ANG 6186 - Southeastern Archaeology

Spring 2011
Section 9663
Tuesdays, Periods 8-10 (3:00-6:00)
Matherly 0009

Kenneth E. Sassaman
Turlington B128
Office hours: Tuesdays 9:00-11:30; 1:30-2:30
392-2253 x256 (during office hours)
392-6772 (my lab M, W,Th, F)
sassaman@ufl.edu

ANG 6186 is a graduate-level seminar for serious students of archaeology who are (1) already vested in the practice of Southeastern U.S. archaeology; (2) exploring the possibility of engaging the archaeological Southeast as a regional specialty; or (3) seeking comparative material to address problems of broad anthropological significance. This final category of interest *must* inform your way of thinking in this course—no matter your prior involvement or commitment to the region—because we will approach the subject through a series of abstract problems and questions. It follows that this course is not a survey of regional archaeology, nor is it deeply concerned with the history of archaeological practice. Rather, the Southeast U.S., like any other region of the world, provides ample opportunity to examine ancient human experience from perspectives that bear on the experiences of people in other times and places and thus are conducive to comparison, integration, and generalization. We will not in this course indulge the lingering misconception that regional archaeology is necessarily a parochial or ideographic archaeology. We will instead strive to develop knowledge useful for practitioners working elsewhere, as well as those working outside the relatively narrow realm of anthropological archaeology.

Notwithstanding the loftier goal of contributing to a high level of intellectual discourse, this course will include many details about the record of actual human experience in the Southeast. We have some 14,000 years and over one-half million square miles to explore. Enacted over this somewhat arbitrary array of time and space were histories that include their share of "origins" and "revolutions," the stuff of headlines. The Southeast was home to the continent's first pottery, its oldest burial mounds, and the earliest domesticates. Evidence grows for a Southeastern origin to the famed Clovis Paleoindian tradition, and the region boasts its share of pre-Clovis finds. It also sits geographically at the edge of the only pre-Columbian state in North America. And it is a region whose growing evidence for monumentality, long-distance interactions, and religious movements challenges the imagination and coaxes us to look beyond the local and mundane to confront the cultural logics that motivate social action.

Robert Dunnell wrote in the 1980s that archaeology in the Southeast was largely unaffected by the intellectual developments of processualism and postmodernism because it remained steadfast to the longstanding (parochial and ideographic) pursuit of culture history. Indeed, early-20th-century-style culture history has a Southeastern pedigree and it persists today in both reflexive and non-reflexive modes of practice. However, were Dunnell to comment on developments in archaeological research since the 1980s, he may

agree that in the routine effort to write culture histories for particular locales in the region, empirical anomalies to "received wisdom" were encountered and they routinely stimulated new ways of thinking. Poverty Point is a classic case in point, while the Big Bang of Cahokia is a more recent example. In these and many other examples, the seemingly neutral goal of determining who was doing what, where, when, and how paid dividends in a surprising string of empirical anomalies that caused skeptics to consider alternative modes of interpretation. Among the "received wisdom" undermined by new finds is that of mid-20th-century cultural evolutionism, notably its progressivist notions that assume, *uncritically*, that things get bigger, more diverse, and more complex through time. It may seem silly to be talking about these issues in 2010—as if we were beating a dead horse or propping up some strawman—but peruse most introductory text on North American archaeology or even one on general anthropology and you'll find vestiges of this shopworn, colonial logic. Southeastern archaeologists are among today's alternative thinkers, and we can attribute this innovation as much to data-gathering that has exposed contradictions between observation and presumption, as we can to theoretical developments borrowed from without the region.

Expectations: Your contribution to this ongoing project begins by choosing a topic from the list that follows below. You may also select a topic not listed below, although it must be abstract enough to transcend the particulars of Southeastern archaeology (e.g., not as specific as the chronology of a given pottery type or the pattern of settlement in a given valley).

Potential topics (in no particular order) to structure your research contribution to this course:

Migration	Memory
Ethnogenesis	Household
Ethnoscience/ecology	Health
Architecture	Death
Monumentality	Gender
Animism	Personhood
Exchange	Ritual
Coalescence	Abandonment
Warfare	Domestication
Colonization	Crafting
Innovation	Ethnicity
Community	Landscape
Cosmology	Temporality
Power	Historicity/Historicism
Sociality	Labor

With your chosen topic as a point of entry into the region, you are expected to pursue three related areas of inquiry, as follows:

(1) *Understand* how your topic has been conceptualized and mobilized at the highest levels of theoretical abstraction within anthropology in general. Although you must

consider the intellectual pedigree of theory informing your topic, you do not have to push this beyond the middle part of the last century unless otherwise warranted.

