



Illinois State Archaeological Survey



Creating the Ancient City: Social Investment of Peripheral Neighborhoods in the Making of Cahokia, IL, USA

Course ID: ARCH 3000

May 20 - June 24 2026

Academic Credits: 8 Semester Credit Units

FIELD SCHOOL DIRECTOR(S)

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OVERVIEW

The Indigenous city of Cahokia, located in the American Bottom region of western Illinois, provides a unique context to investigate the processes of city formation and dissolution through examining people's investment in place and place-making. Cahokia was a cultural and political zenith in the region between A.D. 1050-1350, characterized by three connected boroughs (St. Louis, East St. Louis, and Cahokia) and a series of outlying sites consisting of immigrants and local Terminal Late Woodland populations. This summer's work is one part of a larger NSF-funded project examining how peripheral communities contributed to the construction, maintenance, and future dissolution of this medieval city.

This project developed from questions raised during IFR Field Schools in 2016 and 2017 in which we explored the ways in which landscape shaped the settlement history of one neighborhood in Downtown Cahokia. Here we expand this question to consider how engaged people living in neighborhoods on the physical periphery of the city were. Beginning with excavations at one such peripheral neighborhood at the margin of Downtown Cahokia, we will consider how and by what means people actively chose to participate in the creation of this urban landscape. We will examine structural and artifactual evidence of people's investment in the built environment (mounds, borrows, causeways, public buildings in or adjacent to the neighborhood), access to raw materials and completed objects, and participation in city-wide events that structured their daily activities, temporalities, and identities. We will consider size, shape, density, and orientation of structures to identify when this neighborhood was occupied and for how long. This evidence will be compared to what we know about neighborhoods already excavated in the core of two major precincts: East St. Louis and Downtown Cahokia, to evaluate whether peripheral neighborhood occupants are engaging with Cahokian practices and ideologies at the same or similar levels as people in the core civic-ceremonial areas of the city. In the bigger picture, we will consider whether the level of investment coincides with longevity of peripheral neighborhoods (and thus their contribution to the rise and decline of the city).

ACADEMIC CREDIT UNITS & TRANSCRIPTS

Credit Units: Attending students will be awarded 8 semester credit units through our academic partner, Connecticut College. Connecticut College is a highly ranked liberal arts institution with a deep commitment to undergraduate education. Students will receive a letter grade for attending this field school (see assessment, below). 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's home institution at no cost. Additional transcripts may be ordered at any time through the [National Student Clearinghouse](#).

PREREQUISITES

There are no prerequisites for participation in this field school. This is hands-on, experiential learning and students will learn on-site how to conduct archaeological research. Archaeology involves physical work and exposure to the elements and thus, requires a measure of acceptance that this will not be the typical university learning environment. You will get sweaty, tired and have to work outdoors. Students must come equipped with sufficient excitement, perseverance, and adequate understanding that the archaeological endeavor requires real, hard work – in the sun, on your feet, and with your shovel or trowel.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The objective of this field school is to enable students to better understand how archaeology is practiced in the field, to explore the diverse lifestyles of people in the past and to gain basic understanding of people's changing relationships to the landscape. To achieve these objectives, this course has two primary goals: (1) to provide students a practical working knowledge of **archaeological field methods**, including survey, excavation, laboratory processing, and conservation; and (2) to introduce students to the **intellectual challenges presented by archaeological research**, including research design, the interpretation of data, and the continual readjustment of hypotheses and field strategies with regard to information recovered in the field.

The course will take place in neighborhoods at the edge of Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, Illinois. The site is located a short drive from St. Louis, Mo. Students will spend the majority of their time conducting excavations at the site of Cahokia.

Student will participate in the following research activities:

Excavations: Students will participate in guided excavations in a multi-component residential area at the periphery of the Cahokia precinct.

Recordation: Students will fully document excavation techniques and observations on excavation forms, map finds, and record stratigraphy. Students will assist in site-wide mapping using Total Station technology.

Laboratory: Scheduled lab tasks will include processing (washing, sorting, and cataloging) artifacts.

