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What I Learned While Studying Anthropology

As a child, I always dreamed of being an archaeologist. My passion for history blossomed from watching the history channel with my father and by reading books about ancient Egypt. When coming to Longwood, I decided to seek out a degree in history and possibly become a teacher. My first semester as a history major showed me that this path was not making me as happy as I had hoped. I decided to enroll in Anthropology 202 in hopes that the course would help me decide where my passions lie. Little did I know then that by taking this course I would live out my childhood dreams and make a wide array of new friends along the way.

Anthropology 202: Archaeology was the first anthropology course I took as a second-semester freshman. This course laid the groundwork for my concentration in archaeology that I would add later on. It was most important in this course to give us knowledge about the history of the field and work from there. While most people imagine Indiana Jones when the word archaeology is spoken, we actually should imagine Pitt-Rivers creating the precedent for documenting fieldwork or Flinders Petrie who is considered the father of archaeology for his excavations in Egypt. From then on, we were able to learn the methods for dating or how to understand stratigraphy. Throughout the semester, we would also learn about various case studies. Many of these case studies were completed by the Longwood Institute of Archaeology so we were given a first-hand account of what the digs were like. My favorite part about this class was being introduced to a form of learning I had never been exposed to before. In class, a concept will be explained to students, and then using our deductive reasoning skills, we attempt to come up with answers to these questions on our own. By doing this, we as students learn to problem solve on our own while using prior knowledge to examine concepts given to us. These skills will continue to be used throughout my professional career in archaeology and my daily

Hannah Harrington

Anth 461-01

April 14, 2022

life. After taking Anthropology 202 and fueling my passion, I officially changed my major from history to anthropology.

Next, I enrolled in Anthropology 200: Cultural Anthropology with Dr. Dalton. Although I had been greatly exposed to the field of archaeology through books and television shows, I had little understanding or knowledge of the field of cultural anthropology. I strongly believe in the importance of the exposure to history and how the past has shaped our world. When enrolling in Dr. Dalton's class, I had no awareness of how important the study of current people and cultures is to the overall human experience. This course explored many layers of modern societies across the globe and how we can properly study them. We discussed gender, music, medicine, and sports. A major issue that can come up while studying other cultural practices is bias. We are all raised within certain societal boundaries which shape the way we think and act, along with how we view other cultures. There can be a tendency to believe that our own culture is better than others which can sway a study one way or another. This view is called ethnocentrism. Dr. Dalton stressed the importance of being aware of our individual biases and looking at cultures through a neutral lens. For the field of anthropology, this skill is one of the most important foundational pieces we need to gain as students. Near the end of the semester, Dr. Dalton assigned us a project in which we used Ancestry.com to discover our family histories to then write a paper discussing what we found. I had never known much of my family history beyond my grandparents. This project allowed me to learn the stories of ancestors I never knew about and track where I came from. I was able to learn about the first relative of mine that immigrated to the United States in the late eighteenth century from England and then share this knowledge with my parents afterwards. Being able to connect the stories I had heard growing up to the names of family members was an emotional experience for me, especially because I lost three of the four of my

Hannah Harrington

Anth 461-01

April 14, 2022

grandparents before high school. I felt much closer to them, and I am very thankful to Dr. Dalton for assigning this project to us. While this assignment allowed me to grow closer to my heritage, I gained the knowledge of how to complete a study using archives, which I had never done before. As someone who is looking into careers in museum or archival work, this study will prepare me for my future.

In the fall of 2021, I completed Physical Anthropology. I took this class at the same time I was enrolled in an interdisciplinary science course that focused on wildlife conservation and the study of evolution. By taking both of these courses, I was able to understand the science of evolution in a light that I had never been exposed to before. Ever since learning about evolution for the first time in middle school, I have been fascinated with the discoveries that have allowed us to better understand where modern species have come from. One piece of this I never learned about before, however, was the evolutionary path of *Homo sapiens*. I was blown away to learn that we are now able to track human ancestry through DNA and possibly see a link to Neanderthals and their disappearance. The people studying the DNA of ancient species are called archaeogeneticists or paleogeneticists. Their primary goal is to track ancient DNA and learn about the migratory patterns of ancient species and how they connect to us. Some scientists study humans and Neanderthal DNA to see if we are connected in some way. One lesson that has stuck with me was when we discussed Neanderthals and the ways that our society misunderstands them. I was never aware that most of the information we see as true about the species is completely false. Most people still believe that Neanderthals were ape like and incapable of love or emotions we deem to be human. When we discussed the story of the Neanderthal that was kept alive into his old age, even with many injuries or disabilities, we could see that they were capable of showing love. I have shared this story with others, and it has changed their ideas of

Hannah Harrington

Anth 461-01

April 14, 2022

Neanderthals as well. Although I am not interested in following this path in the future, I was able to expand my ideas of evolution, early humans, and our ancestors.

