The Archaeology of Ethnic Change In Pre-Columbian Nicaragua

Course ID: ARCH 330I
June 13, 2021 to July 17, 2021

FIELD SCHOOL DIRECTOR(S)

Dr. Geoffrey McCafferty, Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, University of Calgary (mccaffer@ucalgary.ca)

OVERVIEW
Ethnohistorical accounts from the sixteenth century CE describe the indigenous cultures of Pacific Nicaragua, including strong evidence for shared Mesoamerican cultural and linguistic traits. For the past 20 years, archaeologists affiliated with the University of Calgary have excavated sites along the shore of Lake Cocibolca in search of archaeological evidence for Mexican colonization. This field school will
continue this quest through investigations at the site of El Rayo, the most significant site yet known for studying the potential impact of Mexican migrants on native cultural traditions. Previous excavations at the site have encountered mortuary and civic-ceremonial contexts representing both the pre-migration Bagaces period (500-800 CE) as well as the post-migration Sapoa period (800-1300 CE). Through comparisons of the material culture and behavioral contexts of these two periods we are recovering key evidence for further interpretations of culture change, especially relating to ancient ethnic identities.

El Rayo is located on the Asese peninsula into Lake Cocibolca, in a tropical zone currently cultivated with bananas. Excellent preservation of organic materials allows the recovery of animal bones and carbonized seeds in addition to the beautiful polychrome pottery for which the region is famous. Mortuary remains have been recovered from several site loci, including two separate cemetery zones, as well as a large building that was possibly used for preparation of the deceased, and a feasting area for celebrations for the ancestors. The 2021 field school project will investigate new site loci in search of residential areas and additional cemetery deposits.

This research project will continue a longstanding program working in close collaboration with regional institutions including the Mi Museo in Granada. The core theoretical perspective focuses on the interpretation of culture change, especially ethnicity, in the centuries leading up to the Spanish Conquest in 1522 CE. As such, the results are of fundamental importance to developing claims of cultural identity by existing indigenous groups in the region.

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**ACADEMIC CREDIT UNITS & TRANSCRIPTS**

**Credit Units:** Attending students will be awarded 8 semester credit units (equivalent to 12 quarter credit units) through our academic partner, Connecticut College. Connecticut College is a private, highly ranked liberal arts institution with a deep commitment to undergraduate education. Students will receive a letter grade for attending this field school (see grading assessment and matrix). This field school provides a minimum of 160 direct instructional hours. Students are encouraged to discuss the transferability of credit units with faculty and registrars at their home institution prior to attending this field school.

**Transcripts:** An official copy of transcripts will be mailed to the permanent address listed by students on their online application. One more transcript may be sent to the student home institution at no cost. Additional transcripts may be ordered at any time through the National Student Clearinghouse: [http://bit.ly/2hvurkl](http://bit.ly/2hvurkl).

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**PREREQUISITES**

There are no academic prerequisites for this field program. Note, however, that summertime in Pacific Nicaragua is very hot and humid, and since it is the rainy season there are also frequent downpours. Since fieldwork will be in a rural area, insects are abundant, especially spiders. Participants should be aware of these pests; orientation will include a discussion of potential hazards.
DISCLAIMER – PLEASE READ CAREFULLY

Our primary concern is with education. Traveling and conducting field research involve risk. Students interested in participating in IFR programs must weigh whether the potential risk is worth the value of education provided. While risk is inherent in everything we do, we do not take risk lightly. The IFR engages in intensive review of each field school location and programming prior to approval. Once a program is accepted, the IFR reviews each program annually to make sure it still complies with all our standards and policies, including those pertaining to student safety.

The IFR does not provide trip or travel cancellation insurance. We encourage students to explore such insurance on their own as it may be purchased at affordable prices. Insuremytrip.com or Travelguard.com are possible sites where field school participants may explore travel cancellation insurance quotes and policies. If you do purchase such insurance, make sure the policy covers the cost of both airfare and tuition.

We do our best to follow a schedule of activities, methods training, and programming as outlined in this syllabus. However, this schedule can be easily disrupted by any number of unforeseen circumstances, including revised decisions by local permitting agencies, political unrest, and changes in the weather. While this schedule represents the best of the director(s) intentions, we - students and staff alike - need to be adaptable and tolerant of necessary alterations. This adaptability is an intrinsic part of all field research.

If you have any medical concerns, please consult with your doctor. For all other concerns, please consult with the program director and staff.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students will learn about the culture history of the Greater Nicoya region of Pacific Nicaragua, generally considered to have been the southern frontier of the Greater Mesoamerican culture area. Theoretical discussions will revolve around ways that material culture may reflect and shape concepts of social identity in the past (and present). Because of the rich material record at El Rayo, students will also be instructed in analytical processes for ceramics, lithics, faunal remains, archaeobotanical remains, and human osteology.

