



AGUACATE REGIONAL ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECT, BELIZE

Course ID: HIS 489

May 13-June 9, 2024

Academic Credits: 8 Semester Credit Units (Equivalent to 12 Quarter Units)

School of Record: Culver Stockton College

DIRECTORS:

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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Aguacate Regional Archaeology Project investigates a series of ancient Maya minor centers and their surrounding settlements. The sites are spread across a series of escarpments at the edge of the Yalbac Hills in western Belize. The region features an unusually high density of small, monumental sites, with a wide range of structures from elite residences, temples and ball courts to formal plazuela groups and individual house mounds. Current models of ancient Maya settlement distribution are insufficient to explain the density and extent of Maya populations revealed by recent advances in remote sensing. Particularly striking are examples of extensive house mounds and architectural remains located in regions at a distance from major centers. The suite of sites in the Aguacate region are located at an interstice connecting multiple zones of settlement, present a unique opportunity to understand how Maya polities were connected and how settlements were organized in what were previously considered to be fringe, peripheral areas.

The wide variety of site and feature types in the project area allows us to provide training across the whole range of fundamental archaeological field skills. Students will gain experience in both regional and site survey methods, test excavations, exposure of structures, and the identification, recovery and processing of a wide variety of artifact types. Over the course of the program, students will become familiar with several phases of executing an archaeological field project, from establishing the research question, through data recovery and the initial phases of analysis.

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER

The Center for Field Sciences was established to support field training in a range of sciences at sites across the world. Traveling and conducting field work involves risk. Students interested in participating in any CFS program must weigh the potential risk against the value of education provided for the program sites of their choosing.

Risk is inherent in everything we do and the CFS takes risk seriously. A committee of leading scholars review each field school location prior to approval. Once a program is accepted, the CFS continually monitor conditions at the program site, its academic quality and ability to conduct as safe of an experience as possible.

The CFS does not provide trip or travel cancellation insurance. Students are encouraged to explore such insurance policies on their own. Post Covid 19, most basic policies do not cover trip cancelation due to pandemics. If you wish to purchase an insurance policy that cover such contingencies, explore Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) plans. Insuremytrip.com, Squaremouth.com or Travelguard.com are possible websites where students may explore different insurance policies.

You should be aware that conditions in the field are different than those you experience in your home, dorms or college town. You will be exposed to the elements, live in rustic accommodation, and expect to engage in physical activity daily.

We do our best to follow schedule and activities as outlined in this syllabus. Yet local permitting agencies, political, environmental, personal, or weather conditions may force changes. This syllabus, therefore, is only a general commitment. Students should allow flexibility and adaptability as research work is frequently subject to change.

All students must consult medical professionals to ensure they are fit to participate in this program. If you have any medical concerns, please consult your doctor. For all other concerns, please consult with the program director – as appropriate.

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COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Students will become familiar with the fundamentals of archaeological survey, shovel testing, excavation, and artifact identification and recovery.
- Students will become familiar with core concepts in Maya archaeology, including the history of the ancient Maya and the common research concepts and protocol used when working on ancient Maya sites.
- Students will become familiar with the process of research design, project planning, and field operations in archaeology, and the process of adapting and changing those plans in the dynamic environment of archaeological fieldwork.

LEARNT SKILLS

We are aware that many students may not seek academic careers but will pursue employment in the private sector. To that end, we are following the Twin Cairns Skills Log Matrix™ (<https://twincairns.com/skill-set-matrix/>) and will provide training for the following skills:

| Skill | Skill Definition |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Field-Artifact Identification | Ability to identify archaeological artifacts and ecofacts, from both pre contact and historical context Peeples, Matthew A. "Finding a place for networks in archaeology." <i>Journal of Archaeological Research</i> 27 (2019): 451-499. |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Field-Artifact Processing | Understand how to assign artifacts to accepted cultural/geological spheres, across space (classification) & time (seriation) |
| Field-Cartography Principles | Understand cartographic principles and can create easy-to-understand maps |
| Field-Data Recording | Ability to use printed or digital sheets to document & record field data |
| Field-Excavation General Principles | Know how to excavate in cultural or arbitrary layers, document and record all excavation activity |
| Field-Grid & Trench Layout | Ability to lay excavation grid and generate reliable trench outline for excavations |
| Field-Phase I | Ability to conduct archaeology phase I work: identification |
| Field-Phase III | Ability to conduct archaeology phase III work: Data recovery |
| Field-Photography | Ability to take clear images of various feature, artifact & soil colors at various light and field depth conditions |
| Field-Project Management | Understand the logistics, time management, product and HR needs of field projects |
| Field-Shovel/Test Pit Sampling | Know how to conduct and record systematic test excavation programs, using either shovel or test pits methodology |
| Field-Stratigraphy | Ability to identify, measure and describe stratigraphic layering of a site |
| Lab-Artifact Documentation | Ability to measure, record, photographed and classify various artifact types in the lab/post ex setting |
| Lab-Geoprocessing | Understand the intellectual framework and digital tools necessary for processing geographic and related data |
| Survey-General Principles | Ability to conduct & document systematic, pedestrian survey using a topographic map — printed or digital |
| Survey-GPS Navigation | Ability to navigate to given coordinates using a GPS receiver |
| Survey-GPS Recording | Ability to use GPS instruments to conduct, document & record digital spatial survey data |
| Survey-Map Reading | Ability to read a topographical map, can navigate by compass to and from provided locations |

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1:

- Monday: Arrival in Belize, students picked up by staff at BZE airport and transported to Belmopan.
- Tuesday: Orientation to Belize and introduction to archaeological methods and techniques at lab in Belmopan.
- Wednesday: Field site visit; introduction to field techniques; acclimation to jungle.
- Thursday-Friday: Regular field work schedule.
- Saturday: Organized group visit to the Xunantunich archaeological reserve.
- Sunday: Free day in Belmopan.

Week 2:

- Monday through Friday: Regular field work schedule.
- Saturday: Organized group visit to the Cahal Pech archaeological reserve; opportunity to visit the weekend market and tourist area in San Ignacio.
- Sunday: Free day in Belmopan.

Week 3:

- Monday through Friday: Regular field work schedule.
- Saturday: Organized group visit to the Lamanai archaeological reserve.
- Sunday: Free day in Belmopan.

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Week 4:

- Monday through Wednesday: Regular field work schedule.
- Thursday: Regular field work schedule, but begin closing operations at site and lab.
- Friday: Lab closeout day; break down and store equipment; general field closeout operations.
- Saturday: Free day.
- Sunday: Students transported to BZE airport by staff for departure.

Course structure may be subject to change upon directors' discretion

TYPICAL WORKDAY

| | |
|---------|--|
| 7:00am | Wake-up call & breakfast |
| 7:30am | Depart Belmopan student housing and travel to field sites |
| 8:00am | Arrive at field sites; safety tailgate review, assign daily tasks and begin work |
| 12:00pm | Lunch break |
| 4:30pm | End of field work and travel back to project lab at Belmopan |
| 5:00pm | Arrive to lab facility, drop off artifacts and tools, return to student housing |
| 6:00pm | Dinner |
| 7:00pm | After-dinner lecture or R&R/free time. |

In case of inclement weather, lectures and lab work will be performed.

LECTURE SCHEDULE

Week 1

Tuesday: Overview of ancient Maya culture and the history of Maya archaeology.

Thursday: Overview of the cultures and history of Belize.

Week 2

Tuesday: Guest lecture on the Pre-Classic and Early Classic periods in Maya archaeology.

Thursday: Overview of developments in the Late Classic and Terminal Classic in Maya archaeology.

Week 3

Tuesday: Ancient Maya site architecture and settlement patterns, and an overview of settlement and regional archaeology.

Thursday: Remote sensing, survey techniques and introduction to concepts in spatial analysis.

Week 4

Tuesday: Research design and project planning in archaeology.

