Instructor Information
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Course Description and Goals
Who are the Maya, and what does it mean to be Maya in a globalized world today? The current Maya are the recipients of one of the most important cultural legacies of the history of Mesoamerica. Some institutions and cultural traits that characterized the pre-Columbian Maya have survived after five hundred years of cultural contact, while others have blended with Western culture in many fascinating ways. In this course, although we will go through the basics of Mayan history, the predominant approach to the study of Maya culture(s) will be ethnographic, which means that we will focus on contemporary Maya culture(s). By the end of the course, you should have developed a good understanding of the following topics:

- What are the main regions, ethnic groups, and languages spoken in the Maya area.
- Fundamental traits that define Maya identity and worldview.
- The main stages in the history of the pre-Columbian Maya, and some of their most famous cultural accomplishments, such as the calendar and literacy.
- The current challenges of the socio-political context in which Maya people live.

Requirements and Policies

Required Texts (Available for purchase at the Student Book Store)
Collab readings as assigned

Grade Breakdown
Presentation: 20%
Midterm exam: 35%
Final exam: 35%
Participation: 10%

Mid-term and Final Exam
There will be a midterm and a final exam, each is worth 35% of the final grade. The final exam will be comprehensive. Check the course calendar and the course website for updates on the date and location of the midterm and final exam.
Attendance
Attendance is absolutely mandatory. I will be taking attendance everyday in class. Every unexcused absence will result in the loss of 1 point off your final grade. If you cannot come to class because of a real problem, let me know beforehand. Being repeatedly late to class or leaving early may count as an absence. Please talk to me in advance if you have a justified reason to leave early. Absences for illness or university-related activities must be properly documented by written notice on official letterhead. Excuses by email are not acceptable.

Participation
You start out with an “A” in your participation grade, and it is yours to keep or loose. Here is how to keep it:
1) Come to all the classes, and be on time.
2) Express yourself! I expect you to do a critical reading of the course materials, and come ready to ask and be asked about anything in the readings. I will be evaluating the quality –not the quantity- of what you say. You are encouraged to ask as many questions as you need in order to ensure your understanding of the concepts covered in class.
3) Prepare for the class. During the lectures, sometimes I may ask you questions that you need to keep in mind as you prepare your readings for the next session. Come ready to share your answers in class.
4) “Participating” also means “paying attention,” and therefore, the (mis)use of media in class is strongly discouraged. So please, no laptops during lectures; only old-fashioned note-taking by hand. To sum up: if you come to all the classes, and you show me by actively participating in class that you have done your work, you get (keep) your “A”.

Presentation
You will be assigned to a small group of 2-3 students, to present a research topic of your choice based on the material we cover in class. Please keep in mind that this is an exercise to enhance your research skills, which means that you are required to consult and do a critical reading of a good number of scientific publications. Here are some examples of possible topics you may choose:
1) A “classic style” ethnographic description of a Maya group (Please choose one which has not been covered in class).
2) A particular topic relevant to Maya ethnography or ethno-history (Cross-group comparisons welcome here. For instance: “differences and similarities in divination with crystals in the Lowlands and in the Highlands”).
3) An historical episode, an archaeological site, or the life of a leader or historical character important in history of the Maya region. (For example: “Copan”; “The Yucatecan War of Castes.”)
You will prepare a handout to distribute to the rest of the class. You will be evaluated on the quality of:
- The bibliography
- The handout
- The presentation
- Your responses in Question-and-Answer

Topic description due: Friday February 11.
Bibliography due: Friday February 25.
Presentation schedule: TBA.

Academic Honesty
You are expected to comply with the University of Virginia Honor Code. For further information about what this means and for plagiarism guidelines, please check the University of Virginia Honor Committee website: [http://www.virginia.edu/honor/](http://www.virginia.edu/honor/)
Calendar of Weekly Topics and Assigned Readings
Please continue to check this page during the semester: updates will be provided periodically.

INTRODUCING THE MAYA

Wednesday January 19.
Introduction, review of the syllabus.

