Archaeology in Theory and Practice
ANTH 123a
Tuesday/Thursday 3:30–4:50PM
Department of Anthropology
Brandeis University

Professor Travis Parno
Office Hours: Thursday 2–3pm, and by appointment, Brown 205
Email: tparno@brandeis.edu
Telephone: (781) 736-2228

Certainly the past doesn't exist anywhere outside of our own heads. I have never touched, kicked, or felt the past.
Matthew Johnson

The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.
L.P. Hartley

Archaeology is a discipline based on the notion that it is actually possible to learn something about past cultures from the materials that people have left behind. But how? Can material culture be read like a text? What the heck is “material culture”? Does broken pottery speak to us? Do burials tell a story about gender roles? Can architecture tell us something about how people conceived of their community and the role of the individual in that community? Or do archaeologists just make it all up?

“Archaeology in Theory and Practice” seeks to answer some of these questions – or is intended at least to lay clear the theoretical underpinnings of the discipline. Through readings, discussion, and a little bit of hands-on work, we will explore the intended methodological approaches and the unintended and un-questioned assumptions that shape archaeological interpretation and public knowledge of the past. This is more than just an academic discussion. As we will examine towards the end of the semester archaeological interpretations often have real world consequences for modern communities.

Course Expectations

This course is a seminar – engagement with the readings and discussion in class are central. Course participation is therefore a significant part of the grade, and attendance is
critical. *More than two unexcused absences will result in the loss of a letter grade from the final participation grade for each additional day missed.* The greater part of the class participation grade consists of presentations, questions, and discussions led by students. Daily readings are divided up between “REQUIRED” and “RECOMMENDED” readings – as the names imply, only the required readings must be prepared before Tuesday’s class each week. Recommended readings represent opportunities to learn more about a topic or engage with different perspectives (*Graduate students must read both Required and Recommended readings*).

**Course Texts**

All readings for this class other than the required text below are available through the course website.

*Required:*

*Recommended:*

**Course Grading**

Course grades will be determined by three main components; (1) class participation; (2) a midterm paper; and (3) a final research project, the grade for which includes topic submission, a presentation, and the document itself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research paper topic</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research paper presentation</td>
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<td>Research paper</td>
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CLASS PARTICIPATION counts towards 20% of the final class grade. To begin the semester, each class session one or two students will be assigned to lead discussion of the readings and post to Latte no later than 7pm the night before each Thursday’s class. 

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brief (one-page), synthetic, overview of the readings, a discussion of major issues covered in the readings, and no fewer than five questions for discussion by members of the class – class discussion need not be restricted to these questions, but they often offer good starting points for engaging with the materials. As the semester progresses, discussion format will certainly change, but student leadership will remain central. The class participation grade will also encompass all other in-class discussion, activities, and exercises.

A MIDTERM PAPER accounts for 25% of the grade. The paper is due before the beginning of class on March 19, and must be uploaded to the Latte website or emailed to me. This is a review paper of a topic chosen by you. You will select a term, topic, or concept related to the course material (e.g., “urbanism,” “landscape,” “ethnicity and boundaries,” “boundaries of style” etc.) and explore the history, present, and likely future directions of that term or concept in archaeology. Further guidelines for the paper will be discussed in class and posted to the Latte website.

Students will complete a FINAL RESEARCH PROJECT based on an independent research question. This is a problem oriented paper, not a review paper. Research questions and goals will be chosen in conjunction with the professor in the second half of the semester.

1) A one-page summary of the paper topic, including at least five references, must be submitted before class on April 2, and must be uploaded to the Latte website or emailed to me. Submission of the paper topic accounts for 5% of your final grade.

2) Oral presentations of the project account for 20% of the final grade, and will be given by every student in the last two class sessions (4/21 –4/23). This allows for feedback and discussion from your professor and peers with plenty of time to take account of such feedback in your final papers.

3) Final papers account for 30% of the semester grade. Final written projects are due on the date and time of the regularly scheduled final exam May 6, at 6:00 pm, and must be uploaded to the Latte website or emailed to me.

