COURSE DESCRIPTION and SYLLABUS

ANTHRO 260
CULTURES AND PEOPLES OF MESOAMERICA
Spring 2007-- TF 9:50-11:00 a.m.

Erich Fox Tree
Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in Anthropology and Latin American Studies
Dept. of Anthropology
Wellesley College

Office Hours
Tuesday 2:15-4:00
Pendleton East 344

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Scholars have long researched and theorized about the diverse cultures, peoples, and political history of Mesoamerica: the “culture area” that covers parts of Mexico and Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Belize, with ancient influences reaching even farther into Central America, the Caribbean, and the Southern United States. This course critically examines the anthropological studies of the region.

Critically examining diverse scholarship (as well as films, novels, art, and literature), we will cover ancient, colonial, and "post-colonial" Mesoamerican civilizations, and their continuing influence on global society. Special attention is given to the Maya area, and to recent political and cultural activism in Chiapas, Guatemala, and enclaves in North America. The goal is for students not only to build up a cultural-geographic knowledge about Mesoamerica in terms of cultural content, but also the ways anthropologists have examined those cultures, and the processes of change and continuity that have shaped them.

Issues to be dealt with include colonization and conflict, legacies of pre-Spanish civilizations, ethnicity and gender, "religious" beliefs and practices, political-economic changes, indigenous identity and activism, and modern transnational flows of people, commodities, and ideas. Special attention will be given to the Maya Area and to recent political and cultural activism in Chiapas, Guatemala, and Mesoamerican enclaves in North America. Lectures, readings, and discussions will draw parallels to other parts of the world.

This course counts toward the major in Latin American Studies.

It will offer an excellent introduction to Mesoamerica for students considering studying in Puebla, Mexico through the Wellesley’s Study Abroad program at the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP). Students interested in human rights activism, development programs, or doctoral work related to Latin America will also find this course informative.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class participation is required. Participation consists of more than mere attendance. Students are expected to participate in discussions in class or online, and pose or answer questions when appropriate. In order to participate in classroom discussions, students should study all required readings, complete short take-home assignments, and watch required films BEFORE coming to class. This will require that students plan in advance how they will complete the assignments, especially given that the quantity of reading varies from class to class. Students should learn to SKIM where appropriate.

Discussion presentation: Each student must lead discussion of required and/or recommended readings for at least one class meeting. Students should prepare and distribute a brief summary of important points before leading the discussion.

Short Assignments: Students must complete five short writing assignments, typically consisting of "reading notes" or "thought papers" of less than 2 pages, dealing with course readings, films. Assignments must be passed in (or posted to FirstClass) by the start of class on the days they are due.

Midterm Exam: A one-hour midterm exam will be administered during week 7. There will be no final exam.

Term paper project: Students must write an original research paper on a topic to be approved by the instructor by the fourth week of class. Excluding the title page and citations, the paper should be 15-20 pages long. In the preparation of this paper, students are expected to refer to relevant required course readings while also using sources from outside of class, including at least one book-length ethnography and
at least 3 peer-reviewed articles from standard social-scientific journals. Specific requirements will be distributed in week 3. To insure that students are making timely progress with their projects, specific assignments will be scheduled, including a discussion with the instructor, a paper proposal, location and description of bibliographic materials, an in-class presentation, and the final paper.

**GRADING:**

Grading: Course grades will be calculated approximately as follows:
- 25% midterm exam
- 20% short take-home assignments
- 20% in-class presentations and participation
- 35% term paper project

**ADDITIONAL EXPECTATIONS:**

Meeting with Instructor: All students are expected to meet with the instructor during the first weeks of class, to discuss student objectives regarding the course. Subsequently, students are encouraged to stop by the instructor’s regular office hours (or arrange alternative meetings if this is impossible) to discuss course or other topics at their leisure or necessity. Students are also encouraged to offer suggestions about improvements to class structure.

Electronic Conference: Students are expected to check the First-Class course conference regularly. This syllabus is meant as a guideline; the instructor reserves the prerogative to change or add assignments and readings.

Cell-phones should be turned off or set to “vibrate” during class. Any student whose cell telephone rings during class will be obliged to dance before the class for one-minute, while the rest of the class enjoys the conversion of classroom disruption into a teaching moment.

**READINGS**

The following **required books** are for sale in Stanford Bookstore. Textbooks are also on reserve in Clapp Library:

- Lynn Stephen (2002)—*Zapata lives!: Histories and cultural politics in southern Mexico*
- Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, ed. (1996)—*I, Rigoberta Menchú: an Indian woman in Guatemala*
- Gaspar Pedro González (1998)—*Return of the Maya*
- Edward Fischer (2001)—*Cultural Logics and Global Economies: Maya Identity in Thought & Practice*
- Roberto González (2001)—*Zapotec Science: Farming and Food in the Northern Sierra of Oaxaca*
- Robert Carmack et al. (2006)—*Legacy of Mesoamerica*

**Additional readings** will be made available on a disk, hung in front of the instructor’s door (PNE 344) for students to read or copy as they wish. Please do not remove the disk from the building and please return the disk to the door quickly. (Should this system prove inefficient, readings will be posted on First-class E-reserves).