Friday January 21. Ancient Mesoamerica and the Ancient Maya

Monday January 24. The Modern Maya. Similarities and differences within the Maya Region

Wednesday January 26. How do we know what we know about the Ancient Maya? The Writing System I

Friday January 28. The writing system II
FUNDAMENTAL ASPECTS OF MAYA CULTURE

Monday January 31. Life cycle, Family life, Gender relations, Kinship, Compadrazgo


Wednesday February 2. Economy and Subsistence Activities I LAST DAY TO ADD


Thursday February 3. LAST DAY TO DROP

Friday February 4. Economy and Subsistence Activities II


Monday February 7. The Cargo system. Communal work (fagina)


Wednesday February 9. Attitudes towards wealth and prestige


SPIRITUALITY, WORLDVIEW, HEALING

Friday February 11. Syncretism TOPIC DESCRIPTION DUE


Monday February 14. The Maya and Time


Wednesday February 16. The Hot-Cold System


Friday February 18. Witchcraft and Shamansim. Pulsing


Monday February 21. Sickness and its cure


Wednesday February 23. Nagualism


Friday February 25. Philosophies of Personhood  BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE


**Monday February 28 & Wednesday March 2:**

No readings assigned. Review for the Midterm.

**Friday March 4: Midterm**

**Monday March 7- Friday March 11: Spring Break**

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**HISTORY OF THE MAYA REGION**

**Monday March 14. The Pre-classic and The Classic**

Coe, Michael. *The Maya*.
- From Pre-classic to classic in the Maya Lowlands. Pages: 84-85.
- Classic Splendor: The Early Period. 87.
- The Late Period. Pages: 111-115.
- Yaxchilan, Piedras Negras, and Bonampak 125-126

**Wednesday March 16. The Classic (Late Period) LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW**


**Friday March 18. Student Presentations**


**Monday March 21. The Classic (Late Period, continued). The Collapse**

Coe, Michael. *The Maya*.
- Copan and Quirigua. 115-118 (Don’t read the section on Quirigua)

**Wednesday March 23. The Post-Classic. The Popol Vuh**

Coe, Michael. *The Maya*.
- The Post-Classic: 177
Friday March 25. Student Presentations

Coe, Michael. *The Maya*

Ch. 6 Puuk Sites in the Northern Area 165-168
Ch. 7. The Toltec Invasion and Chichen Itza. Pages: 177-192.


- Introduction. Pages: 3-6 (top “Seventeenth Century originals”)
- A prophecy for Katun 11 Ahau. Pages: 77-79.
- A book of katun prophecies. First: 11 Ahau, when the foreigners first established the country. Pages: 147-149.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

Wednesday March 30. Human Rights in the Maya region


Friday, April 1. Student Presentations


Monday April 4. Zapatism I

**Wednesday April 6. Zapatism II**


**Friday, April 8. Student Presentations**

No readings assigned. Read ahead “Rigoberta Menchú”

**Monday April 11. Maya languages and literatures**


**Wednesday April 13. Language endangerment and death in the Maya context**


**Friday, April 15. Student Presentations**

No readings assigned. Read ahead “Rigoberta Menchú”

**Monday April 18. La Violencia**


- Ch.1: The family
- Ch. 4: First visit to the finca
- Ch.6: An eight-year old agricultural worker
- Ch.7: Death of her little brother in the Finca. Difficulty of Communicating with Other Indians
- Ch.14: A maid in the capital
- Ch. 16: Period of reflection on the road to follow
- Ch. 17: Self-Defence in the village
- Ch. 19: Attack on the village by the army

**Wednesday April 20. The Debate between Menchú and Stoll**


- Ch.22. The CUC comes out into the open
- Ch.23. Political activity in other communities. Contacts with Ladinos.
- Ch. 24. The torture and death of her little brother, burnt alive in front of members of their families and the community
Ch. 25. Rigoberta’s father dies in the occupation of the Spanish Embassy. Peasants march to the capital.
Ch. 32. Strike of agricultural workers and the first of May in the capital
Ch.33. In hiding in the capital. Hunted by the army
Ch.34. Exile


**Friday, April 22. La Violencia continued**


**Monday April 25**


**Wednesday April 27- Friday April 29**

No readings assigned. Review for the Final.

**Monday May 2**

Final in-class test.