

ANTHROPOLOGY 140g – MESOAMERICAN COSMOVISION AND CULTURE
THH 202, M/W 8:30-9:50

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Course Description

Anthropology 140g provides a general introduction to the ancient civilizations of Mesoamerica and the ways in which they are studied. The emphasis in the course is on understanding how different societies manifested a core set of beliefs shared by all Mesoamerican civilizations while at the same time maintaining local cultural identities. The course addresses changes in Mesoamerica both spatially and temporally from the Archaic Period through the Spanish Conquest. Throughout the course there will be a general emphasis on broad themes such as religion, identity, and political organization and how these themes are detected and presented by scholars of Mesoamerican civilizations.

Recommended Preparation

An introductory archaeology course would be helpful, but is not required.



The aims of this course are threefold:

- 1) To introduce you to the major cultures and time periods of Mesoamerica.
- 2) To help you critically examine the different ways in which scholars interpret the past.
- 3) To encourage you to think openly about Mesoamerican civilizations and to create your own arguments about the past. This last aim is a critical component of the course and there will be many opportunities to demonstrate this ability.

Introduction, Objectives, and Outcomes

Mesoamerica is one of the great culture areas of the ancient and modern world. Almost all of you have probably heard of the *Maya* and the *Aztecs*, but what about the *Olmec*, *Zapotec*, *Totonac*, *Chichimec*, and *Toltecs*? All of these ancient civilizations share a broad worldview with a core set of beliefs, an idea embodied in Mesoamerican studies by the concept of *cosmovision*. While these ancient civilizations and their modern descendants shared an ideology, the way each culture manifested these concepts was distinct in both time and space. This course will track the Mesoamerican cosmovision through an analysis of the archaeological record and other relevant sources of information. We will see that there are disagreements, both large and small, amongst those who study the Mesoamerican world.

This course meets the requirements for one of your core literacies in Social Analysis because it introduces you to a variety of social science approaches that are used to study Mesoamerican civilizations. You will learn to assess archaeological, anthropological, and ethnohistoric data so that you may determine what you feel is the best approach to studying ancient cultures. In addition to the methodological aspects of the course, you will also have a firm grounding in the historical particulars of ancient Mesoamerica as played out among the rises and falls of various cultures, culminating with the Spanish Conquest.

In order to achieve the course aims, it will be taught in a diverse manner. Lectures will provide the backbone of the class and will complement, but not substitute for, the assigned reading. The required texts for the class provide important introductions to the major civilizations as well as to major themes and approaches. Articles are assigned to fill in gaps not covered in the texts. Staying on top of the reading will be critical to succeeding in this course. You will also have weekly discussion sections led by your TA. These periods will be used in a variety of ways. Sometimes you will debate major topics in Mesoamerican archaeology. Other times you will participate in exercises that will show firsthand how scholars study and interpret Mesoamerican civilizations. Discussion sections will also be used to watch documentaries, as well as for exam review.

By the end of the course you should be able to:

- Identify the civilizations of Mesoamerica and the major time periods.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the Mesoamerican cosmovision and its hard nucleus.
- Distinguish between different approaches to studying Mesoamerica.
- Create an original thesis statement regarding Mesoamerica and defend it with relevant supporting material.
- Appreciate the simultaneously interrelatedness and uniqueness of the different Mesoamerican civilizations.

Course Requirements

Attendance in weekly lectures is mandatory for all students. Repeated absences will negatively affect your grade. Your out of class workload is about 75-150 pages of reading per week plus the time you need to spend on assignments and exam and quiz preparation. Reading for each class is to be done prior to the lecture. There will be one quiz, one short writing assignment, a research paper, and two exams that will be used to determine your grade in the course.

Statement on Late Assignments and Course Workload

The writing assignments will be turned in online using Blackboard (via the TurnItIn system), and will be due in by 11:59pm PST on the assigned due date. Assignments handed in one day late will lose 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g. B+ becomes B). Each additional day late will result in the loss of a full letter grade.

The best way to reach me is through email (seligson@usc.edu). I will try to respond to your email within 24 hours.

Description of Assignments

A quiz on the geography and archaeological chronology of Mesoamerica will be given early on. There will be one short writing assignment (4-6 pgs.) in which you will answer a set question on the archaeology of Mesoamerica. You will be required to write a longer research paper (10-12 pgs.) at the end of the semester. I encourage you to send a prospectus for your research paper to either myself or your TA for review prior to Thanksgiving break. There will be both a midterm and final examination. The final will be cumulative, but will have a heavier emphasis on the second half of the semester. Discussion section participation will also contribute to your final grade.

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	% of Grade	Due Date
Section Grade	10%	Ongoing
Map Quiz	5%	Sept. 6
Short paper	15%	Oct. 2
Midterm Exam	20%	Oct. 18
Research Paper	25%	Dec. 5
Final Exam	25%	Dec. 6

Required Readings

There are three books required for this course. All books are in stock in the USC Bookstore. Supplementary or recommended readings will be posted to the course website.

(CAR) Carrasco, David 2013 *Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmivision and Ceremonial Centers*, second edition. Waveland Press, Prospect Heights, Illinois.

(C&H) Coe, Michael D., and Stephen Houston 2015 *The Maya*, ninth edition. Thames and Hudson, New York.

