

**FALL SEMESTER 2010**

**■ ARHS 535: The Painted Books of Ancient Mexico**

William Barnes

Wednesdays, 5:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Leading up to the time of the Conquest, most people of ancient Mesoamerica relied upon painted documents to record and transmit information. These painted 'books', or codices as they are sometimes called, often took the form of long screenfold documents made of deerskin or native paper and large sheets of woven cloth referred to as *lienzos*. They were used for the practical purpose of noting historical events, recording tax and tribute information, proclaiming dynastic and genealogical descent, and mapping out the boundaries of polities. They were also quite important for setting down the intricate working of the Mesoamerican calendar that recorded astronomical cycles and served as the basis for divination, a key element of Mesoamerican civilization. Participants in this course will learn about the fundamentals of Mesoamerican manuscript painting, particularly the painted books of the Aztecs, Mixtecs, Maya, and their neighbors. Additionally we will look at the survival of the manuscript painting tradition in the Post-Conquest period, and investigate the surprisingly general use and acceptance of painted documents in Colonial culture.

*This course fulfills the Non-Western/Non-European requirement for those beginning in fall 2009 and beyond.*

*This course fulfills the Non-Western Art core requirement for those who entered the program prior to fall 2009.*

Background reading:

Boone, Elizabeth H. "The Pictorial Codices of Ancient Mexico" in *The Ancient Americas: Art from Sacred Landscapes*, ed. Richard F. Townsend. Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago (1992). pp. 196-210.  
Miller, Mary and Karl Taube. *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*. New York: Thames and Hudson (1993).