Thursday: Archaeology as cultural resource management; history of archaeological practice in Belize and the United States.

ACADEMIC GRADING MATRIX

Students will be graded based on their work as follows:

- 50% -- Participation in field work activities
- 40% -- Submission of field forms, drawings and data as directed by the instructor
- 10% -- Attendance at planned lectures and field trips

SKILLS MATRIX LEVELS

The school instructors will evaluate the level each student achieved on the list of skills provided above. Each skill will be graded on one of the following three levels:

Basic: Can perform the skill/task with some supervision.

Competent: Can perform the skill/task without any supervision.

Advanced: Can perform the skill/task and teach others how to do it.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

The required minimum attendance for the successful completion of the field school is 85% of the course hours. Any significant delay or early departure from an activity will be calculated as an absence from the activity. An acceptable number of absences for medical or other personal reasons will not be considered if the student catches up on the field school study plan through additional readings, homework or tutorials with program staff members.

PREREQUISITES

None. This is hands-on, experiential learning and students will study on-site how to conduct archaeological research. Field work involves physical work and exposure to the elements and thus requires a measure of understanding that this will not be the typical university learning environment. You will have to work outdoors and will get sweaty and tired. Students are required to come equipped with sufficient excitement and an adequate understanding that field work requires real, hard work, in the sun and wind. Most work on this project takes place in a tropical jungle environment with a variety of stinging plants, biting insects, and other environmental stressors. The work requires patience, discipline, and attention to detail.

PROGRAM ETIQUETTE

We have a twofold responsibility to our host communities on this project. Project housing and logistics are located in the city of Belmopan, the capital of Belize. Fieldwork takes place in Spanish Lookout, a conservative Mennonite religious community. A thorough cultural introduction to both areas will be provided during project orientation online and during the the first week of the field school. Our work relies on permission from both the government of Belize and the community leaders of Spanish Lookout, so it is of the utmost importance that all project members respect their laws, regulations, customs, property boundaries and cultural values.

Please be aware that marijuana is illegal in Belize and there have been students on other projects jailed for possessing or attempting to purchase it.

EQUIPMENT LIST

Required:

- Valid passport (required to enter Belize)
- US Cash for personal expenses (accepted everywhere)
- Personal toilet kit: bath towel, soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, and other necessary personal toiletries.
- Water bladder/Camelback and/or water bottles. Our field director goes through 4-5 liters of water on a hard day.
- a sturdy, reusable laundry bag
- Field journal or notebook, Rite-in-the-Rain brand preferred

Recommendations/suggestions:

Work clothes:

- Sturdy long-pants and long-sleeved shirts
- A good pair of hiking boots (make sure to break them in before arriving in Belize)

- Hiking socks
- Anything that is cool in high humidity and dries quickly is good
- Town/travel clothes
 - Please don't wear revealing items like short shorts, crop tops, muscle tees, etc. in the Mennonite community areas. Bring at least one set of long sleeved shirts/long pants.
- Tennis/running shoes
- Shower/swimming/sandals/flip-flops
- Hat / Bandanas (preferably not red or blue bandanas)
- Something that will protect you from rain and sun that can be stored in your backpack
- Swimsuit
- Battery-operated fan and batteries
- Insect repellent
 - for skin: Deep Woods Off or Off or Skintastic are commonly used - up to about 30%-35% DEET.
 - for clothing and gear: Permanone, or repellent containing permethrin
- Pocket knife
- Pens, pencils, paper, envelopes
 - Postcards and stamps may be purchased locally, but delivery is very slow.
- A waterproof marker (e.g., Sharpie) to mark your laundry with your name
- Backpack ("day pack"): you will use this in the field, to carry your lunch, water, and any other personal items, such as camera, binoculars, paper products, notebooks, and field tools.
- Waterproof backpack fly or application of a waterproofing product
- Garbage bags or dry bags to keep gear dry - it will rain often
- Poncho/rain gear
- Medications and supplements
 - Prescriptions / medications and supplements must be in their original pharmacy containers only - these should include the pharmacy label bearing your name (not anyone else's name).
 - Carrying a copy of your prescription is recommended.
 - Make sure you have enough for the duration of your stay. Keep in mind that some medications spoil quickly in hot humid climates, so a desiccant from your pharmacy should be included in the bottle with any tablets.
- Consider the following: Pepto-Bismol, Imodium, or your favorite anti-diarrhea medication; aspirin, acetaminophen, ibuprofen, naproxen sodium; eye drops, electrolyte solution (Gatorade powder); foot powder, disposable wet wipes for field and camp, minor first aid kit, allergy medications, antibiotic cream or wash
- Earplugs and/or sleeping eye mask
- Reading material
- Trowel, line level, tape measure - contact project staff if you're not sure where to get these or what kind.
- Spare pair of eyeglasses or contact lenses

