

**ANTHROPOLOGY 314g – THE NATURE OF MAYA CIVILIZATION**  
GFS 106, T/TH 12:30-1:50

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### Course Description

This course provides an in depth examination of the Maya civilization from its shadowy beginnings in the 2nd millennium BC to current struggles faced by modern Maya peoples living in Latin American nation-states. A particular emphasis will be placed on the Maya of the Classic Period (AD 250-1000) including their own histories, which were recorded in elaborate glyphic texts. This course should make plain some of the mystery surrounding the Maya who have been the subject of much erroneous speculation in recent years.

### Recommended Preparation

An introductory course in archaeology (ANTH 202) or the cultures of Mesoamerica is recommended prior to taking this class, but not required.

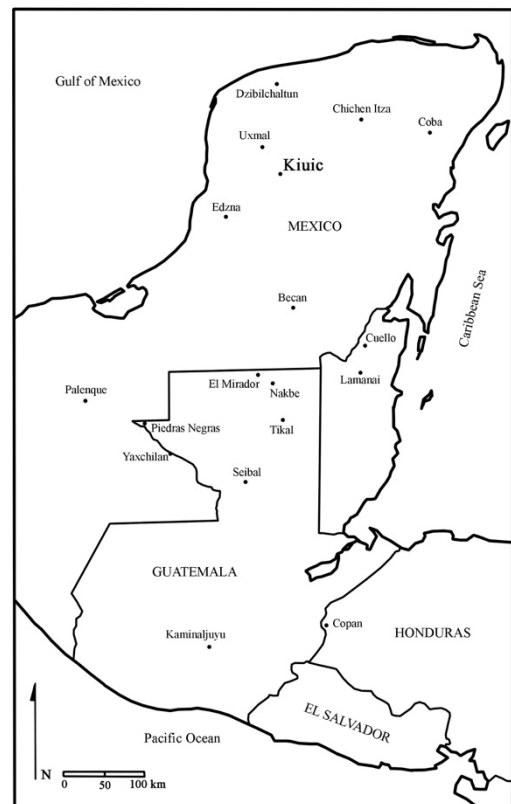
### Course Aims and Objectives

The aims of this course are threefold:

- 1) To introduce you to Maya civilization and dispel modern misconceptions about the ancient Maya.
- 2) To take an in depth look at the history of Classic Period (AD 250-1000) Maya city-states by considering historical events found in ancient glyphic texts.
- 3) To help you learn how to make critical arguments about Maya civilization (and ancient civilizations more broadly) through the use of reliable source material.

By the end of the course you should:

- Have a basic understanding of Maya culture and history.
- Be able to identify reliable accounts of Maya culture in popular media.
- Have strong research and writing skills relating to Maya archaeology.
- Have the prerequisite knowledge to participate in fieldwork in the Maya world.



**Introduction**

The Maya have fascinated the public and scholarly communities ever since they were revealed in mainstream publications in the 1840s. As one of the few major ancient civilizations to have emerged in a tropical jungle setting, they are often labeled as “mysterious” or “enigmatic.” In the last decade the Maya have been in the public consciousness even more than ever as the so-called “December 21, 2012 Maya Apocalypse” came and went. This doomsday prophecy is just one of a number of false claims attributed to the beliefs of the Maya people that are entrenched in the popular perception of this brilliant civilization. This course seeks to present the true nature of Maya civilization as it is understood from the archaeological record and the ancient texts of the Maya themselves. The ancient Maya obtained some of the greatest achievements of the cultures of the New World and many of their beliefs survive in modified forms among their modern descendants who live throughout southern Mexico and Central America.

This course meets the requirement for the core literacy in Social Analysis because it teaches an interdisciplinary social science approach to the study of a specific human society. You will learn about the multivariate data sets that Mayanists use to achieve the most holistic interpretation of the Classic Maya people. Along the way, we will see how both individual and collective action altered the trajectory of ancient social, political, and economic institutions.