Fieldwork will consist of excavation of residential mounds where evidence of household activities and human remains has previously been observed. Work will involve hand tools such as trowels and brushes, and screens for recovery of small artifacts. Students will work alongside experienced Nicaraguan archaeologists. Additional field experience will include surveying to map the excavation area and relate finds with those from previously excavated areas, and field drawings of excavation units and profiles. Lab work will include washing and labelling of artifacts, as well as preliminary classification and analysis.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will gain familiarity with archaeological methods as practiced in Central America, including use of hand tools for excavation. Lab experience will result in basic knowledge of ceramics, lithics, faunal remains, and other classes of material culture. Specialized knowledge on human skeletal remains will be
available to students with interest. Readings and discussion will also provide background information on the pre-Columbian culture history of Central America and the history of archaeological investigation. More general theoretical discussion of topics such as migration and ethnicity will also be provided.

ASSessment

Students will be evaluated on several criteria:

- Background preparation based on readings and lectures: 10%
- Participation in fieldwork: 30%
- Participation in lab work: 30%
- Field notebook and forms: 20%
- Final exam based on readings, discussion, and integration of field results: 10%

TRAVEL, ROOM & BOARD, & SAFETY LOGISTICS

Disclaimer for 2021 Season. The logistics outlined below for this IFR field school were written according to the most current and accurate information available to IFR. We recognize that the best practices for preventing the transmission of the coronavirus may change in the coming months. The IFR will be revisiting program-specific plans periodically throughout the enrollment period and will update program details according to new developments, such as the presence and availability of a vaccine, new travel protocols, and updated local policies.

An IFR field school is designed to provide positive, constructive experiences for communities, students, and researchers. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the following protocols have been developed based on the assumption that any participant in an IFR field school may be an asymptomatic carrier of SARS COVID-19. Our goal, with these protocols, is to reduce the possibility for COVID-19 transmission among participants, staff, and local community members. IFR depends on the complete and sustained commitment of all students to stay healthy and to help others stay healthy. On enrollment, students commit to comply with all aspects of the IFR COVID-19 avoidance policy as well as any/all policies specific to their respective IFR field school.

PRIOR TO TRAVEL

Students must arrange a test for current infection for COVID-19 through a RT-PCR test for themselves in their home location within 72 hours prior to arrival at the destination and upload proof of negative result to their IFR application portal.

After demonstrating they tested negative, students must take all precautions possible to ensure they remain COVID-19 free prior to and during travel to the field school. Students should plan to travel in the safest manner that they are able (e.g., avoid flights with long layovers and multiple connections). In addition, we require the following from all students: use of a face mask during travel to, from, and on
airlines, ferries, trains, busses, and the like; regular washing of hands; and, in so far as possible, maintain social distancing of 6 feet / 2 meters in airports and other spaces.

VISA REQUIREMENTS

US and Canadian citizens (with passports) entering Nicaragua receive their visa upon entering the country at the Managua airport. As of 2020 there was a $10 (USD) fee for a tourist visa. The visa form is given to in-bound passengers while in the air.

Citizens of other countries are asked to check the embassy website page at their home country for specific visa requirements.

TRAVEL (TO AND DURING THE PROGRAM)

We suggest you hold off purchasing your airline ticket until six (6) weeks prior to the departure date. Natural disasters, political changes, weather conditions and various other factors may force the cancelation of a field school. The IFR monitors local conditions 6-7 weeks prior to the beginning of each program and makes a decision accordingly. This approach allows sufficient time to still purchase deeply discounted airline tickets.

The most convenient means of travel to Nicaragua is by air, arriving at the international airport in Managua (MGA), where the field school director will meet students. Currently, Nicaragua requires a negative COVID (PCR) test within 72 hours of arrival, but there is no subsequent quarantine required. Upon arrival, students will be shuttled across the street from the airport to the Best Western Las Mercedes where they will spend the first night, as the full group arrives. The following morning the student group will be transported to Granada (about 45 minutes away) by passenger van, to arrive at the arranged housing. Daily trips to the field site will also be by passenger van. All program participants will be required to use their face masks throughout the duration of shuttle and van rides. The field lab will be within walking distance of the project housing.

If you missed your connection or your flight is delayed, please call, text or email the field school director immediately. A local emergency mobile phone number will be provided to all enrolled students.

LOCAL PROTOCOLS, REGULATIONS, & EXPECTATIONS

Currently, as of December 2020, Nicaragua has an extremely low incidence of COVID-19. Residents of Granada (where the students will be housed), wear masks and maintain social distance, but restaurants are open with limited capacity, and people are free to move about the historical town. Because Granada is both a popular tourist destination as well as being home to a large international population, it is likely that students will come into contact with community members. Since the program director and members of the staff have visited Granada often, there may be opportunities for students to participate in community events, such as concerts, art galleries, and museum visits. This will be monitored by the project director to ensure safety protocols. The housing facility will allow isolation in the case of a renewed outbreak, or other safety issues.

