

Anthropology 140G

Mesoamerican Cosmovision and Culture

Professor: Dr. Eric J. Heller

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Student Hours: Monday, 11 – 1 pm as well as by appointment

Professor's Zoom Link: <https://usc.zoom.us/j/8411925086>

Course Description:

Anthropology 140G is a survey of histories, cultural practices, and ideologies of in ancient and contemporary Mesoamerica. In this distinct culture area, spanning much of Mexico and Central America, numerous complex cultures developed, transformed, persisted, and continue thrive in the face of centuries of colonization and neoliberal development. What unites these cultures across time and space is a shared *comsovision*, an integrated system of beliefs about one's place and purpose in the operation of the universe. In examining these beliefs from their earliest traces to the present day, this course highlights remarkable continuity across more than three millennia of cultural florescence and metamorphosis. To understand the emergence and perseverance these complex cultures in the context of the ingenuity and fortitude of native peoples, this course makes extensive use of a Mesoamerican literary tradition composed of oral histories, written records, and an abundant iconographic corpus. Alongside these resounding voices, ancient and modern, we examine the material culture, culture history, and social landscapes of the region through theoretically informed anthropological perspectives. Together, these sources enable powerful insights that promote both scientific and indigenous ways of knowing the world.

Prerequisites:

Introductory archaeology courses will be helpful but are not required.

Introduction:

Defined by an incredible set of shared cultural practices that demonstrate astonishing continuity through tumult and transformation, Mesoamerica stands as one of the great culture areas of the ancient and modern world. As a so-called cradle of civilization, Mesoamerica is home to unique languages, literary traditions, pantheons of deities, ritual practices, and lifeways, which emerged as people creatively engaged with their social and material landscapes to create fruitful lives and produce culture. From Olmec, to Maya, Toltec, Aztec, and many more, these ancient civilizations shared a worldview founded in a core set of beliefs regarding the shape and function of the universe and the place of humanity within the cosmos based on deep observation of natural cycles and concepts of reciprocity with other sentient forces, both human and supernatural. These ideas are encapsulated by the concept of *cosmovision*, a unified system of beliefs about the nature of reality and one's place in the operation of the universe itself. While ancient civilizations and their modern descendants shared basic ideological tenants, the way each culture manifested their own cosmovision is distinct across time and space, demonstrating tremendous creativity and agency as they reproduced shared cultural assumptions. This course will track the development, reproduction, and unique place in the modern world of Mesoamerican cosmovision Through an analysis of archaeological landscapes, artifacts, indigenous literature, oral traditions, and ethnohistoric accounts, from the first footsteps in the Americas to the present day.

This course meets the requirements for a core literacy in Social Analysis because it introduces you to a variety of social science approaches employed in the study of Mesoamerican civilizations. You will learn to assess archaeological, anthropological, and ethnohistoric data alongside a three-millennia-old literary tradition to gain insights into ancient cultures and contemporary societies. In addition to the methodological aspects of the course, you will also develop a firm grounding in the historical particulars of ancient Mesoamerica through studies of the rise, fall, resistance, and persistence of various cultures, culminating with the Spanish Conquest and modern neocolonial agendas.

To best achieve these goals, bi-weekly lectures comprise the core of the course and are complemented by a variety of assigned readings, largely derived from professional anthropological works and indigenous voices, both ancient and contemporary. The required books provide important introductions to the literature, culture history, and themes of the course while assigned articles (available on Blackboard) provide insights into critical ongoing discussions in Mesoamerican archaeological and cultural studies. Keeping up with the readings is a critical component to success in this course!

In addition, you will attend weekly discussion sections led by your instructor. Sections are based on seminar-style student-led discussions of course readings, exercises that demonstrate methods used by scholars to study and interpret Mesoamerican civilizations, and workshops designed to augment your final research papers.

Learning Objectives:

Through successful completion of this course, you will achieve and demonstrate competency in the following areas:

- The major cultures and chronologies of ancient and contemporary Mesoamerican societies.
- Critical reasoning from material culture, text, and ethnographic accounts to make inferences into ideations, systems of belief, and cultural practices of ancient peoples.
- The relationships between the history and cultural heritage of Mesoamerica and modern religious ideations and sociopolitical structures and institutions.
- Constructing your own arguments about past and present based on archaeological data and ethnohistoric sources.

Course Requirements:

Attendance in weekly lectures and discussion sections is mandatory for all students, with options to participate remotely on an as-needed basis. Repeated absences, particularly in sections, will negatively affect your grade. Your out-of-class workload is about 75-100 pages of reading per week plus time spent on assignments, exams, and quizzes. Weekly assigned readings are to be completed prior to lectures and your discussion sections. There will be one quiz, followed by two scaffolding assignments to support a research paper on a topic of your choosing. In addition, two exams and your overall section participation scores will determine your final grade in the course.

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Value	Due Date
Section Participation	15%	Ongoing
Map Quiz	5%	Week 4
Annotated Bibliography	10%	Week 8
Thesis Worksheet	5%	Week 11
Final Paper	25%	Week 15
Midterm	20%	Week 7
Final Exam	20%	Dec. 10 th

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-	

Required Texts:

There are three books required for this course. All books are in stock in the USC Bookstore. Supplementary 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.

