

ANTHROPOLOGY 140g – MESOAMERICAN COSMOVISION AND CULTURE
GFS 106, M/W 2:00-3:20

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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 75-100 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 three 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 (800-1000 words) in which you will answer a set question on the archaeology of Mesoamerica. You will be required to write a longer research paper (2000-2500 words) 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 two midterms and a final examination. The exams will not be cumulative. Discussion section and lecture participation will also contribute to your final grade.

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	% of Grade	Due Date
Section Grade	10%	Ongoing
Lecture Participation	5%	Ongoing
Map Quiz	5%	Sept. 5
Short paper	15%	Sept. 26
Midterm Exam	20%	Oct. 10
Research Paper	20%	Dec. 1
Final Exam	25%	Dec. 7

Grading Rubric

94 <	A	80-82.99	B-	67-69.99	D+
90-93.99	A-	77-79.99	C+	65-66.99	D
87-89.99	B+	73-76.99	C	64.99 >	F
83-86.99	B	70-72.99	C-		

Final grades are non-negotiable.

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: Cosmvision 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

Wk	Date	Lecture Topics	Readings	Assignment
1	8/20	Introduction to Mesoamerica		
	8/22	Cosmovision and the Hard Nucleus	Kirchhoff 1952; CAR 1-74	
2	8/27	Early Mesoamerica	EVA Chapter 4	
	8/29	Early Olmec Civilization	EVA Chapters 5, 6	
3	9/3	NO CLASS – LABOR DAY		
	9/5	Late Formative Olmec	Pool 2000	Map Quiz in Class
4	9/10	Early Oaxaca	EVA pp. 149-153	
	9/12	Monte Alban and the Zapotec Fluorescence	EVA pp. 189-201	
5	9/17	The Earliest Maya	C&H 7-73	
	9/19	The Late Preclassic Maya	C&H 73-91	
6	9/24	The Basin of Mexico and Teotihuacan	EVA 267-287	
	9/26	The Early Classic Maya and Teotihuacan	Stuart 2000	Short Paper Due
7	10/1	Maya Religion and Culture	CAR chapter 4; C&H 242-263	
	10/3	The Late Classic Maya and the “Collapse”	C&H pp. 124-177	
8	10/8	Maya Writing and Politics and Midterm Exam Review	C&H pp. 263-278	
	10/10	MIDTERM EXAM		
9	10/15	<i>Documentary: Quest for the Lost Maya</i>	Seligson et al. 2017	
	10/17	The Postclassic Maya	C&H Chapter 7	
10	10/22	Epiclassic Period, the Great Tollans	EVA Chapter 15	
	10/24	The Rise of the Aztecs	EVA Chapter 17	
11	10/29	Aztec Civilization	EVA pp. 447-456, chap. 19; Wade 2018	
	10/31	The Conquest According to the Spanish	Diaz del Castillo	
12	11/5	The Conquest According to the Aztecs	Leon-Portilla; EVA pp. 539-555	
	11/7	Colonial New Spain	EVA pp. 555-562; Burkhart 1989	
13	11/12	The Conquest of the Maya and the Colonial Experience	C&H pp. 227-229	
	11/14	Mexican Wars, Pre-Columbian Themes	Lopez Caballero 2008	
14	11/19	Fieldwork in Mexico		

	11/21	NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING	
15	11/26	The Enduring Maya	Ardren 2002; Farah & Seligson 2018
	11/28	<i>Documentary: Of Gods and Kings</i>	CAR chapter 5
16		Study Days	
	12/1	FINAL PAPER DUE	
	12/7	FINAL EXAM – 2:00-4:00pm	

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>