The course begins on Sunday, June 15, 2025, and will meet every weekday until July 19, 2025. A combination of lectures, readings, and fieldwork during the first two days of the project will provide the cultural and archaeological background to the fieldwork, and additional lectures by project specialists will occur periodically throughout the remainder of the field season. Each Wednesday evening we will have a weekly discussion of required readings (see below).

LEARNING OUTCOMES

On successful completion of the field school, students will be able to:

- Understand the different elements of an archaeological field project and the relationships between these elements
- Apply standard excavation methods to archaeological contexts
 - Students will learn and apply proper shovel and trowel techniques, as well as how to take special samples (e.g., flotation samples)
 - students will be able to identify feature fill
 - students will be able to provide basic soil descriptions (Munsell and texture)
 - students will be able to identify and recover artifacts *in situ* as well as through dry screening
- Use standard recording techniques to document excavation results
 - Students will learn and apply proper field photography methods
 - Students will be able to accurately plan map features and artifact locations
 - Students will be able to accurately profile map and describe stratigraphic deposits
 - Students will have working knowledge of Total Station operations
- Undertake preliminary processing and cataloging of archaeological artifacts and ecofacts

- o Students will be able to determine proper cleaning practices for each material type
- o Students will be able to identify and properly catalog different material types

ASSESSMENT

60%: Attend and participate each scheduled day, including lecture and field and laboratory work

20%: Keep a readings notebook that will be submitted and evaluated at the end of each week

10%: Lead discussion of readings (provide classmates with two questions and summarize weekly readings) once during the field season

10%: Participate in daily reports of research activities, artifact bag check-in, and checking of notes

Grade	Grading Criteria
A	Present every day, on time and prepared to work Always participates fully in excavations, screening, note taking, photography, etc. Demonstrates improvement in archaeological skills described in the SLOs Participates fully in loading/unloading vehicle and transporting equipment Has read assigned readings and participates in discussion of those readings Is a team player, works well with others Maintains an overall positive attitude
A-	Has one unexcused absence Almost always participates fully in excavations, screening, note taking, photography, etc. Demonstrates improvement in archaeological skills described in the SLOs Almost always participates fully in loading/unloading/transporting equipment Misses one assigned reading or does not participate in discussion of one reading Is a team player, works well with others Maintains an overall positive attitude
B+	Has two unexcused absences Typically participates fully in excavations, screening, note taking, photography, etc. Shows some attempt to improve archaeological skills described in SLOs Typically participates fully in loading/unloading and transporting equipment Misses two assigned readings/does not participate in discussion of two readings Is a team player, works well with others Maintains an overall positive attitude
B	Has two unexcused absences Inconsistent in their participation in excavations, screening, note taking, photography, etc. Shows some attempt to improve archaeological skills described in SLOs Typically participates fully in loading/unloading and transporting equipment Misses two assigned readings/does not participate in discussion of two readings Is a team player, works well with others Maintains an overall positive attitude

B-	Has two unexcused absences Inconsistent in their participation in excavations, screening, note taking, photography, etc. Shows some attempt to improve archaeological skills described in SLOs Inconsistent in their participation in loading/unloading/transporting equipment Misses two assigned readings/does not participate in discussion of two readings Is overall a team player and works well with others most of the time Attitude intermittently poor
C+	Has three unexcused absences Inconsistent in their participation in excavations, screening, note taking, photography, etc. Shows little attempt to improve archaeological skills described in SLOs Inconsistent in their participation of loading/unloading/transporting equipment Misses three readings/does not participate in discussion of three readings Has trouble working with others or working together as a team Has a consistently poor attitude
C	Has more than three unexcused absences Does not participate in some aspect of excavation, screening, note taking, photography, etc. Shows no attempt to improve archaeological skills described in SLOs Does not participate in loading/unloading and transporting equipment Misses > three readings or does not participate in discussion of >three readings Does not work well with others or cannot work together as a team Has a consistently poor attitude

COURSE SCHEDULE

All IFR field schools begin with a 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.

