

SEARCHING FOR THE VISCOUNTS OF CHELVA: BIOARCHAEOLOGY AT THE MEDIEVAL FRANCISCAN CONVENT, SPAIN

Course ID: HIS 489

Session I: May 4-31, 2025

Academic Credits: 8 Semester Credit Units (Equivalent to 12 Quarter Units)

School of Record: Culver Stockton College

This program is focused on the recovery of Medieval human remains buried under the floor of a church. The program is designed to train students in the process of exhumation and identification and studying human remains.

This program is emotionally and physically demanding. It requires the utmost respect for the dead and the living. 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 Chelva Monastery was established 1390 CE, the oldest Franciscan mission in Spain. By the 16th century, the Church of San Francisco was built attached to the convent, in a Late Gothic style. According to written records, between 1551-1558 CE the Viscounts of Chelva – important leaders of the Iberian period – were buried under the alter of the church (Fig 1). This project is design to verify the validity of these textual records, excavate the remains of these important figures and study the life and death of elite, individuals from the nobility class of the period.

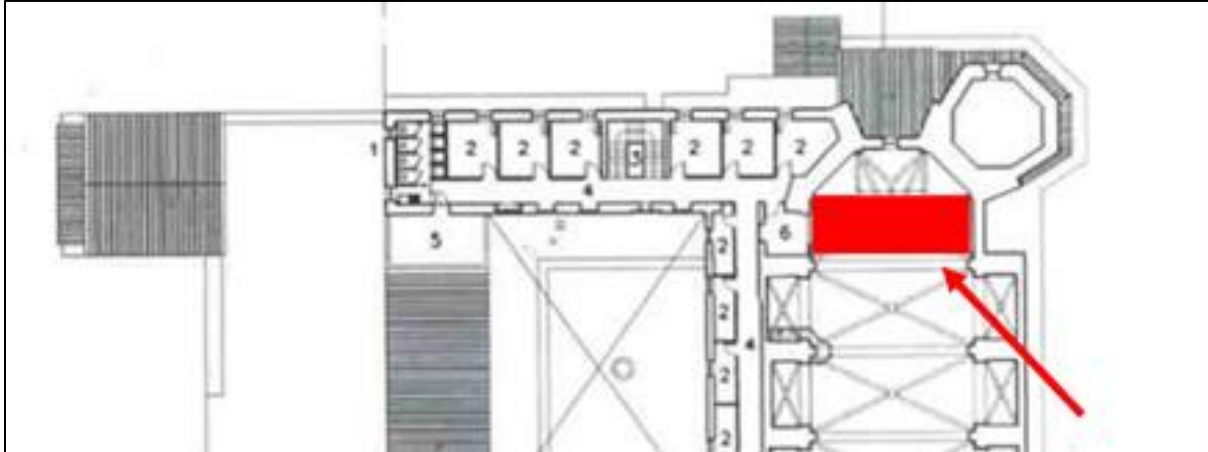


Figure 1: Designated excavation area within the Church of San Francisco

Today, the Chelva monastery complex is standing abandoned – although it is periodically used for ceremonial purposes. The Chelva’s *Fondaction Antonia Clavel* manage the complex and in the process of renovating and bringing back to use the structure and its environments. Part of this renovation is a study of the history of area, with special focus on the role Chelva and its past political leaders played in the shift from Iberian to Spanish identity and political structure. The excavation of the Viscounts burials should shed significant light on such processes and will help in building a more complete narrative to the history of the structure and the region.

It is not certain that the written records are correct and that the Viscounts are, indeed, buried under the alter. A long tradition in Catholic churches is to bury past leaders under the floor of important areas within the church, so the written records are in line with historical traditions. If we do find the burials and if these are the Viscounts, we anticipate a significant media interest within, and likely outside the Iberian Peninsula. Students should expect this potential media interest and attend the program only if they feel comfortable with such exposure.

