ARCHAEOLOGY CORE COURSE
ANTH 603 Spring 2010
T 1:30-4:00 p.m. Saunders 345

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Course Objectives

ANTH 603 is the foundation course for our archaeology program and reviews the development of a variety of theoretical approaches over the last century of work. We have two central goals in this class: (1) to understand historical trends in how archaeologists construct knowledge; and (2) to examine a range of strategies that archaeologists use to evaluate knowledge claims. To meet these goals, we first examine “first principles”: archaeology as an academic discipline, epistemology and explanation, the role of theory in archaeological interpretation, and key concepts of time/change and culture. The second part of the course examines theoretical approaches for explaining culture change or culture transformation. The third part addresses several theoretical frameworks with close ties to anthropology and history (e.g., neo-idealist interpretive and neo-historical/contextual approaches; practice and agency theories; indigenous theories of identity). This survey illustrates the active presence of multiple archaeologies and their intellectual and epistemological relationships to the discipline of anthropology (and to other social and historical sciences), and should prepare you for advanced seminars in selected topics in archaeological theory.

Course Organization

As a graduate seminar, the burden is on you to carefully read the assigned materials and to reflect on, discuss, disagree with, and comprehend the major theoretical movements in archaeology. My tasks as instructor are to choose the readings and evaluate student performance. After the first three weeks of class, one student will be assigned each week to lead discussion of the readings; two other students will be assigned specific topics for formal seminar presentations. Student participation is essential to the success of each weekly session: all students should complete all of the assigned readings prior to each class meeting, complete the 3-page weekly readings summary, and identify at least two questions or discussion topics.

Students are expected to comprehend material at the level of theory and concept and to master (i.e., commit to memory) sufficient detail to illustrate discussion points. I do not expect you to memorize a multitude of details (e.g., dating of smudge pits, Luo ceramic designs, or the precise configuration of Poverty Point settlement patterns). You should, however, understand key concepts for the week (these are listed) and also know how/when to use specific data and particular research findings to bear in order to elaborate discussion on a higher level of abstraction.

Student Facilitation of Seminars

An appropriate strategy for the discussion leader is to develop a PowerPoint that summarizes subthemes, uses a case study to illustrate themes, raises specific questions to clarify details of the readings, and formulates general questions to engage in subsequent group discussion. Students
must address some (but not necessarily all) of the listed “potential case studies” and topics from the list that follows the reading assignments. The presentation should be 45 minutes- 1 hour, followed by discussion. The discussion leader will need to consult additional readings beyond the course assignments (at least two). The discussion leader should also distribute a 1-2 paragraph abstract or one-page outline of the presentation to the class and a 1-2 page bibliographic list of literature used to prepare this presentation. Appropriate sources include recently published texts, books and peer-reviewed journals. The discussion leader will hand in the outline (or notes or text) s/he prepares for the discussion. (When you are the discussion leader, you do not need to hand in the weekly summary; just submit your outline or notes or text).

Students are also expected to participate actively in this semester-long survey of archaeological method and theory. Active participation requires: (1) taking primary responsibility for two (2) articles each class session to the extent that peers (and the instructor) can ask detailed questions about the article’s argument, methodology, and epistemology; and (2) preparing several key discussion points for each class. To actively participate, all students must read and understand all readings without imposing their particular theoretical bias. Given the heavy reading load, students may wish to establish a reading and discussion group to meet outside of regular class hours. Students are also encouraged to consult additional readings beyond those required for the course in order to participate fully in the class.

Required Texts:


Course Grades

Grades are calculated on a 100-point system. Weekly summaries = 50 points; Participation (attendance and discussion) = 20 points; Class Presentation and facilitation = 30 points.

