

# ANTH-131: MESOAMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

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## Effective Term

Fall 2026

## CC Approval

11/07/2025

## AS Approval

11/13/2025

## BOT Approval

11/20/2025

## COCI Approval

N/A

## SECTION A - Course Data Elements

### CB04 Credit Status

Credit - Degree Applicable

### Discipline

#### Minimum Qualifications

Anthropology (Master's Degree)

### Subject Code

ANTH - Anthropology

### Course Number

131

### Department

Anthropology

### Division

Arts and Humanities (ARAH)

### Full Course Title

Mesoamerican Archaeology

### Short Title

Mesoamerican Archaeology

### CB03 TOP Code

2202.00 - Anthropology

### CB08 Basic Skills Status

NBS - Not Basic Skills

### CB09 SAM Code

E - Non-Occupational

### Rationale

Update

## SECTION B - Course Description

### Catalog Course Description

An archaeological survey of the ancient civilizations of Mesoamerica. The course includes studies of the Olmec, the Maya and the Aztec, with particular emphasis on Maya civilization. Students will explore the major archaeological sites of Mesoamerica through both primary sources and current archaeological research.

**SECTION C - Conditions on Enrollment****Open Entry/Open Exit**

No

**Repeatability**

Not Repeatable

**Grading Options**

Letter Grade or Pass/No Pass

**Allow Audit**

Yes

**Requisites****SECTION D - Course Standards****Is this course variable unit?**

No

**Units**

3.00

**Lecture Hours**

54.00

**Outside of Class Hours**

108

**Total Contact Hours**

54

**Total Student Hours**

162

**Distance Education Approval****Is this course offered through Distance Education?**

Yes

**Online Delivery Methods**

DE Modalities	Permanent or Emergency Only?
Hybrid	Permanent
Entirely Online	Permanent
Online with Proctored Exams	Permanent

**SECTION E - Course Content****Student Learning Outcomes**

**Upon satisfactory completion of the course, students will be able to:**

1. Interpret the major archaeological sites of Mesoamerica and the cultural contributions of Mesoamerican peoples using the theories and methods of anthropology.
2. Discuss the settlement of the Americas using evidence from the archaeological and ethnographic record.

**Course Objectives**

**Upon satisfactory completion of the course, students will be able to:**

1. Identify and distinguish between the Late Pleistocene, early Formative, Classic, and Post-Classic periods of pre-historic Mexico.

2. Discuss the archaeological approaches and methods for interpreting the fossil record and cultural practices of pre-historic peoples.
3. Differentiate between characteristics of the major archaeological sites of Mesoamerican chronological periods.
4. Explain the aesthetic and cultural differences of the pre-historic peoples of Mesoamerica using archaeological evidence.
5. Summarize the unique qualities of Mesoamerican indigenous languages, stelae, and calendars.
6. Examine the various hypotheses for the "decline" of early Mesoamerican civilizations.

### Course Content

1. Introduction
2. Geography and Chronological Periods
3. Dating techniques and archaeological sciences
4. Early Hunters and Paleolithic North America
5. Paleo-Indian/Paleo-American migration and settlement theories
  - a. "Pre-Clovis," Clovis First, Pacific Coastal Route, Beringia/Ice-Free Corridor
  - b. The role of mtDNA in theorizing about the earliest peoples
  - c. Discussion of alternative theories not supported by evidence
6. Projectile points and stone tool technologies
  - a. Clovis and Folsom points
  - b. atlatls
  - c. microblades
  - d. choppers, scrapers, cores, etc.
7. Phases of the Early Archaic (Diablo, Ajuereado, etc.)
8. Plant domestication and cultivation
  - a. teosinte hypotheses
  - b. *maiz* and early horticulture
9. Tehuacan Valley Phases (El Riego, Abejas, etc.)
10. Early Pre-Classic Farming and Early Village Life (San Jose Mogote, Tlatilco shaft-tomb art, etc.)
11. Middle Pre-Classic (El Arbolillo, Zacatenco, etc.)
12. Late Pre-Classic (Chupicuaro, Cuicuilco, Tetimpa, etc.)
13. Early Civilizations- San Lorenzo and La Venta Olmec
  - a. Hierarchy
  - b. Religious states
  - c. Patterns of rule
  - d. Art/Archaeology
14. Long-count calendar
  - a. Tres Zapotes, links with Maya and Aztec calendar systems
  - b. Chalcatzingo
15. Monte Albán and Zapoteca (early phases)
16. Classic Period - Teotihuacan
  - a. Archaeology of Teotihuacan
  - b. Art and religion in Teotihuacan
  - c. Enslaved peoples at Teotihuacan
17. Yucatan and Maya cultures
  - a. Languages (Proto-Maya and the Mesoamerican Language Tree)
  - b. Creation Stories
    - i. Popol Vuh
    - ii. Chilam Balam
    - iii. Codices
  - c. Major Yucatecan sites, I: The Ruta Puuc (Kabah, Labná, Sayil, Uxmal)
  - d. Major Yucatecan sites, II: Ek Balam and Dzibichaltún
  - e. Other Yucatecan sites
    - i. Mayapan
    - ii. Izamal
  - f. Major Quintana Roo sites
    - i. Chichen-Itzá (Piste)
    - ii. Tulúm and Cobá
    - iii. Chacchoben and Dzibanché

