

COURSE SYLLABUS

Mesoamerican Archaeology (ANTH 323)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course serves as an introduction to the prehistory of Mesoamerica with a special focus on understanding why this region developed some of the most complex human societies in the Americas which saw the growth of large towns and cities, monumental public works, writing, complex calendrical, administrative, and market systems, etc. The course begins with an examination of the environment of the region and of the first few local foragers. We continue with the beginnings of food production and the development of early sedentary villages, culminating with the emergence of the first kingly lineages (the Olmec). We then focus our attention on the Mesoamerican Classical Period and the monumental city of Teotihuacan and the thousands of city-states of the ancient Maya, as well as their eventual collapse. Finally, we explore the development and apex of one of the most powerful empires in the ancient world, the Aztec Empire, including how it emerged, how it was administered, and how the Spanish eventually conquered it in the 16th century. All through this sequence, the evolution of Mesoamerican civilizations is used to clarify anthropological concepts of how and why cultural systems develop and the purpose that they serve, and how the Mesoamerican example teaches us key characteristics of the nature of those systems.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Throughout the semester we will be working towards achieving various class goals. By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Understand the general geography, environment, history, and social realities of Prehistoric Mesoamerica, and how the cultural systems that evolved there are adapted to those realities.
2. Have a clear sense of the political, economic, and religious forms of organization that of Mesoamerican society, and understand how and why these institutions evolved the way they did.
3. Understand how the examples we study from Mesoamerica clarify broader concepts of human social evolution and of the role of culture worldwide.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

Textbook

Title: Ancient Mexico and Central America

Edition: Third

Author: Susan Toby Evans

ISBN: 978-0-500-29065-1

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE

	Date	Topic	Readings due this date
Week 1	Jan 21	NO CLASS	
	Jan 23	Intro	
	Jan 25	Ancient Mesoamerica, The Civilization and Its Antecedents	Chapter 1
Week 2	Jan 28	Ecology and Culture: Mesoamerican Beginnings	Chapter 2
	Jan 30	-- Continuation and discussion	
	Feb 1	Archaic Foragers, Collectors, and Farmers (8000–2000 BC)	Chapter 3
Week 3	Feb 4	-- Continuation and discussion	
	Feb 6	The Initial Formative (c. 2000–1200 BC)	Chapter 4
	Feb 8	-- Continuation and discussion	
Week 4	Feb 11	The Olmecs: Early Formative (c. 1200–900/800 BC)	Chapter 5
	Feb 13	The Olmecs: Middle Formative (c. 900–600 BC)	Chapter 6
	Feb 15	Middle to Late Formative Cultures (c. 600/500–300 BC)	Chapter 7
Week 5	Feb 18	The Emergence of States in the Late Formative (300 BC – AD 1)	Chapter 8
	Feb 20	-- Continuation and discussion	
	Feb 22	The Terminal Formative (AD 1–300)	Chapter 9
Week 6	Feb 25	-- Continuation and discussion	
	Feb 27	Teotihuacan and Its International Influence (AD 250/300–600)	Chapter 10
	March 1	-- Continuation and discussion	
Week 7	March 4	-- Continuation and discussion	
	March 6	-- Continuation and discussion	
	March 8	MIDTERM EXAM	
	March 11	NO CLASS	NO CLASS
	March 13	NO CLASS	NO CLASS

	March 15	NO CLASS	NO CLASS
Week 8	March 18	The Maya in the Early Classic (AD 250–600)	Chapter 11
	March 20	-- Continuation and discussion	
	March 22	The Lowland Maya: Apogee and Collapse (AD 600–900)	Chapter 12
Week 9	March 25	-- Continuation and discussion	
	March 27	The Late Classic and Epiclassic in the West (AD 600–1000/1100)	Chapter 13
	March 29	-- Continuation and discussion	
Week 10	April 1	Maya Collapse and Survival (AD 800–1200)	Chapter 14
	April 3	-- Continuation and discussion	
	April 5	-- Continuation and discussion	
Week 11	April 8	The Rise of Tula and Other Epiclassic Transformations (AD 900–1200)	Chapter 15
	April 10	The Middle Postclassic (1200s–1430)	Chapter 16
	April 12	-- Continuation and discussion	
Week 12	April 15	The Aztecs: An Empire Is Born (1430–1455)	Chapter 17
	April 17	-- Continuation and discussion	
	April 19	The Aztec Empire Develops (1455–1486)	Chapter 18 --Aztec exercise handed out
Week 13	April 22	-- Continuation and discussion	
	April 24	The Aztec Empire at Its Height (1486–1519)	Chapter 19
	April 26	-- Continuation and discussion	
Week 14	April 29	The Conquest of Mexico and Its Aftermath	Chapter 20
	May 1	-- Continuation and discussion	
	May 3	-- Continuation and discussion	
FINALS	May 6		
	May 8	FINAL (10:15 a.m.–12:15 p.m.)	
	May 10		--Exercise due by midnight this date

METHODS OF EVALUATION

- 1) Midterm Exam.....30%
- 2) Final Exam.....40%
- 3) Data analysis exercise.....30%

Exams

Exams will be given during the course of the semester that will test students on the information provided in readings, class discussions, and lectures. Each exam will be a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and fill-in-the-blank.

Data Analysis Exercise

This exercise will give students an opportunity to analyze actual archaeological data about the cultural patterns of Mesoamerican populations before and after their incorporation into the Aztec empire to see how this change affected their daily life. In order to successfully complete the exercise, students will have to draw from information learned from readings and lectures, as well as use quantitative approaches and critical thinking to piece together what the archaeological data says us about people's lifeways and how it changed through time.

Extra Credit

There is no extra credit available in this course.

GRADING SCALE

The following grading scale is utilized for student evaluation:

A	90% and above
B	80-89%
C	70-79%
D	60-69%
F	59% and below

When the book, *Ancient Life in the American Southwest*, was published in 1930 it was understood that its reception would determine whether or not there should be written at a later date a similar one on Mexico and Central America. In the opinion of the publishers, the book has had a satisfactory circulation and has been found readable and useful. That settles it so far as I am concerned. I shall put together the results of twenty-five years' study of Mexico and Central America, including many field trips into that ancient world; explorations extending from Chihuahua to Honduras; personal c In modern-day Mexico and Central America, around 5 million people speak some 70 Maya languages; most of them are bilingual in Spanish. Within that expanse, the Maya lived in three separate sub-areas with distinct environmental and cultural differences: the northern Maya lowlands on the Yucatan Peninsula; the southern lowlands in the Peten district of northern Guatemala and adjacent portions of Mexico, Belize and western Honduras; and the southern Maya highlands, in the mountainous region of southern Guatemala.Â Traditionally, ancient peoples had flourished in drier climates, where the centralized management of water resources (through irrigation and other techniques) formed the basis of society. Susan Toby Evans' *Ancient Mexico and Central America* is excellent. She uses clear language and good organization to develop a structure study of the archeology of Mesoamerica. She includes many effective examples, with explanations. Understanding the past through archeology is always best viewed as an incomplete picture, with a constant need to incorporate new evidence into re-examining our current concepts and patterns. This text does a good job of presenting current thinking, while revealing that many parts of the puzzle are missing. Read more. Helpful.