TRAVEL & MEETING POINT/TIME

We suggest you hold purchasing your airline ticket until six (6) weeks prior to departure date. Natural disasters, political changes, weather conditions and a range of other factors may require the cancelation of a program. The CFS typically takes a close look at local conditions 6-7 weeks prior to program beginning and makes a Go/No Go decision by then. Such time frame still allows for the purchase of deeply discounted airline tickets while protecting students from potential loss of airline ticket costs if CFS is forced to cancel a program.

Please purchase a flight that will have you arriving in Belize International Airport (BZE) on May 13, 2024. The airport is served by United, American and Southwest (Saturdays only). There are two arrival windows for international flights – one around 11am and one around 2pm. Project staff members will wait for students at each of these two windows just outside the arrival hall. Look for staff members holding a sign marked “ARAP”. The airport is very small, so it is basically impossible to get lost or go to the wrong place.

If you missed your connection or your flight is delayed, please call, text or email project director immediately. A local emergency cell phone number will be provided to all enrolled students.



VISA REQUIREMENTS

Tourists entering Belize from the US do not require a visa. Your passport will be stamped with admission good for 30 days. If you plan to remain in Belize or travel regionally after the end of the field school, please contact project staff for advice on how to extend your visa.

MEALS & ACCOMMODATION

Students will stay at a residence in central Belmopan, the capital city of Belize. The field house is located close to the central ring road, within a walking distance to the market and several shops. Students will bunk two to a room. The house has a seating area, kitchen/dining area with refrigerator, and outdoor space which will also be used for artifact processing. Furniture, mattresses, electric fans, and housewares will be provided. The house will **not** have internet access or television, but internet cafes are available within walking distance. If you wish to purchase an internet hotspot, staff can provide direction where and how to get one.

Breakfast, lunch, and dinner will be provided on field days (M-F) and field trip days (some Saturdays). Students are responsible for their meals on non-field trip Saturdays and all Sundays.

Breakfast and lunch will consist of prepared foods from local vendors, e.g. breakfast burritos, rice and beans with fried chicken, sandwiches with French fries and salad. Dinner will consist of cooked meals provided by a local in-house cook. The local staples are rice and beans, chicken, and tortillas, but a wide variety of foods are available, and dinners will vary. Belmopan has many corner stores, food stalls, and restaurants serving various cuisines including Chinese, Italian, Lebanese, El Salvadorean, BBQ and wings, tacos, etc.

Tap water is not potable in Belize. The field house will have a supply of 5-gallon water jugs and a dispenser. Staff will ensure that there is plenty of drinking water available at all times.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

International dialing code: The international dialing code for Belize is +501.

Money/Banks/Credit Cards: Belize uses both US dollars and Belizean dollars. The exchange rate is set at 1 USD:2 BZE. US cash is happily accepted everywhere, but you are likely to receive change in BZ dollars. Many places will not have change for any note larger than \$US20, especially corner stores and food stalls. Credit cards will be accepted at some large stores and most tourist attractions, but not at most small shops.

ATM Availability: In Belmopan there are several ATMs in the city center, within walking distance of the field house. Only use ATMs during the daytime and keep aware of your surroundings while doing so.

