

Spring 2010 **Ancient Civilizations of the Americas** Dr. Blair Gibson
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Office hrs: MW 1:30-2:30 PM; TTH 8:30-9 AM; 2:00-2:30 PM; F 1-2 PM.

Textbooks: *Ancient Mexico and Central America*; Susan Toby Evans
Popol Vuh; Dennis Tedlock, translator

Reserve Readings: see accompanying list.

Course resources: Syllabi, handouts, and Powerpoint lectures can be viewed and downloaded on the class web page, accessed through my faculty index page. Copies of the textbooks are on reserve in the library in the reserve reading area.

Course Description: this course constitutes a survey of the indigenous cultures of Mesoamerica (the region stretching from northern Mexico to Honduras and Guatemala), from the Formative Period up to the Spanish conquest.

Course Objectives

1. Compare and contrast the varying traces that societies of differing levels of social complexity have left in the archaeological record of Mesoamerica.
2. Identify the territory of Mesoamerica on a map of North and Central America and describe its climates and topography.
3. Identify and explain the differences between a language, language family, proto-language, and language isolate with Mesoamerican examples.
4. List the major Mesoamerican hieroglyphic scripts, and discuss the major characteristics of Mesoamerican hieroglyphic languages.
5. Assess the geological, linguistic and archaeological evidence supporting the positions taken by different groups of scientists for the timing of the first movement of humans into the New World.
6. Delineate and assess the evolution of subsistence strategies in Mesoamerica from the Upper Paleolithic Period to the beginning of the Formative Period.
7. Outline the development of the complex societies along the Gulf of Mexico and analyze the principal features of the religion of the Olmecs that have survived in the archaeological record.
8. Describe the Formative Period peoples located along the Gulf Coast, in Guerrero, the Puebla/Morelos Basin, and along the Pacific Coast of Chiapas.
9. Determine and examine the localities where archaeologists have found remains of the first Mayan chiefdoms and states.
10. Outline and evaluate early Mayan cosmology.

11. Analyze the relationship between the natural resources of the Petén demography and the stability of the states of the Classical Period of the Maya.
12. Describe and evaluate the type of organization during the Classical Period of Mayan society.
13. Describe the shifting patterns of settlement in the Valley of Oaxaca during the Formative Period and examine the evolution in public architecture.
14. Evaluate the ecological parameters for human settlement in the Valley of Mexico and the role played by ecology and volcanism in the trajectory of development of the larger communities in the basin during the Formative Period.
15. Discuss and assess the organization of the city of Teotihuacan and the theories archaeologists have proposed concerning the functions of its ritual buildings.
16. Outline and assess the history of the empire of Teotihuacan from both Mayan texts and the archaeological record of Teotihuacan.
17. Analyze the culture of the Chichimec peoples of Northern Mexico from the remains of their centers at Alta Vista, La Quemada, Tollan, and Tenochtitlan.
18. Describe the rise to prominence of the Mexica (Aztecs) based on ethnohistoric sources.
19. Identify and evaluate the structural weaknesses of the Mexica state that made it vulnerable to conquest by the Spanish under Cortés.

Student Learning Outcome

After completing this class the student will know that Mesoamerica is an ancient cultural region that encompasses Northern, central and southern Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, and El Salvador.

Scoring: Grading will rest on four, non-cumulative exams involving multiple choice and matching type questions, and five quizzes intended to acquaint students with class policies and to prepare students for the exams. Each exam will be 75 questions long, and each question will be worth 1 point, and each quiz will be worth 10 points, so the potential number of points achieved for the semester is 350. The exams will cover lectures, readings (including reserve readings), and films. The grade scale for the tests will be based upon the highest grade achieved on the test. Grade boundaries will be 90%, 80%, 70% etc. of that score.

Make-ups: Quizzes cannot be made up under any conditions. Exams, with the exception of the final exam, may only be made up under the following conditions: 1) the reason for missing the exam is **very** serious or a school-sanctioned activity, and it is documentable, 2) the instructor has been contacted on the day of the crisis or before. 3) Documentation of the problem is furnished to me prior to taking the make-up. Make-ups may only be taken in my office during my office hours. I will not turn back test results

until all make-ups have been completed. I will only delay returning exams to students one class meeting to allow time for make-ups.

Extra credit: Students are encouraged to do extra-credit assignments. See guidelines for details. No extra credit presentations will be allowed during the 15th-16th week. Students will be excluded from earning extra credit for excessive unexcused absences (2 weeks) and tardies.