Interaction with the local community must be limited to situations where everyone can maintain the required 6-foot/2-meter physical distance, wear masks, and ideally be outside.
FACE MASKS / FACE COVERINGS
All students, faculty and staff are expected to wear face coverings. Face masks, along with social distancing, are among the most effective ways of minimizing the spread of the coronavirus.

The objective of wearing a mask is to capture potentially infectious droplets from the wearer. Therefore:

- Masks or respirators that are equipped with an "exhalation valve" are not permitted, unless covered by another mask.
- Neck fleeces (gaiter masks) are considered the least effective form of face masks, and are not permitted. (The material found in gaiters tend to break down larger droplets into smaller particles that are more easily carried away in the air.)
- Folded bandanas and knitted masks are ineffective and are not permitted.
- Masks must be worn so as to cover both the mouth and nose. If your mask becomes loose, it can be tightened by twisting the ear loops.

ACCOMMODATIONS
Students will be housed in a small hotel in Granada, a medium-size city on the shore of Lake Cocibolca. The hotel will feature double-occupancy rooms with private bathrooms, air conditioning, and WiFi, and also a kitchen that will provide morning meals and allow access in the evenings. Students will be picked up from the hotel and transported to the field site in the morning. After lunch students will be transported to the field laboratory for afternoon artifact processing and discussion of daily results before being returned to the hotel.

While rooms will be double occupancy, they will offer separate beds and sufficient area to maintain distance. Cleaning staff at the hotel will regularly clean and disinfect high traffic areas and materials, and will dispose of potentially contaminated materials. Laundry facilities will be available through the hotel.

All participants in a field school, students and staff, will wear masks while indoors (i.e. during lectures, during labs, in shared residential spaces, etc.). Roommates will form “ pods”, or two-person groupings that limit their non-distanced social contact to one another for the duration of the field program.

Regular hand washing will be a part of the project’s daily schedule.

A light breakfast will be provided at the hotel. Lunch is typically the big meal of the day in the tropics, and will be provided in the field. No formal dinner is provided but the hotel kitchen will be stocked with food for evening snacking (there are also many restaurants in Granada for evening meals at students’ expense). Note that specialized diets are difficult to accommodate. Meals in the field will be prepared members of the Salablanca family, with lunch usually consisting of traditional rice, beans, vegetables, and occasional meat. Drinks are made from tropical fruit juices mixed with purified water. During sit-down meals where people are unmasked, care will be taken to maintain 6-ft of distance from those outside our two-person ‘ pods’.

MANAGING COVID-19 CASES & OUTBREAKS
COVID-19 is clearly a major concern for the success of this field school. At present (December 2020), Nicaragua has had a very minimal impact from the pandemic, and a recent report from an independent COVID team reports only about 35 cases in the past month from the entire country. Granada has been consistently identified as a low risk area within the country. Of course this is a fluid situation so it is impossible to foresee what the condition will be in the summer of 2021.
Students and staff will maintain restrictive protocols at all times, including the use of masks, social distance, and washing of hands. While some movement within the community will be encouraged to enhance the cultural experience, this will be done in controlled situations to avoid close contact. Students will be grouped in ‘pods’ of two, consisting of roommates who will also be field partners, to minimize exposure across the group.

In the unfortunate event of students/staff with mild symptoms, the field lab has a guest room where they can isolate from the rest of the group. Depending on the hotel, there may also be extra rooms available there. If the symptoms occur towards the end of the project the guest room will continue to be available after the end of the program.

We know an excellent English-speaking doctor in Granada. There is a hospital in Granada, and a major hospital with COVID-specific ICU located about 30 minutes away. The driver of the passenger van also has access to vehicles that he maintains in excellent condition (i.e., regularly sanitized).

The Granada community has a well-coordinated social media network that conveys health and safety information. Consequently near real-time concerns are available.

The hotel will have laundry facilities on the premises, and public laundry services are also available. In the case of laundry from symptomatic students/staff, laundry will be handled separately so as to not mix with other laundry.

EQUIPMENT LIST
Students are responsible for a small list of mandatory equipment. All excavation equipment will be provided; however, students may want to acquire their own hand tools especially if they are interested in future archaeological fieldwork. Suggested hand tools include hand trowels (Marshalltown 5” pointing trowels are the industry standard but there are comparable options), 3 m metric tape measures, line level, and 3 inch paint brush. Additional optional hand tools might include dental picks or nut picks, barbecue skewers for working with bone, and smaller paint brushes. Recommendations for clothing and attire are listed below. Head coverings, such as hats with brim, are highly recommended.