***Course Schedule subject to change due to weather conditions (e.g. excessive heat, rain)**

Week 1 (May 20 - May 23):

Wednesday 4:00 pm: Students will be picked up from the MetroLink Fairview Heights Station
 5 pm: Students and staff assemble in the PI's living room
 5 – 6:30 pm: Preliminary introductions and group dinner

Thursday 6:45 am: meet van
 7:00 am: leave from Cougar Village (we will leave promptly by the time listed every day, if you are not in the vehicle at that time you will be left and miss a day in the field; this will affect your grade)
 7:30 am: tour of Cahokia (grounds and Interpretive Center)
 11 am: Lecture on project goals and research at Interpretive Center
 1 pm: lunch
 3 4:30 pm: free time at museum
 5 pm: arrive back at apartments, dinner to follow

7 pm: Lecture "What was Cahokia?"

Readings: Pauketat et al. 2015; Pauketat et al. 2023

Friday 6:45 am: meet van; 7 am departure from apartments
7:30 am: arrive at site, unpack van, begin fieldwork
11 -11:30 am: lunch
2 pm: 15 min. break
3:30 pm: pack up
4 pm: leave for field house
4:30 pm: unload equipment, complete paperwork
6 pm: return to Cougar Village for dinner
7 pm: Lecture "Landscapes and Neighborhoods"

Saturday Free
Sunday: Free

Week 2-4 (May 24-June19):

Daily schedule for the three weeks of fieldwork Monday through Friday (note the 4th of July holiday will not be a field day):

6:00-6:45am	Breakfast (on your own)
6:45-7:15am	Transfer to Cahokia
7:15am-3:30pm	Research activities at the site (snack and lunch break at the site, bring your own lunch and snack)
3:30-4:00pm	Return back to housing
4:00-5:30pm	Daily debriefing, Lab work & paper work (if needed)
	Wednesdays we will have readings discussion/lecture (see below for required readings) at 4:30-5:30 p.m.
6:00-7:00pm	Dinner (on your own, except Thursdays)
7:00-8:00pm	(occasionally) invited lectures by project specialists and guests

****Wednesdays we discuss weekly readings****

Thursdays there is an option to join a group dinner at The Stagger Inn in downtown Edwardsville. This won't be mandatory, but highly recommended for community and comradery. Student meals will be covered by the PIs, though students will have to pay for their own beverages.

Week 5 (June 22-24):

Mon	Continued regular research schedule
Tuesday-Wednesday	Backfilling and lab cleaning
Thursday	Return home

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.

Each week you are required to complete the readings as listed below. Each week two students will be designated as the discussion leaders. Discussion leaders will provide fellow classmates with two discussion questions (due the Tuesday before) and lead the conversation surrounding the readings. Additionally, you are required to keep a notebook with short summaries (200 words or less), comments, and questions about each reading (due Friday by 5 pm). These will be collected and reviewed by the PI's.

Week 1: What is Cahokia?

Readings: Alt and Pauketat 2017; Pauketat et. al 2015; Pauketat et al. 2023; Howe and Wilson 2015

Week 2: Cahokia In Context

Readings: Emerson et al. 2020; Baltus and Baires 2020; Baires et al. 2023

Week 3: Building Cahokia, literally and spiritually

Readings: Alt et. al 2010; Baires et al. 2017; Baltus and Baires 2012; Betzenhauser and Pauketat 2019;

Week 4: Cahokian "Collapse", Cahokia in Context

Readings: Munoz et al. 2015; Baires et. al 2015; Rankin et al. 2021

Week 5: Re-Cap and Closing Discussion

No Readings for this week

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alt, S., Kruchten, J. and Pauketat T. (2010) The Construction and Use of Cahokia's Grand Plaza. *Journal of Field Archaeology* (35)2: 131-146.

Alt, S.M., and T.R. Pauketat (2017) The Elements of Cahokian Shrine COmplexes and Basis of Mississippian Religion. In *Religion and Politics of the Ancient Americas*, edited by S. Barber and A.A. Joyce, pp. 51-74. Routledge, London.

Baires, S., Baltus, M., and Buchanan, M. (2015) Correlation does not equal causation: Questioning the Great Cahokia Flood. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* doi/10.1073/pnas.1509104112.