Final grade / percentage equivalences are the following: A = 94–100%; A- = 90–93%; B+ = 87–89%; B = 84–86%; B- = 80–83%; C+ = 77–79%; C = 74–76%; C- = 70–73%; D = 60-69%; F = <60%.

A grade of “A” means “excellent” - the work is of superior quality on an exam and represents insightful, well-considered, and well-written/produced research & write-up. A grade of “A” typically represents a great deal of effort, but effort alone does not guarantee an “A.” A grade of “B” means “good” - the work fulfills all of the assignment instructions and adequately presents well-written, well-researched work. “C” means “average” - the work submitted fulfills the letter of the assignment, but lacks sufficient quality of research and/or presentation that would warrant a higher grade. A grade of “D” represents work that is unsatisfactory and has not fulfilled the stated goals of the assignment, while an “E” is a failing grade resulting from work that is incomplete, incoherent, or otherwise unacceptable given the guidelines for a given assignment.

Extensions on papers and excused absences from class will only be given if I am notified ahead of time of an existing conflict, or you provide proof of an emergency precluding your
submission of the paper. No extensions or make-ups will be given because of conflicts with assignments or exams in other classes. Papers turned in late without permission of the instructor will be discounted one letter grade per day. This calendar of readings is subject to change. Any changes to the calendar will be noted in class, and a message sent out to the class mailing list.

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

I find that students using laptop computers in class is distracting to me and other students, in part because the temptation to take “just a second” to check email or web updates is hard to resist. If you feel that your learning will be hampered by not having access to your laptop for note-taking or other legitimate purposes, please speak to me. Otherwise, keep your laptop turned off and stowed away during class.

**Plagiarism Policy**

You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University’s policies on academic integrity (see [http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai](http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai)). Faculty may refer any suspected instances of alleged dishonesty to the Office of Student Development and Conduct. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in sanctions including but not limited to, failing grades being issued, educational programs, and other consequences.
Schedule of Course Meetings

Readings should be prepared prior to the first class meeting of each unit. Note that any entry preceded by an asterix is a PDF that can be found on our course Latte site. All other readings can be found in your textbooks.

Unit 1 (Jan. 13/15): Introduction to the Course

UNDERGRADUATES:

GRADUATES:

Unit 2 (Jan. 20/22): A big tent?: Moving from processualism and post-processualism to the future

Required:

Recommended:
Unit 3 (Jan. 29/Feb. 3): A critical look at contemporary fieldwork

Required:

Recommended:

Unit 4 (Feb. 5/10): Theoretical strands, part 1: Feminist theory in archaeology

Required:

Recommended:
Unit 5 (Feb. 24/26): Theoretical strands, part 2: Structure and agency

Required:

Recommended:

Unit 6 (Mar. 3/5): Theoretical strands, part 3: Practice theory

Required:

Recommended:


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**Unit 7 (Mar. 10/12): Theoretical strands, part 4: Materiality, consumption, object biographies**

**Required:**


Recommended:

Unit 8 (Mar. 17/19): Themes in contemporary archaeology: Archaeology, colonialism, and politics

Required:

Recommended:
Remaining essays in Part IV of *A Companion to Social Archaeology*

Unit 9 (Mar. 24/26): Themes in contemporary archaeology: Time/Place

Required:
Lucas, *The Archaeology of Time*
Recommended:


Remaining essays in Part III of *A Companion to Social Archaeology*

Unit 10 (Mar. 31/Apr. 1):  Themes in contemporary archaeology: Embodiment & sexuality

Required:


Unit 11 (Apr. 2/14):  Archaeology of experience/experience of archaeology

Required:


Recommended:


http://web.comhem.se/cornelius/Fieldtrips.html

**Unit 12 (Apr. 14/16/21):** Archaeology, heritage, and popular culture

Holtorf, *From Stonehenge to Las Vegas*

**Unit 13 (Apr. 21/23):** Research Project Presentations