

Department: Anthropology

Course No.: 1500 [102]

Credits: 3

Title: Great Discoveries in Archaeology

Contact: Sally McBrearty

Content Area: CA2 Social Sciences

Diversity: CA4 Diversity and Multiculturalism- International

Catalog Copy: Survey of important discoveries in archaeology spanning the whole of human prehistory across the globe. Current issues, methods, and techniques relevant to archaeology are explored.

Course Information: A. This goals of this course are to: 1) introduce students to a wide range of important archaeological discoveries that document human evolution, peopling of the world, the origins of agriculture, the development of writing, and the development of civilizations across the globe; 2) present these finds in the context of archaeological theory; 3) introduce students to the methods used by archaeologists, the history of and current themes within the discipline; 4) encourage critical thinking with respect to interpretations of the past; and 5) stimulate a heightened sensitivity to ethical concerns. B. Reading basic texts, supplementary articles, images of artifacts/sites and museum catalogs online. Exams include a test, midterm, and final. Writing assignments include a term paper. C. A broad view of “great” discoveries is adopted to include scientific discoveries that have furthered archaeology as a discipline (e.g. the notion of deep time, dating techniques, etc.) and archaeological discoveries that mark important events throughout the course of human prehistory. Important events include human evolution, the timing and nature of peopling of the world, the radical shift to dependence upon agriculture, the invention of writing, and development of urban societies. Sites from Africa, Europe, Asia, the Americas, and Australasia highlight the diversity of finds across the globe. Recurrent themes include varying interpretations of the past, ethics and looting, and cultural heritage management.

Meets Goals of Gen Ed.: This course satisfies all of the requirements of the goals of General Education. In particular, it allows students to acquire “intellectual breadth and versatility” through their exposure to a broad array of archaeological discoveries that document the “diversity of human culture and experience” through time. Additionally, students are introduced to the methods that archeologists use to interpret finds providing them with “a working understanding of the processes by which they can continue to acquire and use knowledge.” “Critical judgment and moral sensitivity” are recurring themes throughout the course and these are developed more fully during discussion sessions. Finally students “acquire awareness of their era and society” by developing a deeper understanding of the various events that have taken place during the course of human prehistory: these include the development of agriculture, increased social complexity, and cultural diversity across the globe.

CA2 Criteria: 1. Due to the large temporal scope and broad geographic focus of this course, students are exposed to numerous avenues of inquiry, various concepts relevant to human prehistory, and the range of theoretical approaches used by archaeologists to examine past societies. The history of the discipline, together with the evolution of intellectual thought, is discussed alongside relevant archaeological discoveries. 2. Alongside descriptions of each archaeological case study presented, students are introduced to the methods used to find, excavate, collect, examine, and interpret data. Ethics within archaeology is repeatedly examined: topics include looting of archaeological site, illegal trade of antiquities, preservation of cultural heritage, and conflict and cooperation between archaeologists and living descendants of peoples being studied. 3. The “ways in which individuals, groups, and societies behave and influence one another” form an integral component of the course. Social structure is discussed with respect to hunter-gatherers; institutionalized craft specialization, long-distance trade, and state-level societies following the origins of agriculture; and investigations of enhanced social complexity within urban societies. In each case interactions with the natural environment varied dramatically. The intensity and manner of landscape use is presented. 4. As a direct consequence of available data, archaeological investigations generally examine peoples of the past at the “cultural or societal” level, although isolated discussions of the individual are presented in this course. Students are introduced to the tools used to “analyze social, political, or economic groups” of past societies through their exposure to current methods and theory within archaeology. Cross-cultural interactions are discussed where relevant to the discoveries being presented.

CA4 Criteria: 1. Since this class spans the entire course of human prehistory (including human evolution, the rise of agriculture, the creation of art and writing, and the development of urban societies and civilizations across the globe), an emphasis on the “variety of human experiences, perceptions, thoughts, values and/or modes of creativity” lies at the very heart of the course. 2. This course presents an introduction to the intellectual history of archaeology and archaeological theory. “Interpretive systems and/or social structures” as “cultural creations” are discussed within this framework and explored further through discussions of interpretations of the past (particularly with reference to cave art, archaeological investigations of ideology and world views). 3. Important parallels between societies can also be drawn. Similarities between the structure and organization of civilizations throughout the world are discussed in the contexts of 1) the origins of agriculture and 2) the formation of state-level and urban societies. 4. This course does not specifically address human rights and migration. Sensitivity to the concerns of a number of groups (including Native Americans) with respect to archaeological investigations is fostered. 5. The “dynamics of social, political, and/or economic power” form an integral component of the course. Lectures chart the diverse ways in which societies have organized themselves throughout human prehistory. Associated theory provides an understanding of how this diversity can be explained.

Role of Grad Students: Graduate students would be expected to attend lectures, lead discussion groups, hold office hours for students, and grade exams/papers. They would be supervised by the faculty member teaching the course. Weekly meetings would be held to evaluate/discuss student progress, section meetings, and ensure equality in grading.