Baires, S.E., M.R. Baltus, and E.Watts Malouchos (2017) Exploring New Cahokian Neighborhoods: Structure Density Estimates from the Spring Lake Tract, Cahokia. *American Antiquity* 82(4):742-760.

Baires, S.E., M.R. Baltus, K. Parker, S. Khuen (2023) The Role of Plants and Animals in the Termination of Three Buildings at the Spring Lake Tract Neighborhood, Cahokia. *American Antiquity* 88(1):20-30.

Baltus, M.R., and S.E. Baires (2020) Creating and Abandoning “Homeland”: Cahokia as Place of Origin. *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 27:111-127.

Betzenhauser, A.M. and T.R. Pauketat (2019) Elements of Cahokian Neighborhoods. *ARCHEOLOGICAL PAPERS OF THE AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION*, Vol. 30, pp. 133–147.

Emerson, T.E., K.M. Hedman, T.K. Brennan, A.M. Betzenhauser, S.M. Alt, T.R. Pauketat (2020) Interrogating Diaspora and Movement in the Greater Cahokian World. *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 27:54-71.

Howe, L. and Wilson, J. (2015) Life in a 21st Century Mound City. *The World of Indigenous North America*, pgs. 3-25. Warrior, R., ed. Routledge.

Munoz, S., Gruley, K., Massie, A., Fike, D., Schroeder, S., Williams, J. (2015) Cahokia’s emergence and decline coincided with shifts of flood frequency on the Mississippi River. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* doi/10.1073/pnas.1501904112.

Pauketat T., S. Alt, J. Kruchten (2015) City of earth and wood: New Cahokia and its material-historical implications. *The Cambridge World History Vol. 3 Early Cities in Comparative Perspective, 4000 BCE-1200 CE*, pgs. 437-452. Yoffee, N., ed. Cambridge University Press.

Pauketat, T.R., S.M. Alt, A.M. Betzenhauser, J.D. Kruchten, and E.M. Benson (2023) Cahokia as Urban Anomaly. *Journal of Urban Archaeology* 7:253-274.

Rankin, Caitlin, Casey R. Barrier, Timothy J. Horsley
2021 Evaluating Narratives of Ecocide with the Stratigraphic Record at Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, Illinois, USA. *Geoarchaeology* 36:369-387.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Crown, P., Emerson, E., Gu, J., Hurst, J., Pauketat, T., and Ward, T. (2012) Ritual Black Drink consumption at Cahokia. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* doi/10.1073/pnas.1208404109.

Demel, S. and R. Hall (1998) The Mississippian town plan and cultural landscape of Cahokia, Illinois. *Mississippian Towns and Sacred Places*, pgs. 200-226. Lewis, R. and Stout, C., eds. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

Echo-Hawk, W. (2009) Under Native American Skies. *Ethnography in the National Park Service* 26(3): 58-79.

EQUIPMENT LIST

Required Supplies:

- 1 tool box cheap plastic is good, though softsided travels best
- 1 pointed Marshalltown trowel must be “Marshalltown” brand & 4.5 inch is best
- 1 steel file (a.k.a. bastard file)
- 2 clear plastic metric rulers (30 cm long)

- 1 Rhino metric folder ruler (a.k.a. carpenter's ruler) www.forestry-suppliers.com, item 71112
- 2 small metric tape measures 3 to 5 meters or metric reel tapes
- 1 roll of **thin nylon string** (not cotton) fluorescent colors are great
- 1 line level (the kind that hooks over a string)
- 1 cheap plumb bob don't get the expensive brass kind
- 2 metal tent spikes with green plastic tops available at Wal-Mart
- Several pencils (wooden or mechanical)
- 1 pencil sharpener if you use wooden pencils
- 2 "Sharpie" finepoint markers must be real Sharpies, only black ink, no ultra-fine point
- 2 bamboo chopsticks you do not need an entire pack
- 1 personal first aid kit (bandaids, antiseptic)
- 1 water jug you need a one-gallon insulated container