This semester, I am taking Language and Culture with Dr. Dalton to round off the four fields of anthropology. The field of linguistics is the study that I had the least prior knowledge on and that I have also struggled the most with. To me, studying linguistics demands a large amount of extra time and effort to understand and master. I have had much difficulty in attempting to break down language and speech in different cultures due to the need to understand a greater variety of concepts and terms. Languages have many small components that make up something we use every single day. We learn language as a baby and continue to use it until we die. While doing this, we often do not put much thought into how our brain registers languages and all the many pieces that create words and phrases. The Broca's and Wernicke's areas of our brains process spoken words and allow us to speak back. Without these areas, we as humans would have never developed speech in the first place. Linguists and neurologists have worked for decades to decipher how we learn language as babies, and it is still not fully understood. There are many competing theories on how it is done and only time will tell when we know for sure what happens inside a baby's mind when learning language. An interesting concept in linguistics is whether culture creates language or if language creates culture. It is a question similar to the chicken or the egg, we can only guess what comes first. One assignment we were given three languages from a fake island in the Pacific. We were given a set of words with the corresponding terms for each language. We also were given a paragraph describing each culture. For the assignment, we had to use the cultural and linguistic data to try and decipher where the words derived first and how they were shared between each culture. It was very amusing to discuss our findings in class as each one of us interpreted the data differently. In the end, Dr. Dalton made it

Hannah Harrington

Anth 461-01

April 14, 2022

clear that as anthropologists, we tend to put a greater emphasis on the cultural aspects of language. Linguists, on the other hand, use linguistic data to track to origins of language. While we can only speculate whether language or culture comes first, it is important to separate the two during a linguistic study.

Within the study of archaeology, I completed Historical Archaeology with Dr. Kostro in the spring of 2021. This class did not fulfill a section for my degree, but I was intrigued with the class because I would like to work within the historical era following graduation. Historical archaeology focuses on the time in human history in which oral tradition and written record can be used to give context to cultural materials. Although some cultures, such as Egypt, had written language and records, historical archaeology is most often used to describe human history following the medieval period. During this course, Dr. Kostro gave us case studies and research done on the historical period to give us an understanding of the many ways an archaeologist can do historical archaeology. We also were given many documentaries and films to watch that either looked at the archaeologists themselves or at pieces of archaeology. A part of this class that I found most exciting was how Dr. Kostro assigned us work done by his colleagues or people he had met in his past. Hearing his stories of the things he learned from these people allowed me to connect on a deeper level to the readings we had done. At times, I grew very tired of the number of readings I had to complete, but these stories kept me engaged each day in class. One film I vividly remember was titled Glas. The short film features no voice-over and instead uses musical and sound juxtaposition to set the mood. The film starts with a soft jazzy background over the clips of men hand blowing glass. It then switches to comical sound effects over the clips of automatic bottle-making machines. I enjoyed this film because of how it contrasted the two forms as well as showed the craftsmanship of hand-blown glass. By adding

Hannah Harrington

Anth 461-01

April 14, 2022

these elements to the class, we could give humanity to the archaeology we studied. This is why I enjoy historical archaeology so much: we can see the material and written pieces of a culture to create a detailed story of a culture or individual.

To accompany my studies of historical archaeology, I am currently enrolled in Folklore. In the class, we studied various forms of oral traditions and how they have been passed on to our current generation. A large part of this course was dedicated to students sharing folklore we grew up with and discussing them. This form of learning was very valuable for a topic like folklore because it allowed us to engage in the sharing of oral traditions ourselves. It was also exciting to share stories and hear new versions that our peers could share with us. When discussing the many types of folklore, we were able to place the stories we had heard into certain categories as we discussed them. The sharing of stories made the class environment feel less stressful and I made new friends as the semester has gone on. Much like the assignments we completed in Historical Archaeology, we were given weekly reflection essays that centered around a topic, article, or film. Every week the topics covered were wildly different from the others and challenged us to use what we discussed in the classroom in our essays. One week we were given a folk song known as *In the Pines, Where Did You Sleep Last Night*, or *My Girl*. We then took a sample of the many covers of the songs and were asked to explain how the song changed over time. This was a way for us to do a mini anthropological study of folk music and how folklore evolves through generations. Another example of a reflection we completed involved baseball and superstitions. The article we were given discussed the rituals done by baseball players to receive good luck or avoid bad luck before and during a game. I had never thought of personal rituals as forms of folklore but seeing how baseball players can each have their own elaborate superstitions but still relate to each other added a new level to folklore for me. I was able to then

Hannah Harrington

Anth 461-01

April 14, 2022

relate this to how as a member of my high school's color guard, we all had our own pre-show rituals along with our group rituals. My friends and I would scream "I love you" across the field to each other and I would sing my favorite song as I lined up my equipment. These small things seem so silly to other people, but they are so important to anyone who competes or performs.