(2) *Situate* your chosen topic in the literature of Southeastern archaeology. Ideally this will entail both diachronic and synchronic/comparative perspectives, although your treatment of this review will to some extent be determined by the chosen topic. For instance, one could not do justice to a topic such as memory without time depth, just as you could not do justice to exchange without geographical breadth.

(3) *Develop* your own line of argumentation involving the application of theory and method appropriate to the topic you chose and its archaeological viewshed (some perspective on materiality in time, space, form). This latter requirement demands empirical insight, and eschews idle speculation. For those not yet equipped to deal with empirical exposition, consider this a chance to write a "research design" for work in progress. This may entail thesis or dissertation prospectuses, actual chapters, and/or proposals for external funding.

The final product for this course is a 25-30 double-spaced-page paper (not counting references, figures, tables, and appendices), which will account for 50% of your final grade. A great student will produce a publishable-quality paper, occasionally a *published* paper. Unfortunately, this doesn't happen as often as it could, or should. The more you put into this effort, the greater the potential that it will have a measurable effect on your ability to acquire and keep a professional position in which original research is required.

To enhance success with your effort, the structure of this class will follow from the topics chosen by contributors and by the three-step process (*Understand-Situate-Develop*) outlined above. By Week 2 you will choose a topic to pursue. By Week 5 you will provide in writing a 500-word prospectus for your contribution. Sometime between Weeks 4 and 11 you will lead an hour-long discussion on the topic you chose and a supporting set of readings selected in consultation with the instructor. Two weeks before your topic presentation you will meet with the instructor to review the plan for discussion and to approve and/or suggest supporting literature. One week later you will supply the instructor with 5-6 readings (number varies with length of items) you expect everyone to read and from which your discussion of the topic will follow. Everyone will have a 15-minute slot to present their final paper during Weeks 12-14. Each presentation will be followed by 15 minutes of serious critical commentary by all.

The point break-down of the components outlined above is as follows:

10% for 500-word prospectus (Week 5)
5% for mandatory meeting with instructor and posting of readings (Weeks 2-10)
20% for leading discussion of articles on chosen topic (Weeks 4-11)
10% for final presentation of research
50% for written paper

But What If I Know Nothing About Southeastern Archaeology and Haven't a Clue at this Point What Sort of Research I'd Like to Pursue?

Well, if both parts of the above question accurately characterize you, it may be a good idea to see what else is being offered this semester. However, you do not need to have a background in Southeastern archaeology to take this graduate seminar, nor do you need to make a commitment to it. Because we are taking a problem-oriented approach to this course, those able to conceptualize at an abstract level may have an advantage over veterans of the Southeast who do not often step back far enough from their data to see how they articulate with the rest of anthropology. Of course, the "facts" of Southeastern archaeology cannot be imagined, so those with limited or no background in the substantive elements of the subject will have two resources to draw on. First, I will provide a primer on Southeastern archaeology during our first three meetings. Second, I will post some references to regional overviews. There really haven't been any regionwide, comprehensive treatments in article-length format since the mid 1980s. Still, there are many topical and subregional syntheses available, as well as compilations that tend to focus on particular time periods or cultural traditions. Everyone in this course will benefit from reviewing the basic synthetic literature.

Tentative Schedule

Week 1 (Jan. 11)	Southeast Primer I
Week 2 (Jan. 18)	Southeast Primer II (choice of topic due)
Week 3 (Jan. 25)	Southeast Primer III
Week 4 (Feb. 1)	Instructor's Topical Overture; two student-led presentations
Week 5 (Feb. 8)	Instructor's Topical Overture; two student-led presentations (prospectus due)
Week 6 (Feb. 15)	Instructor's Topical Overture; two student-led presentations
Week 7 (Feb. 22)	Instructor's Topical Overture; two student-led presentations
Week 8 (Mar. 1)	Instructor's Topical Overture; two student-led presentations
Week 9 (Mar. 8)	Spring Break
Week 10 (Mar. 15)	Three student-led presentations
Week 11 (Mar. 22)	Three student-led presentations
Week 12 (Mar. 29)	Student final presentations/critiques

Week 13 (Apr. 5) Student final presentations/critiques

Week 14 (Apr. 12) Student final presentations/critiques

Week 15 (Apr. 19) Open forum (final papers due)

Go to Sakai Resources folder for the course to find list of background readings. Topical readings will be added to the Sakai folder as they are made available.