



Department of Anthropology

“Maya Archaeology and Ecology: Summer Student Research Opportunities, 2025, Mirador Basin, Peten, Guatemala” July 6- August 8, 2025

Special Topics : ANTH 4499_01/ 5599_01

“Maya Archaeology: Field Research, Methods & Theory”

“Introduction, Maya Hieroglyphic Writing, Level 1”

ANTH 4484_01/ 5599_02

Richard D. Hansen, Ph.D., Affiliate Research Professor, Department of Anthropology, Idaho State University

and special guest professor

Mark Van Stone, Ph.D. Southwestern College, Specialist on Maya Hieroglyphic Writing

Introduction

Idaho State University Guatemala Archaeological Research Program is located in the remote Mirador Basin in the northern department of Peten. The research encompasses one of the most exciting research projects on the ancient Maya, and is focusing on the origins, incipient dynamics, and collapse of Preclassic Maya civilization and an understanding of the more modest Classic occupation. Under the direction of **Dr. Richard Hansen**, you will have the opportunity for research and exploration in the largest and earliest ancient Maya cities with teams of scholars from a variety of disciplines. The ISU research opportunity offers the student the chance to be on the cutting edge in the application of sophisticated technology, excavation and research strategies and methodologies, innovative conservation measures, and theoretical considerations relative to the origins and demise of complex societies. Experts and scholars from more than 40 universities and research institutions will provide the intellectual backdrop. In addition, an introductory level Maya hieroglyphic writing course will be provided with a Level I Introduction to Maya Hieroglyphic Writing course, (for first timers) or a Level 2 Maya Hieroglyphic Writing course (depending on knowledge and experience) so that students understand the fundamentals of Maya writing and calendric systems. **Dr. Mark Van Stone**, a Maya Hieroglyph specialist will be on hand to assist in the glyph classes.

The purpose of the proposed courses is to continue a field research program during a 5 to 6 week period at the large Preclassic Maya site of El Mirador and sites that are directly associated with it, located in the north central portion of the Peten rainforest of northern Guatemala. Students will be trained in field techniques, theoretical orientation, and methods under rigorous scientific conditions at the site of El

Mirador, Guatemala. The course will provide training in the fundamentals of scientific excavation in Maya sites, with an emphasis on Maya cultural history, stratigraphy, chronological sequences, ceramic and lithic recognition and seriation, chronological methods, strategies and approaches to complex architectural excavations, and fundamentals of consolidation and conservation of Maya art and architecture. Depending on your experience, you will be placed with project staff in on-going excavation programs, or placed in supervised selected excavation areas to gain experience and knowledge about Maya art, artifacts, and architecture (see below).

Site Description

The area for the study is in a remote area of pristine tropical forest, 54 km from the nearest road, in the northern department of Peten, Guatemala. The site is one of the largest known ancient sites in the Western Hemisphere, and dates to the Middle and Late Preclassic periods (1000 B.C.- A.D. 150), centuries before the time of Christ. A modest Late Classic occupation is also present at the site. Students will be exposed to a wide range of disciplines, including herpetology, botany, ornithology, entomology, biology, geography, geomorphology, hydrology, ceramics, lithics, consolidation and conservation practices and techniques, and comparative archaeology.

Program Uniqueness

The scientific research investigations would provide a vibrant background, training, and research strategies involving complex methodologies and conservation techniques currently underway at the monumental Preclassic Maya sites in the Mirador Basin of northern Guatemala. Students must apply to the ISU Anthropology program and pay tuitions and fees (\$50 Admission fee; non-ISU students would apply as non-degree seeking students) as appropriate for field research training. The area of investigation will provide students with daily understanding of the flora and fauna and the complexity of tropical systems, as well as an understanding of symbiosis between environment and culture.

Coursework:

The students will be enrolled in Idaho State University and will need to register for at least one or more courses during the course of the five-week field research program. Application fee: \$50.

