

FORENSIC ARCHAEOLOGY OF MASS EXECUTIONS DURING THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR, CHELVA (SPAIN)

Course ID: HIS 489

Jan 4-31, 2026

Academic Credits: 8 Semester Credit Units (Equivalent to 12 Quarter Units)
School of Record: Culver Stockton College

The program is designed to train students in the process of identification and analyzing human remains from mass burials in conflict zones. Its goal is to train participants in the methodological and legal issues (chain of custody, documentation, etc) that are crucial elements of such work. This program takes place where family & community members of the dead are alive and have deep and intensive interest in the identification and research work.

This program is emotionally and physically demanding. It requires the utmost respect for the dead and the living, and high emotional resilience to deal with the outcome of extreme violence performed by humans in the recent past. Students should be aware of the challenges and attend only if they feel this type of experience is for them.

This program DOES NOT offer onsite professional grief counseling.

DIRECTOR:

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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Spanish Civil War was fought from 1936 to 1939, between Republican and Nationalist forces. The war began in 1936, when General Francisco Franco initiate a coup d'état against the democratically elected Republican Spanish state. Franco wanted to establish a fascist state in Spain and was supported by the then contemporary fascist regimes of Germany and Italy. The Spanish Civil War is considered by many around the world as a struggle between dictatorship and democracy and was internationalised almost immediately. Volunteers from around the world

joined combatants of both sides. By 1939, Franco's forces won the war, and the regime began an intensive, long-term process of liquidation of its foes.

Castellón began to be directly affected by the Spanish Civil War at the end of March 1938. With the defeat of Republican forces at Teruel, General Aranda – the commander of the Nationalist army – advanced toward Castellón. The town fell to the Nationalist forces on June 14, 1938, and the regime began its 'liquidation' program immediately. This program is focused on studying human remains from the long liquidation process at Castellón.

The 'liquidation' of political opponents at Castellón took place in three different phases. From July to October 1938, irregular killings were carried out in the streets and exits of the town, on the roads or in local cemeteries. From November 1938 to February 1939, official files were created for detainees. No judicial process was followed, and immediate death sentences were signed by the military. The third phase was an institutional one. The regime created official War Councils, and a semi-judicial process was followed before death sentences were issued. That phase lasted until 1956. The vast majority of those executed in Castellón and its hinterland were killed during the third phase.

Recent excavations of a mass grave at the cemetery of Castellón, human remains of 51 individuals were exhumed. Due to legal protocols and chain-of-custody procedures followed by the Spanish authorities, the remains were transferred to Chelva, the Valencia regional hub for Civil War human remains.

This field school is focused on studying the remains to determine identity, cause of death and other forensic elements. We have two main goals. The first is to create proper documentation standing to contemporary legal standards so perpetrators can be prosecuted (a political decision) and historical truth established. Second, we hope to identify victims from mass graves and return to families so individuals may be intern with named, marked graves.

Each student will be responsible for the complete recording & study of at least one individual, and more if time permits. This program includes extensive travel to local Civil War sites, including Teruel and Valencia. Students will learn how to contextualize the analysis of human remains with historical events, how to engage with stakeholders and how to study victims of war atrocities and mass burials.

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER

The Center for Field Sciences was established to support field training in a range of sciences at sites within the U.S. & across the world. Traveling and conducting field work involves risk. Students interested in participating in any CFS program must weigh the potential risk against the value of education provided by the program of their choosing.

Risk is inherent in everything we do and the CFS takes risks seriously. A committee of leading scholars review each field school location prior to approval. Once a program is accepted, the CFS continually monitor conditions at the program's site and so we can provide an experience that is as safe as possible.

The CFS does not provide trip or travel cancellation insurance. Students are encouraged to explore such insurance policies on their own. Post Covid 19, most basic policies do not cover trip cancellation due to pandemics. If you wish to purchase an insurance policy that covers such contingencies, explore Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) plans. [Insuremytrip.com](https://www.insuremytrip.com), [Squaremouth.com](https://www.squaremouth.com) or [Travelguard.com](https://www.travelguard.com) are possible websites where students may explore different insurance policies.