**Mandatory Equipment**

**Face masks:** washable — or — disposable

- washable: two or more layers of washable, breathable fabric; completely cover your nose and mouth; fit snugly against the sides of your face and don't have gaps
- disposable: multi-layer surgical masks

**Gloves** (e.g., those used for moderate yard work)

Hand sanitizer for personal use during travel and throughout the program
**Suggested Equipment**

- Marshalltown 5” (masons) hand trowel
- 3-meter measuring tape
- line level
- 3-inch paint brush
- dental picks / nut picks
- barbecue skewer
- small paint brushes

**Recommended Clothing and Other Supplies**

- Clothes suitable for working outside in the tropics:
  - long pants, long breathable shirts, hiking shoes
- Sunscreen

*(other recommendations will be given during the online, pre-departure orientation)*

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

All IFR field school begins with safety orientation. This orientation addresses local and program protocols concerning student behavior, appropriate attire, local practices and sensibilities that may be unfamiliar, potential fauna and flora hazards, IFR harassment and discrimination policies, and the student Code of Conduct.

**June 13:** Arrival in Managua and spend first night at Best Western Las Mercedes, with orientation lecture in the evening

**June 14:** Transfer by passenger van to Granada. After settling into the hotel we will take a walking and buggy tour of the historic city, including a visit to the Ex-Convent San Francisco cultural museum. Evening quiz based on required readings.

**June 15:** Orientation to regional material culture during site visit followed by lunch; afternoon lecture and discussion at field lab in Granada. Lecture will cover: (1) History/prehistory of the region in which the FS takes place; (2) Relevant archaeological methods and theories; (3) Research design for the project *(Discussion of readings: Abel-Vidor 1981; Carmack and Salgado 2006; McCafferty 2020)*

**June 16-18:** Begin fieldwork with survey and mapping to identify and lay out excavation units; followed by excavation. A typical field day will consist of leaving for the field at 6 AM, with field activities between about 7 AM until 1 PM, followed by lunch (1 to 2) and return to field lab in Granada for artifact processing and discussion (3 to 6 PM).

**June 19-20:** Free days for students to continue exploring Granada, with available tour of the isletas (small islands) around the Asese peninsula. *(Discussion of readings: McCafferty 2015; McCafferty and Dennett 2013)*

**June 21-25:** Excavation at El Rayo; lunch in field; return to field lab in Granada for artifact processing and discussion.

**June 26-27:** Free days in Granada with optional field trip to Zapatera Island to visit archaeological sites of Isla de Muerto and Sonzapote, protected tropical biosphere, and beach on Lake Cocibolca *(Discussion of reading: McCafferty, Pavon Sanchez, and Galeano Rueda n.d.)*
June 28-July 2: Excavation at El Rayo (same schedule)

July 3-4: Free weekend, with optional trip to town of Masaya to visit the Masaya volcano and museum, and the arts and crafts market. (Discussion of readings: McCafferty 2019; McCafferty and McCafferty 2009)

July 5-9: Excavation at El Rayo (same schedule)

July 10-11: Field trip to Rivas and San Juan del Sur to visit Santa Isabel archaeological site, historical museum, and popular beach resort (Discussion of readings: McCafferty 2008; McCafferty et al. n.d.)

July 12-14: Excavation at El Rayo (same schedule)

July 15-16: Packing up artifacts for curation, final preparations for departure; Final exam.

July 17: Transportation to Managua airport for departure

**REQUIRED READINGS**

PDF files of all mandatory readings will be provided to enrolled students via a shared Dropbox folder. Students are encouraged to download and/or print readings prior to traveling. Course participants are expected to be prepared to engage the discussions led by facilitators, all of whom will be looking for compelling evidence that students have read and thought about the assigned readings prior to the scheduled day on which they are first discussed.

Abel-Vidor, Suzanne

Carmack, Robert M. and Silvia Salgado

McCafferty, Geoffrey G.


2019 Mixteca-Puebla Ceramics from Early Postclassic Pacific Nicaragua. *Mexicon*


McCafferty, Geoffrey G., and Carrie Dennett

McCafferty, Geoffrey G., Oscar Pavon Sanchez, and Ligia Galeano Ruedo
n.d. Preliminary Investigations at Sonzapote, Zapatera Island
McCafferty, Geoffrey G. and Sharisse D. McCafferty

McCafferty, Geoffrey, Andrea Waters-Rist, Sharisse McCafferty, and Celise Chilcote

RECOMMENDED READINGS
Anthony, David W.

Lange, Frederick W.

Lange, Frederick W.

McCafferty, Geoffrey, Fabio Esteban Amador, Carrie Dennett, and Silvia Salgado

McCafferty, Geoffrey G. and Larry Steinbrenner

McCafferty, Sharisse D. and Geoffrey G. McCafferty

Salgado Gonzalez, Silvia and Ricardo Vasquez Leiva