Maya Archaeology: Methods and Theory, taught by Dr. Richard Hansen,

Anthro 4499_01 (6 credit hrs.): Undergraduate fees: \$2560.50 + \$1450 af = \$4010.50*

Anthro 5599_01 (6 credit hrs.): Graduate fees: \$3384.00 + \$1450 af = \$4834.00 *

Activity fees (af): \$1450 plus airfare to and from Guatemala City and/or Flores (only once per field season)

Introduction to Maya Hieroglyphic Writing Level 1, taught by Dr. Richard Hansen and invited specialist Dr. Mark Van Stone,

Anthro 4484_01: Undergraduate fees: \$1280.25/3 credit hours or \$426.75 per credit*

Anthro 5599_02: Graduate fees: \$1692.00/3 credit hours or \$564.00 per credit*

A student may not take the Hieroglyphic Writing class unless they are taking the Field Research program, or have taken it previously.

These courses will provide a solid background for participation by students and technicians in cutting edge methodologies and practices in Maya Archaeology.

Coursework will include formal classroom lectures, and hands-on training in excavation techniques and strategies as well as artifact recognition, particularly in ceramics and lithics. All students in the Maya Field Research class will be involved in actual excavation of Maya ruins. All students will have two or more workmen that they will be responsible for. Workmen will conduct the excavations under the careful supervision of the student. New or inexperienced students will begin with salvage excavations of the few looter's trenches known to exist at the site to familiarize themselves with Maya architecture, stratigraphy, mortar and stucco compositions, and artifacts. They will also learn to fill out the standardized field recording forms used by the project.

More experienced students may be assigned to on-going excavations supervised by experienced archaeologists in order to familiarize themselves with the formats of various types of architecture, depending on the chronology of the structure being excavated. The art and architecture of a Preclassic structure is radically distinct from architecture in the Classic period, and serious mistakes in excavations will be avoided by observing and participating with experienced senior archaeologists on site.

Students who have experience and looking for an MA or Ph.D. thesis and dissertation will work closely with Dr. Hansen and his staff to find a suitable topic that will contribute to the knowledge of the Mirador Basin. Numerous opportunities abound for students interested in finding a suitable graduate level topic. Workmen will be assigned to you for these projects.

Classroom coursework will include discussions about the reading lists and articles as it applies to archaeological methodology and theory. Mesoamerican chronologies and field work procedures will be explicitly explained and learned by all students.

All students will have hands-on excavation training, including the fundamentals of filling out field notes, standardized forms, archaeological photography, artifact recognition, artifact conservation, architectural consolidation and conservation, archaeological drawings and illustrations, and stratigraphy. These subjects will be taught in the classroom and applied daily in the field. Field notes will be written on standardized forms with the original copy remaining with the project and the carbon copy remaining with the student.

Field work is conducted from 7 am to 5 pm daily, Monday through Saturday. Sunday is a free day to rest, read, and catch up on reports.

All students will be required to write up a scientific report of their field excavations, complete with photographs, drawings, and text. Students will be encouraged to write these reports in English AND Spanish if possible (and depending on their language proficiency) so that they can be more readily incorporated into the reports that are delivered to the Guatemalan government. Students will have their name as a lead author on the formal reports that they write and are submitted to the government.

Excursions and Site Visits

Students will be introduced to the National Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography in Guatemala City and a visit to Tikal National Park in the Peten. Explanations and descriptions of art, artifacts, and architecture will be provided to students as a fundamental background for Maya research.

Housing, Meals, Cost of Living.

Upon application by students to the Idaho State University Department of Anthropology, students will receive full orientation and required reading lists, materials, gear, necessary permits and medical exams. Students will be required to be in good physical condition, and will require a health clearance from a physician prior to leaving for the field. Students will be housed in project housing and hotels during travel to and from the field, and will be expected to hike 54 km with guides and project personnel to the remote site of El Mirador. Food, guides, mules, and equipment will be provided by the project.

