

Anthropology 3838.80/3838W.80/6838.80

Archaeological Theory and Practice

Fall 2013, Tues and Thur 12:45 – 2:00

2110 G Street Rm. 201

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 2:30 – 4:30, or by appointment.

General Course Description:

The material record of the “past” is the main source for archaeologists to make interpretations concerning human societies. There is a great diversity of theoretical approaches and models archaeologists use to explain the structure of archaeological remains and these frameworks shape archaeological investigation. This course provides an overview of major theories and positions in American archaeology as well as examining the practice and ethics of archaeology. While this course is not intended to provide an exhaustive survey or history of all types of archaeological theory, much of the semester will present a review and critique of the major trends in archaeology since the 1960s. Students will engage with the primary literature written by some of the most prominent contributors to archaeological theory and practice, and examine significant ethical issues in the field.

Learning Outcomes:

- 1) Students will explore and learn archaeologists’ contributions to theory and if there is a coherent body of theory to which most archaeologists subscribe.
- 2) Students will learn how archaeologists use data to advance arguments and theoretical positions, and will be able to critique these efforts.
- 3) Students will critically assess important ethical, political, and practical impacts of archaeology.
- 4) Students will analyze archaeologists’ self-appointed position of stewards of the past.
- 5) In order to further students’ professional preparation, throughout the semester we will engage in examinations of the politics and practice of archaeology, from publishing/citation strategies to ethical issues, such as archaeologists’ relationships with Native Americans, museums, collectors and the public.
- 6) Students will examine—and contribute to—debates about whether archaeologists can overcome entrenched theoretical perspectives and navigate difficult ethical issues to produce a richer, more cooperative discipline.

Prerequisites:

As a capstone class for archaeology majors, it is expected students have had exposure to archaeology. For students who have not had much background in the anthropological theory from which much archaeological theory comes, I recommend looking at Marvin Harris’ *Rise of Anthropological Theory*, on reserve at Gelman.

WID Students will have the opportunity to produce an outline and revised drafts of 3 essays, and will receive a cumulative grade for each essay. They will also write a 1 – 2 page critique of a student essay. A schedule for assignment/revisions will be distributed.

Graduate Students will have additional readings (see reading list), assignments and meetings to be discussed. Any interested undergraduates are welcome in these discussions as well.

10/01-T	Structuralist Approaches.	Essay 1
10/03-Th	Marxist Archaeology.	
10/08-T	The Postprocessual Critique of Archaeology.	
10/10-Th	Postprocessualism Applied and Reaction: Can Postprocessualism be Scientific?	
10/15-T	Radical Postprocessualism and Critical Archaeology.	
10/17-Th	Agency/Practice Theory: Basic Concepts. REVIEW: analyzing a pot from different theoretical perspectives.	Examine pot (on Blackboard)
10/22-T	Agency/Practice Theory: Applied and Appropriated.	
10/24-Th	World Systems Approaches and Post-colonial Archaeology.	
10/29-T	Ethnographies of Archaeology	
10/31-Th	No class; midterm/epistemology essay due in department office by 4:45 pm!!	Essay 2
11/05-T	The Politics of the Past: Colonialism, Museums and Descendant Communities.	
11/07-Th	Native Americans and Archaeologists.	
11/12-T	NAGPRA and Kennewick Man.	Present ethics essays
11/14-Th	Archaeological Ethics: Preservation and CRM.	Present ethics essays
11/19-T	Archaeological Ethics: Looting, Owning, and Protecting the Past.	Present ethics essays; Essay 3 due
11/21-Th	Archaeology of Gender and Identity: Theory and Issues.	
11/26-T	Gendered and Alternative Archaeologies: Case Studies.	
11/28-Th	No Class – thanksgiving recess.	
12/03-T	Make up day; no class.	
12/05-Th	The Future of Theory: the Return of Cultural History or the Ultimate Triumph of Scientific Archaeology?	
12/12	Take Home Final Exam – due in department by 4:45 pm!!	FINAL DUE!!

Class Policies and Course Requirements:

Attendance:

Regular attendance is required, as 10% of your grade will come from informed participation in class discussions. No more than 3 unexcused absences will be allowed. Students must notify me in advance

Terms and Concepts

If there are terms and concepts that are unfamiliar to students (such as “functionalism”), the Johnson textbook has a very useful glossary. Learn it.

Article Czar Presentation and Essay – See Rubric on p. 7

For each class, a student will serve as “Article Czar” for that week’s articles. The student’s duties are to provide a brief synthesis, either on the themes of the articles as a whole or a brief overview of each article, and to pose questions that will provoke class discussion. One question for **each** of that day’s readings must be **posted on the class website 24 hours before class** (see “Discussions” section on Blackboard menu); all other students are expected to think about the questions before class. Johnson and *Death by Theory* chapters will **NOT** be included in discussions, although czars should know examples/case studies brought up in those chapters. Czars will be expected to talk for 10 to 15 minutes on the articles and/or themes, plus they should be able to comment on each article throughout that day’s class. They should also provide a 1 to 2 minute temporal and spatial background on the site(s)/culture(s) covered by their articles. On the day of the presentation, the Czar will submit a 4 – 5 page essay that provides a brief synopsis of each article (excluding Johnson and *Death by Theory* chapters) and **especially** a critique, which assesses the strengths and weaknesses of each article.