Students should be aware that conditions in the field are different than those experienced at home, dorms or college towns. Students will be exposed to the elements, live in rustic accommodation, and expect to engage in daily physical activity.

We do our best to follow schedule and activities as outlined in this syllabus. Yet local permitting agencies, political, environmental, personal, and/or weather conditions may force changes. This syllabus, therefore, is only a general commitment. Students should allow flexibility and adaptability as research work is frequently subject to modification.

All students must consult medical professionals to ensure they are fit to participate in a CFS field program. CFS is not qualified to provide medical advice. For all other concerns, please consult with CFS staff members or program director(s) – as appropriate.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Our program is designed to train students and professionals. Experience from this program may benefit individuals interested in forensic anthropology, forensic archaeology and bioarchaeology.

While some experience working with human remains will be helpful, beginners are welcome. The first two days of the program will focus on training in ethics, international field and laboratory work protocols in forensic anthropology, human rights and their legal context in conflicts. Each student will be trained in the techniques of forensic anthropology methods.

The two main objectives of this training are:

- a. To develop and extend skills in the identification and analysis of skeletal human remains.
- b. To provide the theoretical and practical knowledge to study and investigate real cases and produce scientific and technical reports.

This field school is aimed to be practical and applied. The four weeks will be dedicated to analysing human remains in the lab. The laboratory work will be complemented with workshops and visits to museums and sites and lessons focused on field work, exhumation, and post-excavation work.

Each student will be assigned the remains of a single individual (both inhumed and cremated), which they will have to document for the entire process. Students will have the guidance, assistance and help of staff members at all times.

A seminar will be held each Friday afternoon, where we will discuss work completed during the week, methods, findings and questions. Saturdays and Wednesdays are dedicated to excursions to important archaeological and cultural sites in the area. Sundays are rest & recuperating days.

OSTEOLOGY AND HUMAN ANATOMY

- ❖ Identification of human skeletal remains
- ❖ Morphology and variation of the skull
- ❖ Human muscle-skeletal anatomy
- ❖ Identification of the immature skeleton, individual bones.
- ❖ Identification and study of cremated bones. Quantitative and analytical methods
- ❖ Osteometry and anthropometry Application of methods, measurements and instruments. Quantification and comparison. Use of standards

BIOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

- ❖ Age estimation
- ❖ Sex estimation
- ❖ Estimation of stature, body size, robustness, etc.
- ❖ Estimation of origin, ethnicity, ancestry

- ❖ Palaeodemographics, life expectancy, qualitative differences, sex, age, socio-economic status, occupation, location, environment
- ❖ Stress and lifestyle markers
- ❖ Paleopathology, identification of bone disease, causes of death, identification of abnormalities identification of abnormalities in the skeleton.
- ❖ Mummified remains or extraordinary preservation of human evidence

FIELD ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF DEATH

- ❖ Archaeotatology, Physical Anthropology, Forensic Anthropology.
- ❖ Excavation techniques, recording and documentation. Variations of remains that and the process of recording skeletal and mummified remains. mummified remains.
- ❖ Taphonomic processes. Principles of taphonomy and diagenesis in skeletal remains.
- ❖ Collective or mass burials
- ❖ Individual primary burials
- ❖ Relations between the internal and external environment of the corpse
- ❖ Burials of infants who died in the first months of life or ante vitae
- ❖ Secondary burials
- ❖ Contexts and types of cremations. Method for the study of burnt remains in in situ. Micro-excavation techniques of burnt remains. Cleaning of human remains. Proper storage of human remains
- ❖ Deaths without funerals (*funus*): catastrophes, epidemics, war conflicts and disasters.
- ❖ Evolution of evidence of human remains. Findings in habitat soils. Funerary caves, megaliths, cemeteries.
- ❖ The ritual dimension of burial
- ❖ Museums, exhibition and didactics of human remains.

