

America's Archaeologies
Alliance to Advance Liberal Arts Colleges
Faculty Workshop Program Proposal 2018

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How does one cultivate and convey knowledge of the deep past? For whom does antiquity (or even antiquities) still matter? In the Americas, how have indigenous histories called into question those of settler colonists—not only in the past, but also more recently? With these questions as frames, we propose an AALAC workshop focused on archaeologies of the Americas. The topic is timely for intellectual reasons and institutional reasons. Among scholars of America's past, thinking about familiar practices—excavation, collecting, exhibition, and publication—has shifted dramatically across the last 25 years due to transformative work being done in indigenous studies, critical race theory, museum studies, and cultural heritage management. In addition, while much archaeology once happened “far away” (literally in the trenches or ruins of a foreign country), liberal arts institutions are, increasingly, supporting new kinds of archival, digital, spatial, and object-based research.

The primary goal of our workshop lies in deepening, and making more explicit, the connections between these two threads—the intellectual and the institutional. As scholars we are committed to comparative thinking, so we cast this workshop as hemispheric in scope. Because archaeology is inflected by (and contributes to) a wide range of disciplinary and institutional practices we have also organized sessions that draw upon the expertise of archaeologists and art historians, museum curators and GIS specialists, geologists and anthropologists. The workshop will be a unique opportunity to share thinking and develop conversations that bridge the humanities, social and physical sciences.

With the liberal arts setting in mind, the workshop will highlight three themes, all of which explore topics central to current archaeological research in the Americas and invite creative thinking about how the past can become resonant for our students.

Communities and collaboration. From Vancouver to Venezuela, and New Mexico to New England, Americanist archaeology has been transformed by the expanding roles of stakeholder groups. Apart from academics and museum professionals, stakeholders include descendant communities, members of religious organizations, current landowners, non-governmental organizations, and tourists. Among the questions our workshop will address: what kinds of knowledge does stakeholder collaboration make possible; what does “successful collaboration” look like and how is it sustained; and how does one train students for this kind of work?

Indigenous archaeologies. Indigenous archaeology, often conceived of as a type of collaborative or community-based work, in fact calls for critical shifts in archaeological theory and practice that center indigenous knowledge, ethics, and values. In the United States, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA) may have changed Americanist archaeology, but a great deal

more activist and decolonizing work is taking place across the Americas. Of particular interest for our discussion: what are the most pressing legal and ethical questions that arise in different settings in the Americas; and how can work by indigenous scholars, museum professionals and teachers continue to transform archaeology, both in our classrooms and in our research?

Sites of Analysis. While excavations remain a major component of research and student training, analytical and interpretive work increasingly transpires “at home,” on our campuses. Digitally-born data are becoming ever-more fundamental—with the promises of big data, augmented reality environments, and drone-based mapping opening both new interpretive possibilities and new ethical questions. Consequently, collaborations with specialists in libraries, and GIS and imaging labs are growing in importance. With “local sites of analysis” as their focus, workshop participants will share their experiences working in campus archives, museum collections, botanic gardens, and other settings. At Smith, we will complete one collaborative exercise highlighting the interpretive possibilities of campus-based spatial analysis; we will complete a second exercise at Mount Holyoke College, working with museum collections.

Rationale, Intended Impact, Assessment

As the first AALAC workshop dedicated to archaeology, we see this as an opportunity to both forge and foster a community of scholars with shared interests in histories of American material culture and materiality. Until relatively recently, in liberal arts settings, archaeology was approached largely through the lens of classical studies or ancient history, and focus rested primarily on the art and architecture of “great civilizations.” Today, however, archaeological research and teaching might also be anchored in a department of anthropology or history, area studies or the physical sciences. This kind of dispersal reflects the growing interdisciplinarity of the field, but it also can create institutional and intellectual islands. Along with planting the seeds for stronger cross-college communities of archaeological scholarship, each session will offer opportunities for discussing and debating concrete ways of incorporating diverse disciplinary perspectives into research projects and curriculum development. In order to facilitate student participation, we chose to host the workshop during the academic year.

We also wish to discuss with participants the possibility of developing a “Liberal Arts Archaeology” blog, which would extend the impact of our thinking and work with students beyond the workshop and beyond AALAC institutions. We expect to further the “take away” of the workshop by submitting selected presentations or papers to *Advances in Archaeological Practice*, a new peer-reviewed journal of the Society for American Archaeology that provides venues for research-based and “how-to” publications on a wide range of related topics. This would give our AALAC-based work a broad, international forum. Assessment will also include a report to AALAC and the peer-review process for submission of papers/projects growing out of the workshop.