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 cancelation due to pandemics. If you wish to purchase an insurance policy that covers such contingencies, explore Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) plans. insuremytrip.com,

Squaremouth.com or 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

The objective of this program is to enable students to better understand how archaeology is practiced in the field, to explore the diverse lifestyle of people in the past and to gain basic understanding of the evolution of cultural complexity. This program also trains students for potential careers in the Cultural Resource Management sector.

To achieve these objectives, this course has three primary goals: (1) to provide students a practical working knowledge of archaeological field methods, excavation, including excavation of human remains, laboratory analysis, artifact cataloging, and conservation; (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; and (3) to train students in documenting and filing paperwork in accordance with laws and regulations design to protect cultural resources.

The course will take place in the medieval Franciscan convent, located ½ mile outside the modern town of Chelva. Students will participate in the following research activities:

Excavations: Students will participate in guided excavations at the Church of San Francisco.

Bio-anthropology: Students will conduct excavation and documentation of burials and human remains.

Recordation: Students will participate in filling out specific excavation forms, map finds, and record stratigraphy. Many of these forms are relevant to commercial archaeology and cultural resource management sector.

Cataloging: Students will participate in field sorting and cataloging of finds.

Laboratory: Scheduled lab tasks will include washing, sorting, drawing, and cataloging of finds.

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
Small Hand Tools	Can operate a trowel or similar small hand tool to conduct excavations
Large Hand Tools	Can operate a pickaxe, hoe or similar large hand tool to conduct excavations

Artifact Processing	Ability to safely register, document and store a wide range of artifact types in curation facilities following state and federal laws
Artifact Identification	Ability to identify archaeological artifacts and ecofacts, from both pre contact and historical context
Artifact Recovery	Ability to record, safely excavate and properly storage artifacts and ecofacts made of different types of materials (ceramics, metal, lithics, etc.) and various level of fragility
Grid & Trench Layout	Ability to lay accurate grid and generate reliable trench outline for excavations
Data Recording	Ability to use printed or digital sheets to document & record field data
Excavation General Principles	Know how to excavate in cultural or arbitrary layers, document and record all excavation activity
Stratigraphy	Ability to identify, measure and describe stratigraphic layering of a site
Bioarchaeology	Ability to excavate, document & study human remains
Photography	Ability to take clear images of various features, artifact & soil colors at various light and field depth conditions

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, Archaeological and cultural heritage
2. Serrania (Valencia) natural and cultural trip
3. The medieval and monastic heritage of the coastal towns of Valencia, La Valldigna, Cullera, Gandia.
4. Town of Peñiscola. Peñiscola is one of the most beautiful villages in Spain, is on the coast and its old town is walled. It also has the famous castle of Pope Luna where Pope Luna (Benedict XIII) took refuge, it is one of the best preserved castles in Spain and was the last castle built by the Templars and meet the scenarios that were filmed Game of Thrones.
5. Visit to the Old Town of Valencia with Medieval Wine and Tapas Tasting in a Historical Space of the 11th Century.

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 7:00-8:00pm	Arrival Dinner
Monday 9:00 -5:00pm	Lectures
Tuesday 8:00-5:00pm	Work on excavation
Wednesday 8:00-5:00pm	Work on excavation
Thursday 8:00-5:00pm	Work on excavation
Friday 8:00-5:00pm	Work on excavation
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 excavation
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 on excavation and lab
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 on excavation and lab
Wednesday 6:30pm-8:00pm	Lectures
Friday	Work on excavation and lab
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

7:00am	Wakeup
7:30am	Breakfast
8:00am	Work begins at the excavation
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

ACADEMIC GRADING MATRIX

Students will be graded based on their work as follows.

% of Grade	Activity
50%	Excavation and Lab work
20%	Lectures/excursions
10%	Friday Seminar
10%	Teamwork, flexibility, adaptability, involvement, initiative.
10%	Interaction with staff and directors, discuss doubts and questions, suggest interpretations.

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.

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 taken into account 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 archaeological research. Field work involves physical work and exposure to the elements and thus requires a measure of understanding that this will not be the typical university learning environment. You will have to work outdoors and will get sweaty and tired. Students are required to come equipped with sufficient excitement and adequate understanding that field work requires real, hard work, in the sun and wind. The work requires patience, 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 many years to come. Students at this field school represent the project both on and off site. Misbehaviour by any project staff that reflects badly on the entire project and may prevent the renewal of research permits may be grounds for removal.