RECORDING AND GRAPHIC RECONSTRUCTION OF BONES AND SKELETONS

- ❖ Techniques and methods of graphic field recording 1: field drawing, topography, total station, 3D scanner, photography and drones.
- ❖ Techniques and methods of graphic field recording 2. Photography, photogrammetry and scanner.
- ❖ Techniques and methods of graphic recording in the laboratory: drawing, photography and scanning of human remains.
- ❖ Data processing in the laboratory: digitalisation.
- ❖ Reconstruction and recreation of burial and gesture.
- ❖ Physical and computerised facial reconstruction

FORENSIC ANALYSIS AND COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES

- ❖ The deontology of death and professional practice
- ❖ Judicial expertise. protocols, excavation and study of mass graves, civil war, conflicts.
- ❖ Quantitative methods in anthropology. Application of statistical and numerical methods and numerical methods in quantitative problems in biological anthropology, palaeo-anthropology, osteo-archaeology.
- ❖ Chemical analysis of skeletal remains. Contribution of stable isotopes to osteo-archaeology.
- ❖ Molecular analysis and DNA
- ❖ Radiometric dating (carbon 14)
- ❖ Radiological study of anthropological remains (radiology, tomography).
- ❖ Microscopic analysis of skeletal remains
- ❖ Development of analytical methods in osteo-archaeology

LEARNT SKILLS

We are aware that many students may not seek academic careers but will pursue employment in the private sector. To that end, we are following the example set by Twin Cairns with their Skills Log Matrix™ (<https://twincairns.com/skills-log-matrix/>). Students will be trained in the following skills:

Skill	Skill Definition
Human remains Curation	Ability to safely register, document and store a wide range of human remains types in curation facilities following state and federal laws
Human remains Documentation	Ability to measure, record, photograph and classify various human remains types in the lab/post ex setting
Human remains Identification	Ability to identify archaeological human remains, from both pre contact and historical context
Human remains Processing	Understand how to assign human remains to accepted cultural/geological spheres, across space (classification) & time (seriation)
Basic Conservation & Preservation	Ability to conduct initial field conservation and preservation of different human remains types, features & architecture
Bioarchaeology	Ability to excavate, document & study human remains
Data Recording	Ability to use printed or digital sheets to document & record field data
Photography	Ability to take clear images of various features, human remains & soil colors at various light and field depth conditions

SKILLS MATRIX LEVELS

The school instructors will evaluate the level each student achieved on the list of skills provided above. Each skill will be graded on one of the following three levels:

Basic: Can perform the skill/task with some supervision.

Competent: Can perform the skill/task without any supervision.

Advanced: Can perform the skill/task and teach others how to do it.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Arrival day is Sunday, the first day of the program.

The initial two days of the program will be dedicated to discussions and study of the cultural, methodological and theoretical aspects of the project. Weekly lectures will be held every Wed, prior to dinner. Seminar will be held each Friday afternoon to discuss project progress, theoretical and methodological issues related to work at the site.

Saturdays are dedicated to field trip. The scheduled excursions will include the following:

1. City of Valencia, Almoina Museum and Ethnomuseum
2. El Torrejón de Gátova, archaeological site and necropolis
3. City of Lliria, archaeological sites and necropolis.
4. Serrania (Valencia) natural and cultural trip

Sunday is a day off.

The last day of the program is a Saturday. Students should plan to depart any time during that day.

