



Course Outline

2026-2027 Catalog

ANTH 33 - Ancient Mesoamerica

Catalog Description

Transfer Status: CSU/UC

Unit(s): 3.00

Lecture: 51.00 Contact hours/102.00 Out of class hours/153.00 Total hours/3.00 Unit(s)

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Course Description: This course is a comparative survey of the precontact cultural traditions of Mesoamerica. Mesoamerica includes all of the central, southern Mexico, the Yucatan Peninsula, the northern regions of Central America. Emphasis is placed on cultural evolution as exemplified through the cultural development and subsequent decline of such traditions as the Olmec, Maya, Zapotec, and Aztec (among others). Comparisons to precontact South American traditions are included.

Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, the student should be able to:

1. identify and discuss basic foundational knowledge of the field of Mesoamerican studies (e.g. cultural geography, the distribution of major language families and models of culture change).
2. analyze, synthesize, and comprehend materials associated with various time periods associated with specific precontact Mesoamerican traditions (e.g. archaeological information on the Paleo-Indian period, Archaic, Preclassic, Classic and Postclassic periods, and in such areas as central Mexico and the Maya area.)
3. explain (through an understanding of culture change) how major Mesoamerican traditions developed and collapsed at various times.
4. recount what happened to indigenous Mesoamericans after contact with Europeans.
5. apply various theoretical models that explain culture changes and evolution.

Course Content

Topic Titles / Suggested Time Topic	
<u>Lecture</u>	
<u>Topics</u>	<u>Lec Hrs</u>
Introduction: Humans Find Mesoamerica	6.00
Humans Become Farmers	6.00
Setting the Mesoamerican Pattern and the Role of the Olmec	6.00
Monuments, Wealth, and Complex Societies	3.00
Codices, Calendrics, and Maya Writing	6.00
Teotihuacan and Its Neighbors: The Maya Kings and a New Order	6.00
Tula and the Toltecs	6.00
Final Scenes: The Maya, the Tarascans, and the Aztecs	3.00
Mesoamerica in Perspective and Civilizations of Peru	6.00
Describe the circumstances for Mesoamerica in the years that followed Spanish contact.	3.00
Total Hours: 51.00	

Methods of Instruction

- A. Collaborative Group Work
- B. Discussion
- C. Homework: Students are required to complete two hours of outside-of-class homework for each hour of lecture
- D. Lecture
- E. Multimedia Presentations
- F. Development of critical learning skills to foster "student based" learning.
Directed projects and writing assignments. (Students will be required to write at least 2,500 words through a variety of writing assignments, to be done using a formal research paper style [e.g. MLA, APA, or Chicago]).

Methods of Evaluation

- A. Exams/Tests
- B. Quizzes
- C. Periodic auditing of assignments (sometimes in-class assignments), Research papers (2,500 word minimum)

Examples of Assignments

Reading Assignments

1. Read the article that dismisses the myth that the Olmec are African in origin. Focus on DNA lineages and dental characteristics as important data linking the Olmec to other Native America groups.
2. Read the first chapter of your text. Focus on western misconceptions of early precontact Mesoamerican traditions. Why do western scholars focus so intensely on ancient Greece, Egypt, and Rome, often leaving out any mention of Mesoamerica? Your personal opinions are welcomed.

Writing Assignments

1. Write an essay that compares and contrasts the ancient Maya with the Mexica (Aztecs). Note how many people combine the Maya and Aztecs as one group of people when they had their respective classical periods hundreds of years apart. What were the differences; how did the Classic Maya tradition influence later traditions including the Mexica?
2. Write an essay (three pages) summarizing the main characteristics of the Maya writing system. Include descriptions of syllabograms, logographs, and head variants. Include some mention as to how over the years scholars broke this code.

Out-of-Class Assignments

1. Take ten minutes to view our Mesoamerican collection on the first floor of LRC. Take notes on the different forms. Based on your observations be prepared to discuss in class. Speculate about the possible cultural functions associated with each piece.
2. Attend the exhibition on Olmec art currently on display at the de Young Museum. Summarize recurring Olmec themes as displayed in their art. What were some of the cultural behaviors implied in the art?

Recommended Materials of Instruction

Muriel Porter Weaver. (2003). The Aztecs, Maya, and their Predecessors: Archaeology of Mesoamerica. *Academic Press*.

Michael Coe. (1999). The Maya. *Thames and Hudson*, 6th.

Michael Coe. (2000). Mexico: From Olmecs to the Aztecs. *Thames and Hudson*, 4th.

Richard E.W. Adams. (2000). Prehistoric Mesoamerica. *University of Oklahoma Press*, Revised.

Robert M. Carmack, Janine Gasco, and Gary H. Gossen. (1996). The Legacy of Mesoamerica: History and Culture of a Native America Civilization. *Prentice Hall*.

Michael Findlay. (2009). The Olmec, Maya and Aztecs: An Introduction to Ancient Mesoamerica. *Butte College*, 2nd.

Minimum Qualifications

Anthropology (Masters Required)

Created/Revised by: Findlay, Michael

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