At El Mirador, students and staff will reside in large project tents (1 tent per person) with cots and beds during the course of the field season. Guatemalan cooks provide all meals for staff and technicians but due to the remote nature of the project and the lack of refrigeration, the primary staples include rice, beans, and occasional vegetables. Fresh baked bread and tortillas are provided daily, as well as soups, canned meats, and occasionally eggs. All meals are prepared by highly trained Guatemalan cooks in adequate dining and cooking facilities.

Students will have access to internet and can communicate with friends, family and faculty on a limited but regular basis.

Students must register for **ISU summer tuition are responsible for all fees**, as well as **plane tickets to and from Guatemala City from your residence**, as well as bus tickets from Guatemala City to Flores if traveling independently. The project will provide food and lodging for students in Guatemala City, Flores, and once the project is launched into the forest. As noted above, the project does provide a bus from Guatemala City to Flores, and students are invited to use this service at no charge, but must be coordinated with the project directors.

Class fees for the Maya archaeology course are **\$1450** per student, (note that the project will invest about \$10,000 in logistics and workmen per student).

Health and Safety,

The Mirador Basin Project maintains highly qualified doctors and a surgeon on site at all times with extensive training in tropical medicine, snake bite, and other trauma considerations. Each student will be expected to have **Evacuation Insurance** to cover medical evacuations by helicopter if deemed necessary, and their own medical insurance. The project pays for the maximum insurance available within the country, but the payout amounts are low (life is cheap in Guatemala). The project maintains three separate satellite systems at the site for any emergency contact.

Students should have a physical exam prior to leaving with pertinent information divulged to the Department of Anthropology and to the Project Director. All students **MUST** report information relevant to HIV or AIDS, diabetes, epilepsy, or other debilitating diseases or ailments that might impact the project. All pertinent immunizations will be required (DPT boosters etc.). COVID vaccinations are NOT required now to enter Guatemala, but all participants may be tested before entering the site. COVID testing will be conducted on site by qualified doctors. Malaria and Dengue fever are a consideration near populated areas, but is much less risk at the site due to the remote nature of the location.

Grades:

Grades will be determined on the following criteria:

1. Attendance and class participation: 20%
2. Quizzes: 10% (based on readings and lectures)
3. Field work activity: 30%
4. Final write up and report: 20%
5. Final exam 20%

Fees: All out of state tuition fees are waived.

\$50.00 Admission fee*

\$2560.50. Undergrad fee per 6 credit hour class for field research*

\$3384.00 Graduate fee per 6 credit hour class for field research*

\$1450 class fee (one-time fee per season) *

\$426.75/credit hour undergrads for Maya Hieroglyphic class for up to 3 hours*

\$564.00/credit hour for graduate for Maya Glyph class for up to 3 hours*

All transportation costs to and from Guatemala and from Guatemala City to Flores (estimates: Round trip tickets \$800-\$1000, air ticket to Flores= \$170. Bus ticket to Flores, ca. \$30 for independent travelers. The project usually hires a bus for staff and personnel from Guatemala City to Flores and back at no charge to the students. You will need to coordinate this with the project staff.

Personal Health Insurance (proof will need to be provided)

Medical evacuation insurance (proof will need to be provided)

The project assumes all food and hotel costs in Guatemala City and Flores and all travel from Flores to the Mirador Basin and back. The project will also assume Guatemalan insurance costs (although even the highest-grade insurance has a low upper policy limit of expenses).

Delays

Working in Guatemala sometimes has inherent and unforeseen delays. The reasons can range from volcanoes and earthquakes to strikes and civil unrest. The project will assume costs associated with any such delays and maximize all time for educational programs. The project has a functioning laboratory in Guatemala City and students will have the opportunity to view materials, experience hands-on-conservation procedures, and benefit academically from any time not spent in the field.

*Please verify current ISU fees through isu.edu/tuition/