GENERAL PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Week 1	
Sunday 4:00-8:00pm	Arrival Dinner
Monday 9:00 -5:00pm	Lectures
Tuesday 8:00-5:00pm	Lectures
Wednesday 8:00-5:00pm	Work on human remains (burials)
Thursday 8:00-5:00pm	Work on human remains (burials)
Friday 8:00-5:00pm	Work on human remains (burials)
Friday 6:30pm-8:00pm	Seminar
Saturday 9:00am-2pm	Excursion
Sat 4:00pm-forward	Free afternoon
Sunday	Free day
Week 2 (Mon-Sat)	
M-F 8:00am-5:00pm	Work on human remains (burials)
Wednesday 6:30pm-8:00pm	Lectures
Friday 6:30pm-8:00pm	Seminar
Saturday 9:00am-2:00pm	Excursions
Sat 4:00pm-forward	Free afternoon
Sunday	Free day
Week 3 (Mon-Sat)	
M-F 8:00am-5:00pm	Work at the lab (Cremations)
Wednesday 6:30pm-8:00pm	Lectures
Saturday 9:00am-2:00pm	Excursions
Sat 4:00pm-forward	Free afternoon
Sunday	Free day
Week 4 (Mon-Sat)	
M-F 8:00am-5:00pm	Work at the lab (Cremations)
Wednesday 6:30pm-8:00pm	Lectures
Friday	Work at the lab (Cremations)
Saturday	Departure

The Director and organizing institutions of the program reserve the right to modify the schedule for scientific needs or for unforeseeable circumstances.

TYPICAL WORKDAY

Time	Activity
6:30am	Wakeup
7:00am	Breakfast
7:30am	Departure for the lab
8:00am	Work begins at the lab
10:00-10:15am	Morning break
1:30-2:30pm	Lunch
2:30pm	Work on the lab
5:00pm	End of workday
6:30pm-8:00pm	Wednesday Lecture/Friday seminar
8:30pm	Dinner

ATTENDANCE POLICY

The required minimum attendance for the successful completion of the field school is 90% of the course hours. Any significant delay or early departure from an activity will be calculated as an absence from the activity. An acceptable number of absences for medical or other personal

reasons will not be considered if the student catches up on the field school study plan through additional readings, homework or tutorials with program staff members.

PREREQUISITES

None. This is hands-on, experiential learning and students will study on-site how to conduct forensic archaeology research. Forensic work requires patient, respect and understanding of the capacity of humans for extreme violence. It demands discipline and attention to detail.

PROGRAM ETIQUETTE

Chelva is a town in the *comarca* (an intermediate level of administrative subdivision between municipalities and provinces) of Los Serranos in the Valencian Province. Two rivers flow through Chelva – The Chelva & Turia Rivers. The oldest evidence of human habitation in Chelva is dated to Neolithic times, Chelva was occupied since Neolithic times. Romans built extensively in town, but the origin of modern Chelva is dated to the Moors, who establish the town in the 11th century CE.

This project is in its first year, and we plan to continue and work at the site for years to come. Students at this field school represent the project both on and off site. Misbehaviour by any project staff reflect badly on the entire project and may prevent the renewal of research permits.

Students who violate Spanish authorities' forensic work regulations, disrespect Spanish law or culture, or disrespect the dead will be subject for removal from the project. Students are expected to observe and to learn, to enrich themselves with the diversity of cultures and different pace, values and ethics of a small Spanish town.

