance is mandatory unless an excused absence is provided. If you are ill with a contagious illness (i.e., Covid-19, Strep Throat, Flu, etc.) you will need to contact the health center ASAP for a test and attend lecture via Zoom until you have been cleared. **Masks are required** when inside the classroom, breaks will be provided but if you are asked to put on a mask and/or properly wear your mask (completely covering your nose and mouth) multiple times then you will receive a 0 for Attendance and Professionalism. 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 and be put away. Students who do not respect these rules will be asked to leave and will be marked as absent. These rules apply to field trip settings as well as the classroom.

Group Projects (30%):

Group projects help break up 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%):

One research paper (minimum of 4 pages double spaced) is required for this class and will deal with the material culture associated with life in Mesoamerica.

The DMA Research paper will be based on an artifact you identify on our field trip to the Dallas Museum of Art. If for any reason we are unable to attend this field trip, an alternative assignment will be provided.

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. Specific requirements for the paper will be provided in the prompt on Canvas. All papers will be submitted through TurnItin via Canvas to check for plagiarism. Plagiarism will be taken seriously and reported if it occurs.

Take-Home Exam (30%):

A list of questions for a Take-Home final exam will be distributed at the end of the first week of class. You will be required to answer three (3) of these questions in a 3-5page, double spaced paper (12pt font, 1-inch margins) due on the last day of class, **by 5:00pm on Thursday, January 13**. You will have the entire class period (morning and afternoon) on the 13th to work on this exam on your own. You may use your notes and readings. 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. If you are ill due to a contagious illness (i.e., Covid-19, flu, strep throat, etc.) then you need to contact the Health Center for testing and treatment, notify me immediately, and attend class via zoom until you are cleared to return to in-person classes.

Excused absences will be given for the observance of religious holidays, participation in University extracurricular activities, documented cases of extreme illness (attend via Zoom if possible), or documented personal emergencies. In cases of religious holidays and extracurricular activities, I must be provided with notification before classes begin on **January 3**.

***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 occasionally.
- 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.

Mask Policy and Covid-19

Masks are required at all times when in the classroom and must be worn properly (covering both your nose and mouth completely). You will receive one warning to put on a mask and/or properly wear your mask, after that you will receive deductions to your Attendance and Professionalism grade. If you are asked more than 3 times to fix your mask or put on a mask during a single day, you will be asked to leave the room.

If cases of Covid-19 increase on campus and/or within this class, then we will move to online instruction via zoom and Canvas. If you have been exposed to Covid-19 or you are experiencing symptoms please get tested IMMEDIATELY and attend class via zoom until you are cleared to return to the classroom.

COURSE SCHEDULE

TB = Textbook AR = Additional Readings (available on Canvas)
AZ = *The Aztecs* (Canvas) * = Optional

Monday, January 3 – Class 1 Morning

- Archaeology 101 – How archaeologists know what they know
 - Read AR: Miner (1956)
 - Read AR: Rathje (1991)
- **Group Project 1: Office archaeology**
- A primer on Mesoamerica: what defines it?
 - TB: Chapter 1 (skim)

Monday, January 3 – Class 1 Afternoon

- Setting the stage: the climates and environments of Mesoamerica and the Southwest
 - AR: *Colinvaux (1997), *Douglas et al (2015)
- **Group Project 2: Making Space and Place**
- The first Mesoamericans – the Preceramic period in Mesoamerica
 - TB: Chapter 2, pp. 61-70
 - AR: Scheffler et al (2012) skim, *Zeitlin and Zeitlin (2000)

Tuesday, January 4 – Class 2 Morning

- Settling down and spreading out – the first villages
 - AR: Stark (1981) (Skim)
- **Group Project 3: Domestication in Mesoamerica**
- The Olmec and Preclassic Maya: Place-Making and Sacred Objects
 - TB: Chapter 4, pp. 88-90
 - TB: Chapter 7 pp. 189-193 and 196-199

Tuesday, January 4 – Class 2 Afternoon

- Introduction to the Popol Vuh: Maya Ideology, Creation Myths, and the ballgame
 - Film: *Popol Vuh* and other Mesoamerican creation stories (link available on Canvas)
 - TB: Chapter 8, pp. 209-223
- The Popol Vuh: Maya Ideology, Creation Myths, and the Ballgame
 - TB: Chapter 8, pp. 223-238
 - AR: *Freidel and Schele (1988)
- Overview of creation stories in Mesoamerica