(EVA) Evans, Susan Toby 2013 *Ancient Mexico and Central America*, third edition. W.W. Norton and Company, New York, New York

Week 1: Introduction to Mesoamerica and CosmovisionMonday, August 21*Lecture:* What is Mesoamerica?*Reading:* Kirchhoff 1952Wednesday, August 23*Lecture:* Cosmovision and The Hard Nucleus*Reading:* CAR pp. 1-74; Lopez Austin 2001*(cosmovision);* Pope et al. 2001**Week 2: Cosmovision and the Early Olmec**Monday, Aug. 28*Lecture:* Cosmovision and Early Mesoamerica*Readings:* EVA Chapter 4*Optional:* González 2016Wednesday, Aug. 30*Lecture:* Early and Middle Formative Olmec, Mesoamerica*Readings:* EVA Chapters 5 and 6*Optional:* Cyphers and Murtha 2017**Week 3: The Late Formative Olmec**Monday, Sep. 4

No Class (Labor Day)

Wednesday, Sep. 6**QUIZ: MAP OF MESOAMERICA***Lecture:* The Late Formative Olmec*Readings:* Pool 2000; EVA pp. 203-205**Week 4: The Zapotec and the Direct Historical Approach**Monday, Sep. 11*Lecture:* Early Oaxaca*Readings:* EVA pp. 149-153; Feinman 2001Wednesday, Sep. 13*Lecture:* Monte Alban and the Zapotec Florescence*Readings:* EVA pp. 189-201; Winter 2001**Week 5: Preclassic Maya**Monday, Sep. 18*Lecture:* The Earliest Maya*Readings:* C&H:7-73, Saturno et al. 2006Wednesday, Sept. 20*Lecture:* The Late Preclassic Maya*Readings:* C&H:73-91; EVA pp. 231-244**Week 6: Teotihuacan and the Maya**Monday, Sep. 25*Lecture:* The Basin of Mexico and Teotihuacan*Readings:* Manzanilla 2001; EVA pp. 267-287; Clayton 2013Wednesday, Sep. 27*Lecture:* The Early Classic Maya and Teotihuacan*Readings:* Stuart 2000; Fash & Fash 2000**Week 7: The Classic Maya**Monday, Oct. 2**SHORT PAPER DUE IN CLASS***Lecture:* Maya Religion and Culture*Readings:* CAR chap. 4; C&H pp. 242-263Wednesday, Oct. 4*Lecture:* The Late Classic Maya and the "Collapse"*Readings:* C&H pp. 124-177; Demarest et al. 2004**Week 8: The Postclassic Maya**Monday, Oct. 9*Documentary:* Quest for the Lost Maya*Readings:* Seligson et al. 2017Wednesday, Oct. 11*Lecture:* The Maya in the Postclassic Period*Readings:* Masson et al. 2006; C&H chap. 7

Week 9: Midterm WeekMonday, Oct. 16*Exercise:* Maya Writing and Politics and Midterm Exam Review*Reading:* C&H pp. 263-278Wednesday, Oct. 18**MIDTERM EXAM****Week 10: The Epiclassic Period, the Toltecs, and the Chichimecs**Monday, Oct. 23*Lecture:* The Epiclassic Period and the Great Tollans*Readings:* EVA Chapter 15; Bruggemann 2001Wednesday, Oct. 25*Lecture:* The Rise of the Aztecs*Readings:* EVA chap. 17**Week 11: Aztec Civilization**Monday, Oct. 30*Lecture:* Aztec Civilization*Readings:* EVA pp. 447-456, chap. 19; Berdan 2008Wednesday, Nov. 1*Lecture:* Aztec Religion*Readings:* CAR chap. 3**Week 12: The Spanish Conquest**Monday, Nov. 6*Lecture:* The Conquest according to the Spanish and the Aztecs, Part I*Readings:* Leon-Portilla; Leon-Portilla 2; Diaz del CastilloWednesday, Nov. 8*Lecture:* The Conquest according to the Spanish and the Aztecs, Part II*Readings:* EVA pp. 539-555**Week 13: The Colonial Period**Monday, Nov. 13*Lecture:* Colonial New Spain*Readings:* EVA pp. 555-562; Burkhart 1989Wednesday, Nov. 14*Lecture:* The Conquest of the Maya and the Colonial Experience*Readings:* C&H pp. 227-229; Stuart 2001**Week 14: The Modern Era**Monday, Nov. 20*Lecture:* Mexican Wars and Pre-Columbian Themes*Readings:* Chance 2001; Nicholson 2001**RESEARCH PAPER PROSPECTUS DUE**Wednesday, Nov. 22 – Thanksgiving Recess**Week 15: The Enduring Cosmivision**Monday, Nov. 27*Lecture:* The Enduring Maya*Readings:* CAR chap. 5; C&H chap. 10Wednesday, Nov. 29*Documentary:* Of Gods and Kings*Readings:* Taube 2013December 2-5**Study Days**Tuesday, December 5**RESEARCH PAPER DUE, 5:00 PM**Wednesday, December 6**FINAL EXAM, 8:00-10:00 AM**

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me or your TA as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776. The website is: <https://dsp.usc.edu>

Statement on Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General Principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, The Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A:

<https://policy.usc.edu/files/2016/10/SCampus-2016-2017.pdf>

Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/scampus/>

Information on intellectual property at USC is available at:

https://policy.usc.edu/files/2014/02/intellectual_property.pdf

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in Crisis

In case of emergency, when travel to campus is difficult, if not impossible, USC executive leadership will announce a digital way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of the Blackboard LMS (Learning Management System), teleconferencing, and other technologies. Instructors should be prepared to assign students a "Plan B" project that can be completed 'at a distance.' For additional information about maintaining your classes in an emergency, please access:

<http://cst.usc.edu/services/emergencyprep.html>