In order to achieve the aims and objectives of the course, you will be expected to attend weekly lectures on Maya culture and history. I have been conducting archaeological fieldwork in the Maya lowlands for nearly a decade and will share some of my personal experiences to try to make the subject more interesting and relevant. We will also have a limited number of class activities and television specials in order to engage you more closely with the material. The Maya are an extremely complex culture about whom hundreds of books and articles have been written. We will only scratch the surface of this complexity during this course, so keeping on top of the reading will be critical to your ability to stay on pace with the lectures. You will also be required to do a number of short writing assignments, each with an increasing amount of required external research.

**Description of Assignments**

Your final grade will be calculated based on attendance, a midterm, three writing assignments, a final, and section quizzes and presentations. The first paper will be 5-6 pages and will cover either the influences of other civilizations on the early Maya, or on the transitional period known as the Preclassic Maya Collapse. The second paper will also be 5-6 pages and will be a study of a single Maya site. Finally, the third paper will be 8-10 pages long and will be on a topic of your choosing. I will provide guidelines for researching each of these papers as well as grading criteria for writing assignments.

**Statement on Late Assignments, Attendance, and 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.

Attendance in all classes is mandatory. Repeated absences will negatively affect your grade. The best way to reach me is through email (Seligson@usc.edu). I will try to respond to your email within 24 hours. 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 preparation.

**Grading Breakdown**

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>% of Grade</u>	<u>Due Date</u>
Section Grade	10%	Ongoing
Writing Assignment 1	10%	Sept. 26
Midterm Exam	20%	Oct. 12
Writing Assignment 2	15%	Nov. 2
Writing Assignment 3	25%	Dec. 5
Final Exam	20%	Dec. 12

**Required Readings**

There are three books required for this course. The first, edited by Grube (2013), is a compilation of short entries about various facets of Maya culture. The second, by Houston and Inomata (2009), is an in-depth look at the Maya of the Classic Period. The third, by Martin and Grube (2008), is a synthesis of the dynastic histories of ancient Maya city-states as interpreted from glyphic texts and archaeology. In addition, a number of scientific articles will be assigned and made available on the course website to enrich your knowledge on certain topics.

1. (GRU) Grube, Nikolai (ed.) 2013 *Maya: Divine Kings of the Rainforest*. H.F. Ullmann.
2. (H&I) Houston, Stephen D., and Takeshi Inomata 2009 *The Classic Maya*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
3. (M&G) Martin, Simon, and Nikolai Grube 2008 *Chronicles of the Maya Kings and Queens: Deciphering the Dynasties of the Ancient Maya*, revised edition. Thames & Hudson, New York.