EQUIPMENT LIST

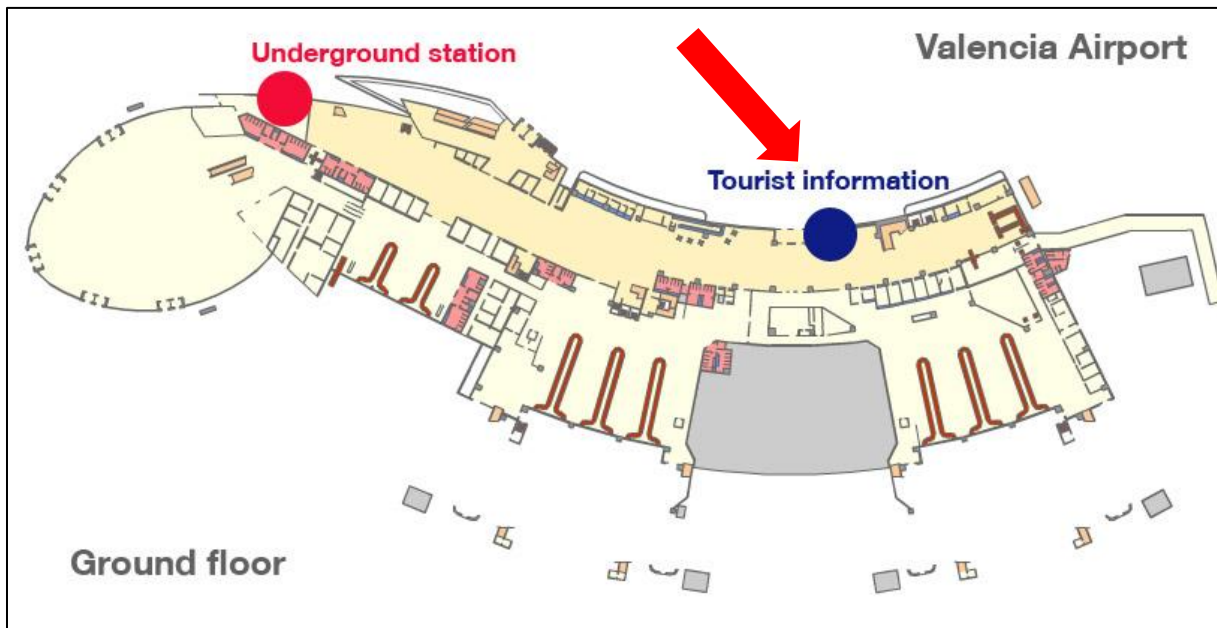
The site is permanently covered, so we are not affected by sun or rain.

1. Passport or ID card. All European citizens should bring their health card, or health insurance card, if applicable
2. Student/University ID
3. Mosquito repellent and after-bite cream
4. If you are taking any medication, remember to bring it with you.
5. Stationery for personal use (notebook, pens etc)
6. Bring your laptop computer as we will be using a digital dossier for the course.
7. Appropriate adaptor for all electronic devices.
8. Consider purchasing an international plan for your phone or purchase a local SIM card when you arrive.
9. We recommend that you wear light and comfortable clothing. You should bring a jacket and/or windbreaker, as well as very comfortable shoes. During excavations, you can wear long or short sleeves shirts, pants or shorts.
10. You don't need to bring any instruments or tools for the excavation. We will provide you with all the tools and instruments you will need for this program.
11. Bring some nice/'dressier' cloths for times when you go out for dinner.
12. Personal First Aid Kit (available in most pharmacies) including. Sterile gauze pads, waterproof bandages, large bandages 8cm x 6cm, Ace bandage 5cm x 4.5m, and medical tape 1.25 x 5m, Eye Wash 20ml, iodine and hydrogen peroxide. Below is an example of a kit available at a pharmacy with most of the supplies: http://www.boots.com/en/Boots-St-John-Ambulance-Essential-First-Aid-Kit_1258543/
13. A small backpack (for your food, bottle of water, wet wipes, camera, papers etc.)
14. Please join us in our efforts to reduce the use of disposable plastics pieces during our program. We kindly ask you to bring your personal meal set – plate, cup, spoon, fork & knife.
15. A good attitude for work, study and research.

TRAVEL & MEETING POINT/TIME

We suggest you hold purchasing your airline ticket until six (6) weeks prior to departure date. Natural disasters, political changes, weather conditions and a range of other factors may require the cancelation of a program. The CFS typically takes a close look at local conditions 6-7 weeks prior to program beginning and makes a Go/No Go decision by then. Such time frame still allows for the purchase of deeply discounted airline tickets while protecting students from potential loss of airline ticket costs if CFS is forced to cancel a program.

We will meet students on Sunday, the first day of the program, at 5:00pm at the Valencia Airport (VLC). Meeting point is by the Tourist Information Booth at the Arrival Hall. Students will then be transported to Chelva by car, a trip of about one hour.



