

# Anth 461 Fall 2021 History of Archaeological Theory



**Prof. Chris Fennell**  
Wednesdays, 3:00pm to 5:50pm,  
Room 312, Davenport Hall

**Overview:** This course examines the prominent theories in archaeology from its inception to the present day and does so within the context of general developments in anthropological thought. The class provides a foundation for graduate students and a capstone for undergraduate majors emphasizing archaeology. Learn more about the course structure and opportunities in the general syllabus [guidelines](#).

We examine the history of theoretical approaches within the context of (1) the specific place and time during which they emerged, (2) general developments in anthropology at large, and (3) influences of broader intellectual and social trends that impacted archaeological theories. We undertake a critical analysis of different approaches, including antiquarian, evolutionary, historical, neo-evolutionary, functional and processual, ecological, Marxism, structuralism, and post-processualism (including agency, gender, practice, and performance). We will also look at examples of archaeological research conducted within the framework of each approach. The ghosts of paradigms past and earlier theories still haunt the discipline. Many theories that current students may assume to be extinct are still living and driving archaeological research.

**Requirements:** Attendance of all classes is required. All students are expected to:

1. Read all the book chapters and articles for each class meeting.
2. Actively participate in the discussion of these readings.
3. Submit written notes on each of the assigned papers/chapters every week (see below).
4. Lead discussion of at least one weekly topic in the course.
5. Oral presentation of your term paper subject and lead discussion of two relevant papers.
6. Submit this term paper at the end of the semester.

**Your weekly notes** should include:

1. A brief explanation of the approach or theory of the week. Send your weekly notes to the instructor by email by 5pm (CT) on the Tuesday immediately preceding the relevant class session.
2. A summary of the main points of each assigned paper, and how each reflects the theoretical framework. These notes are meant to help you prepare for class by focusing your attention on the texts under discussion. Write this as a narrative essay in full sentences. Your critical evaluation and insights (not simply criticism and opinions without explanation) are valuable for these summaries.

3. A brief closing synthesis with comparisons and contrasts among the week's readings.
4. Notes should not exceed 1 page per article. They are graded as +, √, or -.

**Term paper.** Term paper topic proposals/abstracts (one paragraph, with references) are due by e-mail on October 27. I will provide feedback and guidance on the scope and content of your term paper, and references to relevant literature. Final paper is due by 5pm (CT) on December 17. Term papers should be 10-15 pages (double spaced text) in length for undergraduates or 15-20 pages (double spaced text) in length for graduate students

**Class Presentation of term paper** (last week).

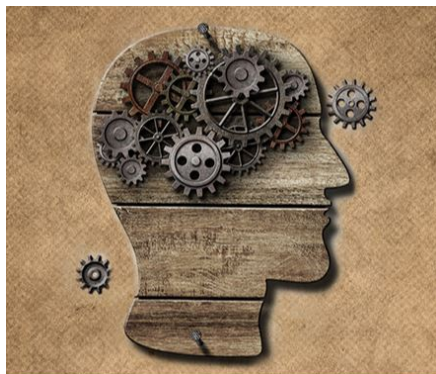
You will be responsible for:

- 1) organizing and presenting an oral discussion of your research project;
- 2) selecting and providing pdf file copies of two key papers on your term paper topic. I will upload these to *Compass* one week before your presentation. Shorter papers are preferred.



**Research Topics for Term Papers.**

Each student will select a major, enduring archaeological problem that has been investigated from many theoretical perspectives and critically examine insights that the different theoretical (not methodological) approaches have brought to this issue. Topics include the origins of agriculture, the meaning of rock art, the Middle to Upper Paleolithic transition, the Paleoindian to Archaic transition, the rise of state society in a particular area of the world, or the question of collapse of a culture (the Maya, Rapa Nui). The history of interpretations of major sites or archaeological cultural traditions is also an appropriate paper topic. Enduring questions include: what was Cahokia (or Teotihuacan, etc.) and why did it rise and fall? In cases where particular paradigms were employed (e.g. an agency perspective, General Systems Theory) the students are expected to augment their presentation by outlining a fruitful research strategy based on the missing theoretical perspective.