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

(TED) Tedlock, Dennis 1995 Popol Vuh: The Definitive Edition of the Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life and the Glories of Gods and Kings, second edition. Simon and Schuster, New York, New York.

Major Assignments

Student Led Discussions (10%) – Form groups of up to five members, lead one discussion section by asking open ended questions about the readings and other course materials to your peers, and participate in other discussions.

Group 1 (Week 4): Tedlock 1995 (or Christenson 2007)

Group 2 (Week 6): Inomata 2020; McAnany 2020; Adams 2005

Group 3 (Week 10): McAnany 2001; McKillop 2004; Webster 2000

Group 4 (Week 13): León-Portilla; Burkhart 1989, Aztec Poetry Selections

Group 5 (Week 15): Morales 2004; Menchu

Map Quiz (5%) – Demonstrate your knowledge of the geography of Mesoamerica with a brief quiz on the regions and important sites consisting of a geographic map containing unlabeled points of interest.

Exams (2 x 20%) – Consists of Multiple Choice and Short Essay style questions. Exams will be take-home and must be completed within an allotted time frame.

Annotated Bibliography (10%) – First choose a topic related to Mesoamerican cosmology, then conduct preliminary research on your chosen topic. Write an abstract and submit four annotated bibliography entries.

Thesis Worksheet (5%) – Working from your annotated bibliography, construct a thesis statement and a working outline for peer review.

Final Paper (25%) – Write a 2000-2500 words research paper on your chosen topic.

Extra Credit (max 3%) – Explore, in short written assignments, issues related to cultural representation in digital museum collections, films, and other media.

Schedule of Topics:

Week	Date	Topic	Readings	Assignment
1	22-Aug	Course Introduction		NO
	24-Aug	Mesoamerican Ontologies	CAR 1-74	SECTIONS
2	29-Aug	The Paleoindian Period	TED 63-88	<i>Section</i>
	31-Aug	Paleoindian to Archaic	TED 91-142	<i>Introduction</i>
3	5-Sep	LABOR DAY	TED 145-162	NO
	7-Sep	Late Archaic to Early Formative	EVA Ch. 3	SECTIONS
4	12-Sep	Formative Olmec	EVA Ch. 5, Ch. 6	<i>Group 1</i>
	14-Sep	Formative Oaxaca	EVA 149-153, 189-201	Map Quiz
5	19-Sep	Preclassic Maya	Inomata, McAnany 2020	<i>Effective</i>
	21-Sep	The Rise of Teotihuacan	Adams 2005	<i>Research</i>
6	26-Sep	Late Preclassic Maya	EVA Ch. 9	<i>Group 2</i>
	28-Sep	Teotihuacan Entrada	Stuart 2000	
7	3-Oct	Review		NO
	5-Oct	MIDTERM EXAM		SECTIONS
8	10-Oct	Early Classic Maya	McAnany 2001	
	12-Oct	Classic Maya	CAR Ch. 4, EVA Ch. 1	Anno Bib
9	17-Oct	Maya Cosmology	McKillop 2004	<i>Maya</i>
	19-Oct	The Maya Collapse	Webster 2000, EVA Ch. 12	<i>Writing</i>
10	24-Oct	The Postclassic Maya	EVA Ch. 14	<i>Group 3</i>
	26-Oct	Postclassic Mexico	EVA Ch. 16	
11	31-Oct	Rise of the Aztec Empire	Wade 2018	<i>Peer Review</i>
	2-Nov	Aztec Thought and Culture	Aztec Poetry Selections	Thesis WS
12	7-Nov	The Conquest of Mesoamerica	León-Portilla 2006 & Ch. 2	
	9-Nov	Early Colonial Period		
13	14-Nov	Late Colonial Period	Burkhart 1989	<i>Group 4</i>
	16-Nov	Decolonization		
14	21-Nov	Neocolonialism	Morales 2004	NO
	23-Nov	THANKSGIVING		SECTIONS
15	28-Nov	Indigenous Revival Movements	Menchu	<i>Group 5</i>
	30-Nov	Course Wrap Up and Review		Final Paper
	9-Dec	FINAL EXAM		

Remote and Asynchronous Learners

Students will have the option to attend lectures and sections via zoom at their discretion. In addition, lectures will be recorded and may be viewed at the student's leisure. Sections on the other hand, must be attended in real time unless prior approval for asynchronous participation is granted by the instructor as your participation in the discussion is a major component of your final grade. The professor reserves the right to terminate all remote participation options at any time and for any reason.

Asynchronous students must receive permission from the instructor to adopt this status. Permission will be granted after the student demonstrates significant hardships barring their regular attendance in the course. In these cases, the student will submit short written assignments or other work based on a viewing of the recording of their assigned weekly section. These assignments will be due within one week of the section. Late work will not be accepted.

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 as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 PM, 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 and may be found at: <https://policy.usc.edu/scampus/>

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: <https://sjacs.usc.edu/students/scampus/>

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>