Weekly Summary of Readings

Students are required to submit a 3-page single-spaced essay each week (for weeks 2-17) that discusses the week’s readings. Some readings are programmatic statements; others are theoretical discussions; still others review the literature critically; and some readings are case studies in archaeological method and theory. The objective of your weekly essay is to draw together your thoughts about a group of readings. The first half of each essay should summarize the week’s assigned readings. By this is meant a summary of the goals, description of databases and analytical methods used in case studies; statement of central findings of the study and evaluation of the study. Decide whether the author poses questions that can be explored using archaeological methods. Identify the authors’ underlying assumptions, and determine whether these assumptions are reasonable or whether they undermine the foundation of the argument. Investigate whether the presentations of the problem, the data and the interpretations follow a clear line of argument. Think about what elements, if any, would strengthen the authors’ position and research. Then consider the ways in which any articles challenge those we have read previously, or those that we are reading for the week.

The second half of your essay should concentrate on the general topic that the readings concern. A good strategy is to organize the essay around one or more general statements, and use the individual articles to illustrate your point. Try to strike a balance between general statements that apply to the group of articles, and specific points that refer to the individual articles.
WEEK 1 1/11 INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE


Key concepts for this week: critical theory, Thomsen, Squier and Davis

WEEK 2 1/18 ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE YEAR 2010 CE


Key concepts for this week: professionalism in archaeology, ethics, decolonizing, accountability

WEEK 3 1/25 HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGY: FROM CULTURE HISTORY TO PROCESSUAL ARCHAEOLOGY


Key concepts for this week: culture history, idiographic, nomothetic, culture process

WEEK 4 2/1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL REASONING: HOW IT’S DONE


Key concepts for this week: positivism, epistemology, ontological materialism, realism, idealism
WEEK 5  2/8  COMPETING APPROACHES TO THE STRUCTURE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE: SOCIAL SCIENCE MODELS


Key concepts for this week: functionalism, behaviorism (social sciences), V.G. Childe, Karl Marx, G. Clarke

WEEK 6  2/15  COMPETING APPROACHES TO THE STRUCTURE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE: BIOLOGICAL SCIENCE MODELS


Key concepts for this week: behavioral ecology, cultural transmission, sociobiology, evolutionary psychology

WEEK 7  2/22  COMPETING APPROACHES TO THE STRUCTURE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE: ALTERNATIVES TO SCIENCE


Key concepts for this week: *habitus*, processual, post-modernism, structuralist post-structuralist archaeology

WEEK 8  3/1  BEYOND INTELLECTUAL “REDLINING”: TOWARD SYNTHESSES


**Key concepts for this week:** critical realism, archaeology as social science

**WEEK 9**  3/8  **ARCHAEOLOGICAL USES OF INFERENCE**


**Key concepts for this week:** analogical reasoning, ethnoarchaeology, cultural transmission, middle-range theory

**WEEK 10**  3/15  **ARTIFACT TYPOLOGY & CLASSIFICATION**


**Key concepts for this week:** culture history, style vs. function, artifact classification strategies

**WEEK 11**  3/22  **NO CLASS: SPRING RECESS**

**WEEK 12**  3/29  **DEFINING ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNITS: STYLE**


**Key concepts for this week:** theoretical pluralism, technological traditions, social boundaries, cultural transmission

**WEEK 13 4/5 SOCIAL COMPLEXITY, EVOLUTIONIST & EVOLUTIONARY**


**Key concepts for this week:** neoevolutionary models, unilinear vs. multilinear approaches, J. Steward

**WEEK 14 4/12 POLITICAL ECONOMY**


**Key concepts for this week:** chiefdoms, production, consumption, distribution, agency

**WEEK 15 4/19 SCALAR ISSUES IN THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF COMPLEX SOCIETIES**


**Key concepts for this week:** heterarchy, "house societies", historical ecology, landscape archaeology

**WEEK 16  4/26  ETHICS, EPISTEMOLOGY, AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRACTICE**


**Key concepts for this week:** indigenous archaeology, Aboriginalism, essentialism, pluralism

**WEEK 17  5/3  ARCHAEOLOGY AND IDENTITY**


**Key concepts for this week:** G. Kosinna, Hedgehogs and Foxes, relativism/objectivism/subjectivity, obloquy