- g. Sites of Chiapas and Oaxaca
    - i. Palenque
    - ii. Yaxchilán and Bonampak
    - iii. Monte Albán
    - iv. San José del Mogote
  - h. Sites of the Petén, Guatemala
    - i. Tikal
    - ii. Calakmul
    - iii. Uaxcatún (*Siaan Ka'an*)
  - i. Sites of Belize and Honduras
    - i. Xunantunich
    - ii. Lamanai (*Lama'an'ain*)
    - iii. Copán
18. Cacao and the Pochteca
  19. The Mesoamerican Ball Game
    - a. Links to the Popol Vuh
    - b. Archaeological evidence- Ballcourts of Mesoamerica
    - c. Archaeological evidence of Ball Game; gear, rules, etc.
  20. The Post-Classic- Toltec and Chichimec
  21. Pre-Conquest Aztec, Mexica, Nuhua and Nahua peoples
  22. Aztec society and culture
  23. Aztecs in 1519
  24. Tenochtitlan and the Aztec empire

## Methods of Instruction

### Methods of Instruction

Types	Examples of learning activities
Activity	For example, a class activity that mimics the Mesoamerican Ball Game as accurate as is possible.
Critique	For example, a written critique of the film <i>Apocalypto</i> .
Discussion	For example, a discussion of how Aztec chinampas helped enable an empire
Field Experience	When taken as a study abroad course, students will experience visiting the actual sites and sketching site plans.
Field Trips	When taken as a study abroad course, field trips to important cultural sites are included.
Group Work	A group project that presents one site of the Puuc route of Mexico to the class.
Individualized Instruction	For example, working with a student to design their class presentation using 3D printing technology from campus.
Lecture	A lecture presenting the role of LiDAR in archaeological discovery.
Visiting Lecturers	For example, a Zoom or in class visit from regional experts in archaeology, or a visiting Q&A session with Maya heritage groups in San Francisco.
Other	Other relevant pedagogy as determined by the instructor and course format.

### Online Adaptation

Types	Examples of learning activities
Activity	For example, an online activity using tutorials about the Mesoamerican Ball Game from the Smithsonian Institute.
Critique	For example, a written critique of the film <i>Apocalypto</i> that is submitted online.
Discussion	For example, a discussion post in an online forum discussing how Aztec chinampas enabled an empire.
Group Work	A group project that presents one site of the Puuc route of Mexico to the class using Zoom or similar technology.
Individualized Instruction	For example, working with a student to design their class presentation using Canva.

Lecture	For example, video or audio recorded lectures about the Popol Vuh.
Other	Other relevant online pedagogy as determined by the instructor.

**Instructor-Initiated Online Contact Types**

- Announcements/Bulletin Boards
- Chat Rooms
- Discussion Boards
- E-mail Communication
- Telephone Conversations
- Video or Teleconferencing

**Student-Initiated Online Contact Types**

- Chat Rooms
- Discussions
- Group Work

**Course design is accessible**

Yes

**Methods of Evaluation**

**Methods of Evaluation**

Types	Examples of classroom assessments
Essays/Papers	For example, short essay responses to questions posed by the instructor about the reading assignments.
Exams/Tests	For example, a multiple-choice and short-answer type final exam that addresses major course content and contains embedded questions to improve future testing efforts.
Homework	For example, watching a longer video at home and submitting a Film Viewing Guide as evidence of student participation.
Oral Presentations	For example, a group presentation on an archaeological site that contains evidence of trade and/or slavery between Maya and Aztec peoples.
Problem Solving	For example, a problem-based exercise where students brainstorm ideas on how to make archaeology more visible in their local communities.
Projects	For example, a group project about a subfield or career field in archaeology (CRM, historical, underwater archaeology, etc.)
Quizzes	For example, a mapping quiz that covers the unique environmental regions of prehistoric Mexico and Central America.
Other	Other relevant assessment methods as determined by the instructor.