Student responsibilities: *Full participation* is expected from the participants in this course. This responsibility entails attending class meetings and reading the assigned materials. There are consequences for not living up to these responsibilities:

Attendance - I take attendance at the beginning of the period. I don't adjust attendance retroactively, so if a student is late and misses roll, it is the student's responsibility to seek a correction on the day of the tardy. A student who is absent on a given day is still responsible for what transpired in class on that day. Missing class often means not receiving materials, like study guides. The student is to come to the instructor's office during the office hour to obtain any handout or unclaimed work a student has missed due to an absence. Attendance will figure into my grading at the end of term if the grade is borderline. I consider absences exceeding a week to be excessive. Students whose total absences and tardies exceed two weeks will be barred from extra credit. A tardy counts as ½ unexcused absence.

Unrighteous behavior - if you wish for me to waiting for you at grade time with vengeance in my heart, then do any of the following 1) leave the classroom while lecture is in progress, and for added effect, cross directly in front of me to make sure I lose my train of thought. If you do this I will deduct 20 points from your score, and record you as absent for the day. 2) read a newspaper, talk to your neighbor, show off your laptop computer, or sleep while lecture is in progress. 3) take a cell phone call while class is in progress. These are all effective ways of communicating to me your interest level in the class, and your respect for me as a teacher.

Cheating: I don't fool around with those who cheat. Cheating includes copying off another's test. Learn the consequences at your peril!

Drops - Generally speaking, I will automatically drop anyone with two consecutive week's worth of absences. I may also drop anyone whose point total falls to more than 30 points below passing (after discussing the situation with the affected student). However, oversights occur, so ultimately it is the responsibility of the student to withdraw from the class if the student wishes to do so.

Incompletes - an incomplete will only be given to a student caught in the throes of a crisis not related to class performance. I will not give an incomplete if the student has missed or cannot take the final at the scheduled time except in cases of medical or family emergency.

Grade Reporting - If you wish to know your grade ahead of official reporting, bring me a grade card at the final exam, or send an email to me.

*****If you have any special problems or pressures, please discuss them with me as soon as you can, not at the end of the term!

Week	Topics	Readings	
		Evans	Tedlock
1	Sources for the reconstruction of American Civilizations: History, Ethnohistory, Linguistics, and Archaeology	Chpt. 1/Introduction	21-30
	Introduction to archaeological concepts and chronology		
	Introduction to anthropological concepts and social evolution		
2	The Americas: geography, settlement, and the transition to a food producing economy.	Chpts. 2 & 3	
	Quiz #1 on the syllabus Friday February 26th		
3 & 4	The Formative: The emergence and spread of the "Olmec" culture.	Chpts. 4 & 5	
	Formative Oaxaca, Puebla, Morelos, Basin of Mexico, West Mexico, and Guerrero		
	Quiz #2 Friday March 5th		
	Test # 1 Friday March 12th		
5	Middle to Late Formative The Valley of Oaxaca and the rise of Monte Albán	Chpts. 6 & 7	
6 & 7	The Basin of Mexico: Cuicuilco and Teotihuacan Mayan beginnings: Cerros, Abaj Takalik, Uaxactún, Kaminaljuyú El Mirador	Chpts. 8 & 9	
	Rio Bec, The Zapotec State: Monte Albán, the Teuchitlán tradition, Cholula, the birth of Teotihuacan		
	Quiz #3 Friday April 2nd		
8	The Empire of Teotihuacan	Chpt. 10	
	Test # 2 Friday April 9th		

9 & 10 Pre-Classic Mayan Civilization:
San Bartolo and the Popol Vuh

Chpt. 11 / Introduction: 30-60
Parts 1-4

A typical Mayan community: Cerén

11 Classic Mayan Civilization: The Peten

Chpt. 12

Late Classic Mayan Civilization:
Dos Pilas, Petexbatún, Altar de Sacrificios, Bonampak, Yaxchilán

The Classic lowland Maya collapse

Quiz #4 Friday May 7th

12 The collapse of the Classic Mesoamerican States
The evolution of Chichimec civilization

Chpt. 13

Test # 3 Friday May 14th

13 Late Classic Mayan Civilization: The Puuc Hills, Cobá
and the rise of the Itzá

Chpt. 14

14 The Toltecs and Tula

Chpt 15

Post-Classic Mayan states
The rise of the Tarascans and Aztecs

Chpt. 16 / Part 5

15 The Post Classic: The Aztec Empire

Chpts. 17 & 18

Quiz #5 Friday June 4th

16 The Aztec Empire in the time of Cortés

Chpts. 19 & 20

16 Final Exam Friday June 11th

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