***Week 1: Introduction***

Tuesday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>

*Lecture:* Introduction to the Course

*Reading:* No reading

Thursday, August 24<sup>th</sup>

*Lecture:* Geography of the Maya Area

*Reading:* H&I: xiii-10; GRU:11-31; Dunning et al. 1998; Dunning et al. 2002

***Week 2: Setting the Stage***

Tuesday, August 29<sup>th</sup>

*Lecture:* A Brief History of Maya Archaeology

*Reading:* H&I:10-27

Thursday, August 31<sup>st</sup>

*Lecture:* The Preclassic Maya and their Predecessors

*Reading:* H&I: 65-86; GRU:50-65

***Week 3: The Preclassic Period***

Tuesday, September 5<sup>th</sup>

*Lecture:* The Late Preclassic Period

*Reading:* H&I:86-104; Taube et al. 2010

Thursday, September 7<sup>th</sup>

*Lecture:* Maya Sociality and Social Organization

*Reading:* H&I:28-64

***Week 4: Becoming Classic***

Tuesday, September 12<sup>th</sup>

*Lecture:* The Nature of Classic Maya Civilization

*Reading:* H&I: 105-127; GRU:86-95

Thursday, September 14<sup>th</sup>

*Lecture:* External Relationships of the Maya

*Reading:* H&I:98-113; Stuart 2000

***Week 5: Maya Writing and Calendrics***Tuesday, September 19<sup>th</sup>*Documentary:* Cracking the Maya Code*Reading:* GRU:114-127; M&G:6-21Thursday, September 21<sup>st</sup>*Lecture:* Time and the Maya*Reading:* GRU:130-147; Stuart 1996***Week 6: Classic Maya Identity***Tuesday, September 26<sup>th</sup>*Lecture:* Concepts of Classic Maya Identity*Readings:* Houston et al. 2006**WRITING ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE**Thursday, September 28<sup>th</sup>*Lecture:* Maya Religion*Reading:* GRU:262-307; Stuart 2013***Week 7: Maya Elites and Their Worldview***Tuesday, October 3<sup>rd</sup>*Lecture:* The *Ajaw**Readings:* H&I:131-162; GRU:148-173Thursday, October 5<sup>th</sup>*Lecture:* Maya Nobles*Reading:* H&I:163-192; Saturno et al. 2012***Week 8: Midterm Week***Tuesday, October 10<sup>th</sup>

Maya glyphs exercise and Midterm Exam

Review Session

Thursday, October 12<sup>th</sup>**MIDTERM EXAMINATION*****Week 9: Maya Political History I***Tuesday, October 17<sup>th</sup>*Lecture:* Tikal*Reading:* M&G: TikalThursday, October 19<sup>th</sup>*Lecture:* The Snake Kingdom*Reading:* M&G: Calakmul; Martin 2017***Week 10: Maya Political History II***Tuesday, October 24<sup>th</sup>*Lecture:* The Western Maya*Reading:* M&G: PalenqueThursday, October 26<sup>th</sup>*Lecture:* The Southeast Periphery*Reading:* M&G: Copan and Quirigua***Week 11: Boom and Bust***Tuesday, October 31<sup>st</sup>*Lecture:* Subsistence Strategies and Trade*Readings:* H&I: 218-287Thursday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>*Lecture:* The Maya Collapse (?)*Readings:* H&I:288-310; M&G: 226-229;

GRU:322-337

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE*****Week 12: The Northern Lowlands***Tuesday, November 7<sup>th</sup>*Lecture:* Archaeology in the Puuc Hills, Mexico*Readings:* Simms et al. 2012; Seligson et al. 2017aThursday, November 9<sup>th</sup>*Documentary:* Quest for the Lost Maya*Reading:* Bey 2006***Week 13: The North Remembers: Chichén Itza and the Postclassic***Tuesday, November 14<sup>th</sup>*Lecture:* Chichén Itza and Tula*Reading:* Hoggarth et al. 2015; Ringle 2017; Cobos et al. 2014

Thursday, November 16<sup>th</sup>

*Lecture:* Postclassic Yucatan

*Reading:* H&I:310-319; GRU:340-353;  
Andrews

Thursday, November 30<sup>th</sup>

*Discussion:* The Enduring Maya

*Reading:* GRU:416-427

***Week 14: Practicing Archaeology***

***Week 16***

Tuesday, November 21<sup>st</sup>

*Exercise:* Interpreting Maya Excavations

*Readings:* Seligson et al. 2017b

December 2<sup>nd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>

**STUDY DAYS**

Thursday, November 23<sup>rd</sup>

No Class (Thanksgiving Recess)

Tuesday, December 5<sup>th</sup>

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT 3 DUE**

***Week 15: The Conquest and Beyond***

Tuesday, December 12<sup>th</sup>

**FINAL EXAM, 11:00 AM-1:00 PM**

Tuesday, November 28<sup>th</sup>

*Lecture:* Conquest and Colonialism

*Reading:* H&I:320-321; M&G: 228-230;  
GRU:372:395

**Statement on Internet Research**

The Maya, and Mesoamerican civilizations in general, are the source of broad speculation and falsified claims made on the internet. As such, websites are extremely unreliable to use in Maya research. Whether it be erroneous claims on Wikipedia pages or discussions of “Pakal the Maya Astronaut” (<http://www.earthmatrix.com/serie26/pakal.htm>), it is best to steer clear of internet sources, which often mask their inaccuracies by providing references to some scholarly research.

You may of course use Google Scholar or any other library database to search for scholarly articles, but **you should not simply do Google searches** to research topics about the Maya. Three websites that you are allowed to use and which have a number of credible articles and reports are: Mesoweb ([www.mesoweb.org](http://www.mesoweb.org)), FAMSI ([www.famsi.org](http://www.famsi.org)), and David Stuart’s blog (<https://decipherment.wordpress.com>).

**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](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>