To further my experiences with field archaeology I completed Advanced Archaeology in the fall of 2021. This was an expedited course that we completed in half a semester. The course gave students the knowledge of general field practices as well as the legal actions needed to protect a site. We started the year studying the preservation laws we would encounter as archaeologists working in the field. From the Antiquities Act of 1906 to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, these laws ensure that historic sites and cultural materials will be protected by the government and not lost to time. Later on, in the semester, we learned the practical skills of how to use a compass. We first were given a presentation in class which gave us an overview of the parts of a compass and how to read it. The following Saturday we went out to First Avenue field and attempted to use what we had learned and track points across a field. We completed activities as individuals and as groups and over time it became easier and easier. The last assignment I was meant to complete was surveying in the field. I never finished this assignment, however, as I went home for a week to get away from school. My junior year has been filled with events out of my control and I have struggled to keep up with everything that has occurred. By missing this assignment, I received a large lesson in learning how to better plan out my time to avoid over-filling my schedule. By doing this, I am able to keep up with my work and prevent any unnecessary anxiety. I feel that lessons like these are just as important as those taught in a classroom because I could not grow as a person without them.

Hannah Harrington

Anth 461-01

April 14, 2022

At the same time I took Advanced Archaeology, I was enrolled in Archaeological Laboratory Methods. This course I greatly enjoyed due to the lessons included working with artifacts and drawing. Dr. Kostro planned out the course to be fully hands-on and mimic using a field journal during a dig. Throughout the semester he lectured on objects such as lithics, shells, or glass. The lectures laid the foundations for our understanding of the materials we could find during our career. Following the lectures, he gave out artifacts made of the material we discussed, and then we drew them in our personal portfolios. These lessons composed the largest chunk of the semester. We also completed an activity that mimicked reconstructing broken artifacts in the laboratory. Dr. Kostro brought in broken wares in a large jumble and as a group, we were to separate the pieces into matching groups. The next day after the objects were sorted, we separated into groups and were given sorted objects to then reconstruct. We put each piece together to create plates, bowls, and cups of various sizes and shapes. These lessons were valuable to me because I learn the best when handling materials rather than being spoken to about them. None of our lessons were done using a textbook. We could feel and examine the kinds of artifacts that we learned about. Not only did Dr. Kostro give us lectures, but we had several guest speakers come in to lecture on materials they handled through their research. Just as we received first-hand accounts in Archaeology 202, we could hear from working archaeologists and see the research that is currently being done. It was exciting for me to be able to relate what I was learning in Laboratory Methods with what I had studied previously in Historical Archaeology the semester prior.

The greatest hands-on experience I received was during the four weeks of field school. During this time, we were given the knowledge and training to prepare us for any archaeological dig we may experience in the future. When studying in a classroom, it is easy to get lost or feel

Hannah Harrington

Anth 461-01

April 14, 2022

that you have not gained any practical abilities that you can bring into the field. Field school immerses you into the environment of a dig site and allows you to work with equipment that many cultural resource management firms will use. Not only do we learn how to use expensive technology, but we were also taught how to measure and survey with equipment that would have been used before a total station. Every day we were on our hands and knees, using a trowel, sifting through the dirt, finding real artifacts, and doing the work we will be doing in the future. These are skills that cannot be taught in a classroom. You must feel the dirt under the trowel to know how gently you should scrape away the layers of dirt. In the classroom you are not prepared for the hot sun and lack of toilets. Without this experience, I never would have known these things. Not only did I learn how to do archaeology, but I also learned how to live in a camp environment with people I did not know before. I did not go camping much as a child, so I had no idea what to expect when I climbed on the bus that day in May. I had no idea that I would be surrounded by people I would later call my closest friends. Field school puts you in close contact with people you may have never spoken to before while in the woods with no cellphone service. When you are there, you cannot escape by texting your friends from home or by watching Netflix. Us students are forced to socialize in a way many people of our generation will not have to do as technology grows. We talked, played games, built fires, and learned so much about each other that it seemed like we knew everyone for years. These were all things I had not done in years. I never thought I could be so entertained while watching a beetle crawl across a sandpit. Living in a society that enjoys movies such as Indian Jones, we have a very skewed idea of what archaeology is in popular culture. Being able to share my personal experience with archaeology after field school has helped change the minds of the people in my life who are confused about

Hannah Harrington

Anth 461-01

April 14, 2022

what archaeology is. I will continue to fight for people to stop thinking that archaeology and paleontology are the same things.

Although I have yet to decide what path I wish to follow after graduation, whether that be cultural resource management, museum work, archival work, or pursuing a master's degree, I spend every day thankful that I chose to change my major. I always knew that I wanted to follow my childhood dream of becoming an archaeologist, I just never believed it was a practical choice. After experiencing being a history major for one semester, I knew that teaching would not be for me. Archaeology fuels a passion inside me that nothing else has before. I no longer feel scared that I will be stuck behind a desk, dreading my choice to go into teaching high schoolers. I now feel confident that the right choice was made. Not only have I fueled my passions, but I have also made friends for a lifetime within the Longwood Institute of Archaeology. I also know that there is a network of alumni who have similar experiences to me that I can reach out to for help. I have learned many personal lessons during my classes that have helped me grow as a person. Without them, I would not be who I am today.