(21652) Introduction to Archaeology

MW 11:15 am-12:05 pm, TU 1:25-2:15 pm • SB 050 • Stacie King

This course is an introduction to the methods and theories of archaeology. Archaeology is the study of past human societies based on material remains left behind by people. We will explore the different kinds of anthropological questions archaeologists have asked about human societies in the past, and the different ways that archaeologists formulate interpretations about social organization, subsistence, environment, architecture, trade, economic systems, and political life based on archaeological data. You will learn about goals of archaeology as a sub-discipline within anthropology and the development of archaeology as a scientific discipline.

Archaeologists employ a wide range of techniques to collect and analyze material remains, including settlement survey, excavation, environmental reconstruction, laboratory analysis of artifacts, dating techniques, and micro-scale analytical methods borrowed from the physical sciences. Throughout the semester, we will draw on examples of archaeological research from across the globe and will discuss major issues and transitions in world prehistory. Examples include the peopling of the New World, the transition to sedentary lifestyles, the development of cities and monumental architecture, and interpretations of everyday social life, identity, family structure, and community membership. We will also discuss contemporary issues related to archaeology, such as museums, site preservation, looting, and the use of archaeological past in nation building and ethnic politics. Students should come away from this class with a solid background in how archaeologists do their work, what we have learned from archaeological research about ancient human societies, and how archaeology can be applied to the contemporary world. This course meets for two 50-minute lectures and one discussion section per week. Students in the Honors discussion section will participate in section exercises, discussions, and activities along with the professor. Students are asked to create classification schemes for artifacts, identify plants remains, manufacture stone tools, determine a site chronology, and other hands-on activities. Students will also consider the complex issues involved in doing archaeology in the 21st century. In the Honors section, students will debate important ethical, practical, and analytical issues involving site interpretation, the practice of archaeology, and the presentation of archaeological findings to the public.

Stacie King is deeply interested in the long-term histories of various peoples in ancient Oaxaca, Mexico. Her research explores networks of trade and communication, the production of cotton cloth, multi-ethnic landscapes, soundscapes and the senses, culture contact and colonialism, reuse and social memory, the relationship between food sharing and household membership, mortuary practices, and the meaning of residential burial. Her early work focused on everyday life in an indigenous Chatino village dating from A.D. 975-1220 in southern coastal Oaxaca. More recently, Stacie has started a long-term archaeological project with community members in Nejapa and Tavela of southeastern Oaxaca that examines conquest and colonialism along trade routes connecting highland Oaxaca and the Pacific coastal Isthmus.