**SCHEDULE:**

--------------------------------------------------------- WEEK 1 ------------------------------------------------------

**Jan. 30: Course Description and Introduction to Mesoamerica**


Feb. 2: Formative Civilizations
• Chapter 1, The Legacy of Mesoamerica, pp. 38-77, skim chapter 11.
• Haslip Viera, et al., "Robbing Native American Cultures"
  Receive a map and a list of sites to be located and memorized.

--------------------------------------------------------------- WEEK 2 ---------------------------------------------------------------

Feb 6: Pre-Colonial Social Organization and Spanish Parallels
• Chapters 2-4, The Legacy of Mesoamerica. pp. 78-180.
• Blanton and Feinman, pp. 673-682

Feb. 9: The Spanish Invasion
• Stephanie Wood, “Pictorial Images of Spaniards” pp. 23-59
• El Requirimiento (text to be distributed in class)

--------------------------------------------------------------- WEEK 3 ---------------------------------------------------------------

Feb. 13: Colonial Social Order ➔ Neocolonialism of the “Independence” Era
• Chapter 5, 7, 8 of The Legacy of Mesoamerica; Skim Chapter 6
• Eric Wolf, "Closed Corporate Peasant Communities" pp. 1-18.
• Look over the website "Bobby Vaughn’s Black Mexico Homepage"
  http://www.afromexico.com/index.htm

Feb 16: Land and Peasantry
• Stavenhagen, Rodolfo. "Seven fallacies about Latin America." pp. 22-35
• Skim Legacy of Mesoamerica, Chap. 9
  Short Assignment # 1 Due.

--------------------------------------------------------------- WEEK 4 ---------------------------------------------------------------

Feb. 20: Indigenismo and “modern” Indigenous identities
• Zapata Lives, Chapters 1-4 (skim chapter 1)

Feb. 23: Mestizaje and Gender
• Judith Friedlander, "What it means to be Indian in Hueyapan," pp 67-94.
• Virginia Tilley, Seeing Indians, Chapter “what is an Indian”
• Skim Legacy of Mesoamerica, Chapter 12

TERM PAPER ABSTRACTS DUE (Please post them on First-class conference for Anth 260)

--------------------------------------------------------------- WEEK 5 ---------------------------------------------------------------

Feb. 27: Case Study of Indigenous/Peasant knowledge
• Zapotec Science (through chapter 4)

March 2: Economics of Reciprocity and Religion
Reading:  • Zapotec Science (finish book)
Short Assignment # 2 due.

------------------------------------------------------------- WEEK 6 -------------------------------------------------------------

March 6: Missionary Marketing
 • Sheldon Annis, Chapter 5 of God and Production in a Guatemalan Town
 • Legacy of Mesoamerica, Chap. 14

March 9: FILM

------------------------------------------------------------- WEEK 7 -------------------------------------------------------------

13 March: MIDTERM EXAM

PRELIMINARY TERM PAPER BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE (to be posted on First-Class conference)

16 March: NO CLASS

------------------------------------------------------------- WEEK 8 -------------------------------------------------------------

March 16-25: SPRING BREAK

------------------------------------------------------------- WEEK 9 -------------------------------------------------------------

March 27: Land, Labor, and Conflict
 • Shelton Davis, 1988 "Sowing the Seeds of Violence." pp. 3-36.
 • I… Rigoberta Menchú (whole book)

March 30: Remembering Guatemalan Genocide
 • Return of the Maya (whole book)

------------------------------------------------------------- WEEK 10 -------------------------------------------------------------

April 3: The Zapatista Uprising in Chiapas
 • Zapata Lives, Chapters 4-7
 • J. Rus and G. Collier pp. 33-61
 • Legacy of Mesoamerica Chap. 10
 Assignment # 3 is Due

April 6: Oaxaca: Rebellion or Participatory Democracy?
 • Zapata Lives, Chapters 8-11
 • TBA on the 2006-2007 protests in Oaxaca

------------------------------------------------------------- WEEK 11 -------------------------------------------------------------

April 10: Globalization and the Cultivating of Autonomy
 • Cultural Logics and Global Economies

April 13: Maya Social Justice Movements
• Earle and Simonelli, *Uprising of Hope*, pp. 179-210

--------------------------------------------------------- WEEK 12 ---------------------------------------------------------

March 17: Monday Schedule; ANTHRO 260 will not meet.

April 20: Indigenous people on Indigeneity
• *Legacy of Mesoamerica*, chapter 13 (and look back at Chapter 6)
• Montejo “Pan-Mayanism” (chapter. 2 of *Maya Intellectual Renaissance*, pp. 37-60)

Short assignment # 4

--------------------------------------------------------- WEEK 13 ---------------------------------------------------------

April 24: Immigration
• Maria de los Angeles C. "Rural women and migration in Latin America," 239-260.
• Quetzil Castaneda, “Tourism Wars in the Yucatán” pp. 8-9

April 27: Tourism
• Walter E Little, "Home as a place of exhibition and Performance” pp. 163-181
• one reading about textiles, TBA

Short Assignment # 5 Due

--------------------------------------------------------- WEEK 14 ---------------------------------------------------------

May 1: Current Events, Paper Presentations, and Discussions
• Finish *Legacy of Mesoamerica*
• Other readings TBA

May 4: FILM

--------------------------------------------------------- WEEK 15 ---------------------------------------------------------

May 8: Final Class: “Mesoamerican Nutrition”
(May 10-14 = Reading Period)

FINAL PAPERS DUE

May 15-21 = EXAM WEEK