ANT 358 (The Archaeology of Cities) Standards for Discussion

Materials for this course are chosen purposefully. In order to make any reading purposeful, you need to be relating those readings back to the course in some way. Think of the following three things for all discussions.

1) Course Objectives
   1) To become familiar with the different theories and perspectives surrounding the origins of cities and the nature of early urban settlements.
   2) To grapple with the question, “What is a city?”
   3) To understand how archaeologists use landscapes and material culture to study cities in the past.
   4) To explore the diversity and similarity of urban forms and society across time and space.
   5) To work with the relationship between evidence and interpretation and better appreciate the nature of scholarly debate and discourse.

How do the readings relate to these course objectives? What can you draw out of the readings to address these objectives?

2) Course Assignments

You have two assignments in this course: one assignment to determine whether or not a major prehistoric site is a city, the other to develop a research design for a modern U.S. City. How can you apply these readings to these problems? You need to understand readings in detail to use them and apply them.

3) Course Structure

Most courses are designed in a particular way to facilitate learning goals by following a logical series of connections. Courses are cumulative. Any one course meeting will not give you all the information you need. How does this reading fit into the design of the course? What has come before it? What is following it? Is this reading foundational, building on existing knowledge, exploring a particular topic or problem, or asking me to reflect on and critique earlier materials in the course?

Basic Standards/Guidelines for Discussion

1) Discussion should be an effort to engage the course materials for any particular day from multiple perspectives and on levels that move beyond the superficial. Therefore, the reading material should always be central to the work at hand.

2) Relating course materials to things you know is only acceptable if they further the goals of the course or the depth of the understanding of the materials. Connections made to other courses, and making connections in the readings from day to day or discussion to discussion are generally appropriate.
3) It is not appropriate to bring in any sort of anecdotal material to a discussion, “Today, I was riding the bus and…” or “My uncle told me this story once…” are generally not academic and have no place in a classroom discussion. They will not in any way be construed positively towards class participation.

4) It is not appropriate to pull information out of thin air that you have no source for. “I read once that…” or “People say that…” or “I heard somewhere…” If you cannot cite the specific source of your knowledge it cannot be evaluated by your peers and is not acceptable. The very fact that you would be the only one familiar with the source itself also limits its utility. Pulling some information “you heard once” is no substitute for actually preparing for class and will be evaluated as such.

5) It is ok to be critical of a source, but not if that is the sum total of your input and insight. Anyone can criticize a piece of work- it is the very lowest form of intellectual engagement and keeps you away from really engaging arguments and their contexts and implications. If you are going to make a critique of a piece or idea- that is fine, but be prepared to justify your remarks with evidence and insight from the readings.

6) Listen actively to your classmates. Spending the entire class period worried about your contributions to the discussion makes you a poor discussant. Listening carefully and thoughtfully to the ideas of others before judging and formulating a response is a critically important skill. It is ok to have some moments of thoughtful silence in a discussion while people take in and evaluate the ideas of others and formulate thoughtful responses of their own.

7) Everyone is expected to participate in discussion. Being shy or uncomfortable is no excuse for not participating. Learning to participate in discussions is a skill and there is a learning curve- but silence is never a part of that curve. You must engage with the material and your classmates.

8) Asking educated, thoughtful questions can be an important part of discussion. Often things you do not know or understand are the places where the most fruitful discussions take place. It is perfectly acceptable to admit freely that you don’t know something and ask others in the class to discuss the topic. This kind of willingness to be honest rather than right is a positive point for discussions. So is being willing to work with the readings to find the answer.

9) Discussions are not an opportunity to show off what you know, but rather to attempt to deepen your understanding of the material- no matter how intelligent you may fancy yourself to be. Discussions should be kept conversational in tone, and ideas should be presented in ways that encourage others to participate and that clearly articulate your ideas. Using jargon, contrived language, or other types of devices are not conducive to an open discussion and should be avoided.