Wednesday, January 5 – Class 3 Morning

- The Preclassic Maya continued
- Film: *Dawn of the Maya*
- **Group Project 4: The Materialization of Myth**
- The first states in Mesoamerica: The Zapotecs
 - AR: Zeitlin and Joyce (1999)

Wednesday, January 5 – Class 3 Afternoon

- Living big – Teotihuacan and the rise of the urban center in Mesoamerica
 - TB: Chapter 10, read pp.267-287, skim pp. 287-296.
 - AR: Houston et al. 2021
- **Group Project 5: City life in Mesoamerica**
- The Classic Period in Mesoamerica and beyond Part I: Political and economic achievements
 - TB: Chapter 11

Thursday, January 6 – Class 4 Morning

- The Classic Period in Mesoamerica and beyond Part II: Social and intellectual achievements
 - AR: *Martin and Grube (1995)
 - TB: Chapter 12, read pp. 327-334, 336-354, skim pp. 354-358.
 - Film: *Cracking the Maya Code*
- Activity: Learning Maya Hieroglyphs
- **Group Project 6: As the Maya World Turns (Perform on Tuesday Morning)**

Thursday, January 6 – Class 4 Afternoon

- The Maya Collapse in the Southern Lowlands
- TB: Chapter 14, pp. 387-394.
- The Maya Collapse in the Southern Lowlands – beyond collapse
 - TB: Chapter 14, pp. 394-408.
 - AR: McAnany and Gallareta Negrón (2010)
- **Group Project 7: Contemplating Contemporary Collapse**

Friday, January 7 – Class 5 Morning

- Transition and Transformation in the Northern Highlands
 - AR: *Aimers (2007)
- The Aztecs: Rise of an Empire
 - TB: Chapter 19 (Skim)
 - AZ: Chapter 1, pp. 3-5
 - AZ: Chapter 7 (skim)
 - Film: *Aztecs: Engineering an Empire*

Friday, January 7 – Class 5 Afternoon

- **Field trip to the Dallas Museum of Art**
 - Gather data for Paper
- **DMA Paper due by 11:59pm on Tuesday, January 11th**

Monday, January 10 – Reading Day

Catch up on all readings, work on DMA paper, prepare for Project #6 performance on Tuesday

Tuesday, January 11 – Class 6 Morning

- **Perform Group Project #6: As the Maya World Turns**
- Aztec Intellectual Achievements, Religion, and Ritual
 - AZ: Chapters 11 & 12 (skim)
- Aztec Social and Economic Organization

- AZ: Chapters 3, 5, 6 (skim all 3)

Tuesday, January 11 – Class 6 Afternoon

- Aztec Sacrifice and Cannibalism
 - AZ: Chapters 9 & 10 (skim)
- AR: Harris (1977), pp. 99-110, Harris (1979), pp. 333-341, Sahlins (1978) (articles for the debate)
- **Group Project 8: Cannibalism: Debating Consumption of the Other (other) White Meat**
- **DMA Research Paper due by 11:59pm Jan 11th**

Wednesday, January 12 – Class 7 Morning

- The Encounter: Spanish and Indigenous visions of the Conquest
 - AR: *The Broken Spears*, Excerpts
 - AZ: Chapter 13, pp. 278-303

Group Project 9: The Price of Colonialism

- Mesoamericans today – remnants of a “collapse”?
 - Film: *The Art of Maya Weaving*

Wednesday, January 12 – Class 7 Afternoon

- The Mesoamerican Legacy – food, math, and ritual
- Mesoamerica today
 - TB: Chapter 12, read pp. 335
- **Group Project 10: Lasting Legacies of Mesoamerican Cultures**
- Activity (and **EXTRA CREDIT!**): Patolli – an ancient Mesoamerican gambling game!
- The Culinary legacy of Mesoamerica – a demonstration and food tasting
- Review for final if needed

Thursday, January 13 – Class 8 (Take Home Exam)

- **TAKE HOME FINAL DUE BY 5 PM ON CANVAS**

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