Course Objectives

The archaeological study of ancient cities around the world is a booming area of research. This course investigates what we know about the nature of the earliest cities in the great original cradles of civilization: Mesopotamia, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Our focus is on how these ancient cities were planned, built, and “lived in” by citizens. We’ll look at the documentary and archaeological evidence that has been used by scholars to reconstruct ancient urban lifeways in particular places. We’ll explore similarities and differences in urban planning and urban life across this collection of early civilizations. Finally, we’ll consider what these ancient expressions of urbanism can tell us about how we might plan and design cities today, and for the future. Thus, the course is an exercise in Urban Anthropology that connects past, present, and future.

The first eight weeks of the course will be a collective exploration of the archaeological literature that exists for ancient cities, and the various issues facing the contemporary city to which archaeological knowledge might be applied. During these eight weeks students will independently research either a particular city of their choice or some other topic that cross-cuts multiple cities. In either case, the research should be relevant to one or more of the contemporary urban issues identified in class. Week nine will be devoted to individual reports of research findings, and class discussion. The final research paper will summarize these findings and offer explicit comparisons with the relevant findings made by other students.

Course Requirements

This course is a weekly seminar. You will be graded on:

1. Class attendance and participation, especially discussion of multiple assigned readings over the course of the term (40%). There may be several unannounced in-class writing assignments.
2. Final Research Paper (40%).
3. In class presentation of your research topic and preliminary findings (20%).

NOTE: This is a seminar and independent research intensive class. The lifeblood of the course is class discussion. Assigned reading has been kept to a minimum. Thus, everyone is required to have all reading finished for the days assigned. You should come to class thoroughly prepared to discuss this material, with pre-drafted questions and comments about the readings in tow. I reserve the right to add or subtract reading material as the course unfolds.

Required Reading

All required readings are posted on the course portfolio site at https://portfolio.du.edu/ancientcity. No log-in is required to access the course portfolio. The course materials are not on Canvas. Readings are listed according to the dates and topics to which they relate.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: September 11. INTRODUCTION: WHY ANCIENT CITIES MATTER.
READING:

Week 2: September 18. PARADIGMS & CONCEPTS IN THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CITIES; THE VARIABLE WORLD OF ANCIENT CITIES.
READING
- Sennett, R. 2018 “The Open City.” In In the Post-Urban World, edited by T. Haas and H. Westlund.

Week 3: September 25. MESOPOTAMIAN URBANISM.
READING:

Week 4: October 2. ASIAN URBANISM.
READING:
Week 5: October 9. AFRICAN URBANISM.

READING:


Week 6: October 16. MESOAMERICAN URBANISM.

READING:


Week 7: October 23. ANDEAN URBANISM.

READING:


Week 8: October 30. NORTH AMERICAN URBANISM: CAHOKIA & CHACO CANYON.

READING:


Week 9: November 6. STUDENT RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS.

Week 10: November 13. LESSONS OF A COMPARATIVE URBANISM.

READING
• Thomas, A. 2010 “Rethinking the City.” In The Evolution of the Ancient City, by A. Thomas.

WEEK 11: November 21. FINAL RESEARCH PAPER IS DUE BY 4PM.