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

VISA REQUIREMENTS

There are no special visa requirements for U.S. citizen travelling to Europe, if they do not stay longer than 3 months. Passport's expiration date should exceed the stay by at least 3 months.

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

MEALS & ACCOMMODATION

All staff and student will be staying 14th century Franciscan convent. The rooms are individual simple, comfortable, and welcoming with free WiFi. The convent has large rooms, bathrooms, showers, library, dining room, a fully equipped kitchen, conference room, recreation and outdoor dining area, as well as a barbecue area.

The project provides breakfast, lunch and dinner throughout the week, except for lunch and dinner on the trip day (normally Saturday) and free day (normally Sunday). Please let us know of any dietary restrictions (vegetarian/vegan) so that we may inform the restaurant in advance.

Meals include a starter, main course, dessert, coffee/tea, wine, soft drinks and water

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

International dialling code: +34

Money/Banks/Credit Cards: As a major touristic destination, Teruel has a wide availability of banks where you can use your ATM and credit card.

ATM Availability: There is a wide availability of banks where you can use a credit card and ATMs

Local Language: Spanish is the official language of the Country. English and Spanish are the languages of the program.

Measure units: degree Celsius (°C), meter (m.), gram (gr.), liter (l)

ACADEMIC CREDITS & TRANSCRIPT

Attending students will be awarded 8 semester credit units (equivalent to 12 quarter credit units). Students will receive a letter grade for attending this field school based on the assessment matrix (above). This program provides a minimum of 160 direct instructional hours. Students are encouraged to discuss the transferability of credit units with faculty and the registrar at their home institutions prior to attending this program.

Students will be able to access their transcript through our School of Record – Culver-Stockton College. C-SC has authorized the National Student Clearinghouse to provide enrollment and degree verification (at <https://tsorder.studentclearinghouse.org/school/select>). Upon completion of a program, students will get an email from C-SC with a student ID that may be used to retrieve transcripts. The first set of transcripts will be provided at no cost, additional transcripts may require payment. If you have questions about ordering a transcript, contact the C-SC office of the registrar at registrar@culver.edu.

REQUIRED READINGS

PDF files of all mandatory readings will be provided to enrolled students via a shared Dropbox folder.

Bass, W. 1995. Human Osteology: A Laboratory and Field Manual. 4th Edition, Missouri Archaeological Society, Columbia.

DeGrazia, D. 2017. The Definition of Death. In The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, ed. E.N. Zalta. Stanford: Stanford University.
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/death-definition/>

Squires, K., Errickson, D., Márquez-Grant, N. 2019. Introduction. In: Squires, K., Errickson, D., Márquez-Grant, N. (eds). Ethical Approaches to Human Remains. Springer, Cham. Pg 1-15.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-32926-6_1

White Tim D., Black Michael T., Folkens Pieter A. 2012. Human Osteology. Elsevier Academic Press.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

FORENSIC PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY Proceedings 2002-2011. The Proceedings of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences is an official publication of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS) and includes various areas of the forensic sciences such as pathology, toxicology, physical anthropology, psychiatry, odontology, jurisprudence, criminalistics, questioned documents, digital sciences, engineering sciences and other disciplines. The proceedings herein are from the Physical Anthropology section for the years 2002 to 2011.

RECOMMENDATIONS IN FORENSIC ANTHROPOLOGY SPANISH ASSOCIATION OF FORENSIC ANTHROPOLOGY AND ODONTOLOGY June 2013 Coordinator: F Serrull.

Muñoz-Encinar, L. (2019). Unearthing gendered repression: an analysis of the violence suffered by women during the civil war and Franco's dictatorship in Southwestern Spain. World Archaeology. Vol 51(5), 759-777.

Herrasti, L., Márquez-Grant, N., & Etxeberria, F. (2021). Spanish Civil War: the recovery and identification of combatants. Forensic Science International. Vol 320:110706.