Local Language: Belize is a linguistically diverse country. The official language is English, but many people commonly speak Kriol, an English creole. Spanish is also common, and many people are bilingual. It is likely that we will work with people who speak Spanish as their first language and English/Kriol second. There are communities of Kekchi and Mopan Maya speakers, but these are less common in the areas where we work and live. The Mennonite community speaks Plautdietsch (Mennonite Low German) with each other and uses Standard German for texts. But they also mostly speak fluent English. In Belmopan there is also a small Mandarin-speaking Chinese community.

Measure units: degree Celsius (°C), meter (m.), gram (gr.), liter (l)

ACADEMIC CREDITS & TRANSCRIPT

Attending students will be awarded 8 semester credit units (equivalent to 12 quarter credit units). Students will receive a letter grade for attending this field school based on the assessment matrix (above). This program provides a minimum of 160 direct instructional hours. Students are encouraged to discuss the transferability of credit units with faculty and the registrar at their home institutions prior to attending this program.

Students will be able to access their transcript through our School of Record – Culver-Stockton College. C-SC has authorized the National Student Clearinghouse to provide enrollment and degree verification (at <https://tsorder.studentclearinghouse.org/school/select>). Upon completion of a program, students will get an email from C-SC with a student ID that may be used to retrieve transcripts. The first set of transcripts will be provided at no cost, additional transcripts may require payment. If you have questions about ordering a transcript, contact the C-SC office of the registrar at registrar@culver.edu.

REQUIRED READINGS

PDF files of all mandatory readings will be provided to enrolled students via a shared Dropbox folder.

Altschul, Jeffrey H., and Terry H. Klein.

2022 "Forecast for the US CRM Industry and Job Market, 2022–2031." *Advances in Archaeological Practice* 10, no. 4: 355-370.

Awe, Jaime J., Christophe Helmke, Diane Slocum, and Douglas Tilden

2020 "Ally, client, or outpost? Evaluating the relationship between Xunantunich and Naranjo in the Late Classic Period." *Ancient Mesoamerica* 31, no. 3: 494-506.

Chase, Arlen F., Diane Z. Chase, John M. Morris, Jaime J. Awe, and Adrian SZ Chase

2020 "Archaeology and Heritage Management in the Maya Area: History and Practice at Caracol, Belize." *Heritage* 3, no. 2: 436-456.

Graeber, David and David Wengrew

2021 *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
Chapter 2: 27-77.

Thompson, Amy E., John P. Walden, Adrian SZ Chase, Scott R. Hutson, Damien B. Marken, Bernadette Cap, Eric C. Fries et al.

2022 "Ancient Lowland Maya neighborhoods: Average Nearest Neighbor analysis and kernel density models, environments, and urban scale." *PloS one* 17, no. 11.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Canuto, Marcello A., and Luke Auld-Thomas

2021 "Taking the high ground: A model for lowland Maya settlement patterns." *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 64.

Coe, Michael D., and Stephen Houston

2023 *The Maya*. Thames & Hudson, 2023.

Ebert, Claire E., James McGee, Krystal Dudash, and Mark Porter

2019 "Early Monumentality in the Belize River Valley: Excavations of a Middle Preclassic E-Group Assemblage at Cahal Pech, Belize." *The Belize Valley Archaeological Reconnaissance Project: A Report of the 2018 Field Season*; Ebert, CE, Walden, JP, Hoggarth, JA, Awe, JJ, Eds. Pp. 1-23.

Peeples, Matthew A.

2019 "Finding a place for networks in archaeology." *Journal of Archaeological Research* 27: 451-499.

Walden, John P., Julie A. Hoggarth, Claire E. Ebert, Scott L. Fedick, Michael Biggie, Brett Meyer, Kyle Shaw-Müller et al.

2023 "Classic Maya Settlement Systems Reveal Differential Land Use Patterns in the Upper Belize River Valley." *Land* 12, no. 2: 483.