**Assignments**

**Reading Assignments**

Reading assignments require critical engagement and may include selections from textbooks, research studies, news articles, materials handed out in class (or online for online/hybrid courses), and other relevant supplemental materials as needed.

*For example:*

1. Read Chapter 5 in the Coe textbook and self-assess whether you agree with the author's claim that the earliest Americans traveled across the Atlantic Ocean along Arctic ice sheets.
2. Read the handout on Paleoindian migration theories and discuss if Late Pleistocene climate could have affected stone tool development in the early Americas.
3. Read selected segments from the *Popol Vuh*, paying special attention to the importance of the Mesoamerican Ball Game in the Maya creation story.

**Writing Assignments**

Written assignments require critical thinking about course content address the readings, lectures, and related course activities (field trips, guest lectures, etc.). class discussions and document personal reactions to course material. Students will practice the analysis of primary source materials and write analytical essays based on readings.

*For example:*

1. Seriation Exercise - arrange the pictures of pottery designs in a logical classificatory sequence and explain the rationale you used to do so.

2. Choose one Maya site from either the Ruta Puuc or the Peten regions and explain how LiDAR has added unexpected dimension to archaeological excavations since 2019.

3. After visiting the online Bodleian Library exhibition site for the Codex Mendoza, discuss your personal views on the public exhibition of cultural artifacts, the concept of cultural patrimony, and the rights of indigenous communities and organizations to control, maintain, and direct the uses of their own intellectual property.

### **Outside-of-Class Assignments**

Fieldwork and out-of-class museum exhibits are a crucial component of this course when offered in a study abroad format. Other relevant assignments as determined by the instructor and course format.

## **SECTION F - Textbooks and Instructional Materials**

### **Material Type**

Textbook

### **Author**

Coe, M.D., Urcid, J., and Koontz, R.

### **Title**

Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs

### **Edition/Version**

8

### **Publisher**

Thames & Hudson

### **Year**

2019

### **Rationale**

This textbook, though not recent, is the classic text for this field, regardless of edition.

### **ISBN #**

9780500841785

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### **Material Type**

Textbook

### **Author**

Schele, L. and Friedel, D.

### **Title**

A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya

### **Edition/Version**

2

### **Publisher**

William Morrow Paperbacks

### **Year**

1994

### **Rationale**

This is considered a classic text in this field.

### **ISBN #**

9780688112042

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**Material Type**

Textbook

**Author**

Tedlock, T. (Translator)

**Title**

Popol Vuh: The Definitive Edition of the Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life and the Glories of Gods and Kings

**Publisher**

Touchstone

**Year**

1996

**Rationale**

This text is considered a classic work in this field and essential to understanding Maya culture, regardless of edition.

**ISBN #**

9780684818450

**Material Type**

Textbook

**Author**

Toby-Evans, S.

**Title**

Ancient Mexico and Central America: Archaeology and Culture History

**Edition/Version**

3

**Publisher**

Thames &amp; Hudson

**Year**

2013

**Rationale**

This book is considered a classic text in this field, regardless of edition.

**ISBN #**

9780500290651

**SECTION G - Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity****How does your course and/or course outline of record reflect strategies for accommodating and engaging diverse student populations, advancing equitable outcomes, and fostering inclusion for all students?**

This course provides multiple pathways for student learning by diversifying both the instructional methods, the overall content, and the assessment methods for assignments. There are opportunities for visual learning, spatial and auditory learning, formal and "low stakes" writing assignments, singular as well as group work, and options for disabled students. The course can be offered either on campus, hybrid, or fully online, as well as in a field setting (through study abroad). Course material is scaffolded such that basic concepts and "reconnaissance" practices are completed before investigating more advanced content. There are no prerequisites for this course.

## **Course Codes (Admin Only)**

### **CB00 State ID**

CCC000449071

### **CB10 Cooperative Work Experience Status**

N - Is Not Part of a Cooperative Work Experience Education Program

### **CB11 Course Classification Status**

Y - Credit Course

### **CB13 Special Class Status**

N - The Course is Not an Approved Special Class

### **CB23 Funding Agency Category**

Y - Not Applicable (Funding Not Used)

### **CB24 Program Course Status**

Program Applicable

### **Allow Pass/No Pass**

Yes

### **Only Pass/No Pass**

No