**Grading:** Your final grade will be based on the following criteria:

Preparation and class participation:	30%
Reading notes:	30%
Class presentation of research project:	10%
Term paper:	30%

**Texts:**

*Archaeological Theory: An Introduction*, by Matthew Johnson, 3d edition, 2020, Wiley Blackwell (J). This text is available at the

University bookstores and can also be obtained from other vendors of your choosing.

*An Unauthorized Companion to American Archaeological Theory*, by Lars Fogelin, 2019, eBook (F), Preface & Chapter 1 in pdf, remainder available online at

[https://www.academia.edu/40368859/An\\_Unauthorized\\_Companion\\_To\\_American\\_Archaeological\\_Theory\\_PDF](https://www.academia.edu/40368859/An_Unauthorized_Companion_To_American_Archaeological_Theory_PDF).



Other required or suggested readings consist of articles or text excerpts that provide additional information related to the subjects we are covering. These articles will be available online in the course web page on *Compass* (<https://compass2g.illinois.edu/webapps/login/>)

## Class Schedule

Date	Topic	Readings
Aug 25 week01	Introduction: Course mechanics	Personal perspectives on theory; <b>J</b> Preface and pp. 284-293 (glossary); <b>F</b> Preface
Sep 1 week02	Why study the history of archaeology? The rise of modern sciences: anthropology, archaeology and evolution; What is a theory? What is a paradigm? An example of a paradigm: Greco-Roman culture	Corbey & Roebroeks; <b>J</b> Chapter 1, <b>F</b> Chapter 1; AAA definition of Anthropology Trigger 2008 Chap 1; Dietler 2005, pp. 33-49.
Sep 8 week03	Archaeology from Antiquity to Darwinism Antiquarianism, Darwinism, evolutionary racism	Sollas TOC; Sommer 2005
Sep 15 week04	Culture-historical archaeology Examples from Eastern North America	McKern 1939; Griffin 1967 Kelley & Brown 2020
Sep 22 week05	Early functional-processual & Marxist arch: Conjunctive archaeology and Archaeography Cultural Ecology	<b>J</b> Chapter 2; Taylor 1948: ix-xii, 5-44, 95-112, 152-56; Deetz 1988; Steward 1953 (1955)
Sep 29 week06	General Systems Theory Ecology and cultural evolution Mesoamerican forager to farmer systems	<b>J</b> Chapters 4-5; Binford 1962; Clarke 1968 Chapter 2; Flannery 1967, Flannery 1968
Oct 6 week07	Social Archaeology & Neo-Marxism	<b>J</b> Chapter 13, Chapter 6: 100-105, Chapter 10: 185-191; Gillman 1989, 1996
Oct 13 week08	Post-processual critique and counter-critiques	<b>J</b> Chapters 6-7; Hodder 1986 ch 8-9; Knapp 1996 Shanks & Tilley 1987 ch. 1; R. Watson 1990
Oct 20 week09	Behavioral and Evolutionary Archaeologies How many kinds are there? (at least three!) Middle Rangers and Neo-Darwinists	<b>J</b> Chapters 10-11; Lamotta & Schiffer 2001; Spencer 1997; O'Brien 1998; Leonard 2001
Oct 27 week10	Evolutionary and behavioral archaeologies vs. Historical processualism; Optimal foraging	Bird & O'Connell 2006; Hawkes & O'Connell 1981; Boone &

theory and behavioral ecology

Smith 1998; O'Brien & Lyman 2004; Pauketat 2001, 2004.

### Term paper abstracts due October 27

Nov 3 week11	Evolutionary Cognitive Archaeology	Mithen 1989, 2001; Ambrose 2010; Coolidge & Wynn 2005; Barham 2010; Thomas 1998; Karlin & Julien 1994
Nov 10 week12	Agency, Materiality, Practice and Habitus	Dietler & Herbich 1998; Yentsch & Baudry 2001; Dobres & Robb 2000; Barrett 2001
Nov 17 Week13	Style in Archaeology	Wiessner 1985, 1997; Sackett 1985; Hodder 1995a; Hegmon 1992, 1998; Fogelin (F) 2019:108-111
Nov 24	<b>Thanksgiving Vacation</b>	
Dec 1 week14	Gender, Sex, Race, Performance	J Chapter 9; Hollimon 1997; Meskell 1999; Spector 1998; Taylor 1990; Crown 2000; Franklin 2001;
Dec 8 week15	Term paper project presentations	Your selected papers; J Chapter 14

### Term papers due Friday December 17



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