Essay Guidelines

All written assignments must be typed, double spaced, not have excessive margins, be an original, solo-produced work, and must conform in style to the standard employed in American archaeology for bibliographic references. A guide to this style can be found on Blackboard, and in the October 1992 issue of the journal *American Antiquity* (Vol. 57, pp. 749-770). The Reading List has been prepared from this guideline; students, however, do not have to follow the indents structure – just be consistent.

Bibliometric Essay (Essay 1)

Early in the semester students will learn about citation strategies used by archaeologists in order to situate themselves – and enhance their claims to legitimacy – within the literature. Students will analyze an article by Charles Spencer (see Reading List). Rather than focusing on the fine points of the article, concentrate on what he is trying to say and how he is situating himself – and his research – in the larger anthropological issue(s) he pursues. **Quantify** and examine the within-text citations of the 4 most cited authors. Using the internet, the American Anthropological Association *Guide to Anthropology Departments* (on reserve at Gelman), etc., explore their relationships to Spencer, and what kind of authority/legitimacy Spencer attempts to establish with his citation strategies. Dialogues in *Death by Theory* will also aid you. Students will present their findings and conclusions in a 5 to 6-page essay. **Hint:** by the due-date, you will have read articles by authors which will enhance your understanding of Spencer’s theoretical and professional relationships.

Epistemology Essay/Midterm (Essay 2)

As a combination essay and take-home midterm, students will demonstrate their knowledge of theory up to this point. After reading the very polarized viewpoints of processualists and postprocessualists, students will see a basic chasm between the validity of knowledge claims by these archaeologists. Can there be any common ground between two seemingly opposed camps? An attempt to bridge this gulf is provided in the VanPool and VanPool (1999) article on the Reading List. Students will read this essay, and compare their presentation of a “scientific postprocessualism” with what they have read in previous articles on both processualism and postprocessualism. Students will also refer to a series of critiques on the VanPools’ article 2 years later in *American Antiquity* by Hutson (2001) and Arnold and Wilkens (2001), and the VanPools’ (2001) response to their critics (all on the Reading List for 10/10). For the essay, imagine you have been asked by *American Antiquity* to write the “final word” on this debate. Write a 6 to 7-page essay that argues either for or against the VanPools’

Rubric and Grading Procedures for Article Czar:

Each student will do an oral presentation that both summarizes the major points of several readings but also critiques them and provides questions that will generate class discussion. Part of your grade will be determined by the thoughtfulness of your questions on the readings, which will be posted 24 hours before class on blackboard. I recommend that you come into class with a series of bullet points to guide your discussion of each article; this will preclude you actually simply reading something and – even more important – will ensure that you are more organized, so you are not fumbling through your notes on the readings:

Evaluation

Your final grade on this assignment will be a combination of your oral presentation as well as your written essay.

I will evaluate your presentation as follows:

A) Engagement with concepts and ideas of the articles – 50%

Students will not only provide a summary, but note what aspects of the readings engaged you; think about how specific authors' concepts are related to what you're talking about. You must pose questions that get to the heart of the authors' arguments, encouraging your fellow students to critique how well these arguments have been supported. The questions you pose on Blackboard will be particularly revealing in how well you have engaged with the material.

B) Organization and effectiveness of presentation – 50%

Put the piece together carefully, making sure you're touching on the major points in order of significance.

How well do you get your point across? Be aware of some common pitfalls. For instance, avoid the word "like"; that word can destroy an otherwise acceptable presentation. Try to make your presentation as smooth as possible. But DO work on being smooth and conversational while also attending to correct diction, grammar, and word-choice.

As noted above, have a prepared presentation in the form of bullet points, which will be very effective in helping you organize your presentation, and ensuring you hit all the major topics/themes that you plan to cover.

Students may generate some form of visual component (such as Powerpoint) for their presentation, but this is not required.

I will evaluate your written essay as follows:

A) Effectiveness of article summary – 40%

A well written and focused essay provides enough information about the article, establishing context, so that the reader is well oriented. At the same time, a summary avoids unnecessary details, and provides an overview of the major contributions of the author(s). If a case study is involved, from where and when do the data derive? What kinds of data were recovered? Briefly summarize the major points the author puts forward in making an argument as well as the data presented to support it.

B) Effectiveness of critique – 60%

A good critique assesses both the strengths and weaknesses of the author's arguments. What is the author attempting to do, and how successfully is it done? Are the data sufficient to support the argument? Is the tone of the article appropriate? Why you may comment on the effectiveness of the author's writing, simply noting as your critique "article was poorly written" will not be sufficient.