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 excavations will go on regardless of outside weather.

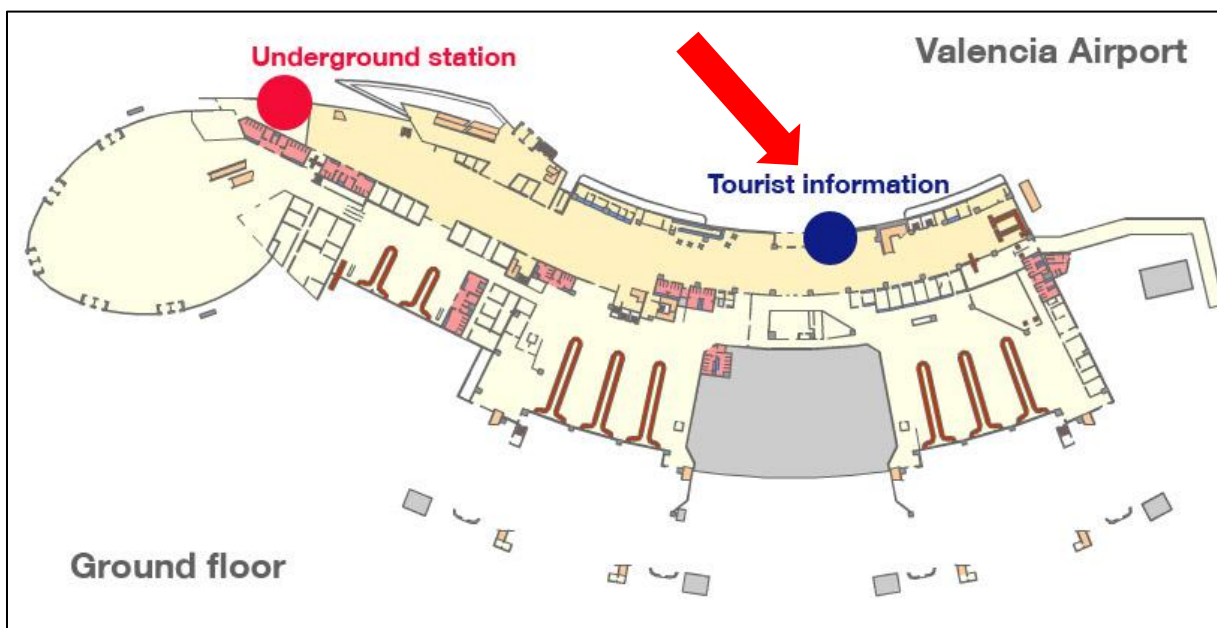
1. Passport or ID card. All European citizens should bring their health card, or health insurance card, if applicable
2. Student/University ID
3. Mosquito repellent and after-bite cream
4. If you are taking any medication, remember to bring it with you.
5. Stationery for personal use (notebook, pens 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. Work gloves
12. You are required to have safety boots with a reinforced toe. If you don't have them you'll be able to buy them at a local shop.
13. Towel, Flip-flops for use in bathroom.
14. 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/
15. A small backpack (for your food, bottle of water, wet wipes, camera, papers etc.)
16. 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.
17. 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, as long as they do not stay longer than 3 months. Passport's expiration date should exceed the date of departure 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 at the 14th Century Franciscan convent. Each student will get a private room that is simple but comfortable. 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. Wi-Fi is available throughout the convent.

The project provides breakfast, lunch and dinner throughout the week, except for lunch and dinner during trip days (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.

Ubelaker, H. Douglas. 1978. Human Skeletal Remains: Excavation, Analysis, Interpretation. Chicago-Aldine.

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

HANDBOOK OF FORENSIC ANTHROPOLOGY AND ARCHAEOLOGY: VOLUME 2 (WAC Research Handbooks in Archaeology) Soren Blau y Douglas H. Ubelaker

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.