

Reflection for the Jane C. Waldbaum Scholarship, Archaeological Institute of America

Paige Schmitt

2021



*Center for American Archeology Advanced Field School end of summer group picture.*

I have wanted to attend a field program for many years. However, before this summer, I had been unable to, first due to financial limitations and then because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the postponing or complete cancellation of many programs until now. Fortunately, due to the generosity of the Archaeological Institute of America through the Jane C. Waldbaum Scholarship and the safety precautions taken by the Center for American Archeology, I was able to attend the Advanced Field School in Kampsville, Illinois for six weeks from June to July. The Advanced Field School is a very special program as it is embedded in a long-term archaeological program. The Center for American Archeology has facilitated archaeological work in the Lower Illinois River Valley for over fifty years.

Specifically, I participated in the Bioarchaeology and Human Osteology track of the Advanced Field School. Not only did I gain invaluable knowledge from lectures by Dr. Buikstra regarding topics such as human anatomy, paleopathology, and current osteological and bioarchaeological techniques, but I was also able to apply this knowledge. This was accomplished through various laboratory-based activities. During laboratory activities, we were tasked with the practical application of commonly employed methods relating to the estimation of age, stature, and biological sex. We also observed paleopathology and traits for biodistance studies.

With each laboratory activity, we also were tasked with writing a formal report detailing our methods, results, discussion, and conclusion. The reports caused me to critically evaluate the methods I applied which improved my understanding and forced me to consider their specific benefits and limitations in comparison with one another. The critical evaluation of common methods in bioarchaeology will continue to serve as a great reference and base of understanding as I continue in my academic career. Additionally, the reports helped me improve my scientific writing and communication skills. These skills were also enhanced through oral presentations which required the communication of our results in a condensed, yet detailed manner. Reinforcing my knowledge with practical experience and formal reports was a vital aspect of the Advanced Field School. This required me to demonstrate and communicate my understanding in multiple ways.

During the summer, we also took a day trip to Cahokia Mounds. This was an amazing experience as Cahokia is an archaeological site of one of the most populous pre-Columbian settlements north of modern-day Mexico. Cahokia was occupied primarily during the Mississippian period. It includes various types of mounds, specialized activity

areas, and an astronomical observatory (“Woodhenge”). The experience of walking the site and touring the museum demonstrated how anthropology may aid us in learning about the daily lives of past peoples and how the public can engage in this process. I could easily visualize how the training I received in the Advanced Field School was applied outside of the classroom.



*Pictures from Cahokia Mounds.*

Another aspect of the Center for American Archeology that made this field school special is its dedication to stewardship and public outreach. I am very grateful that I was able to assist directly in these goals during my participation in the field school. I volunteered as staff for Archeology Day which was held on July 17<sup>th</sup>. With the help of one of my peers, we hosted a stand on the zooarchaeology of local fauna. This allowed me to share one way in which everyone can interact with archaeology. Archeology Day was also a great opportunity to learn from local experts on the history of the area which supplemented the lectures we received on the Lower Illinois River Valley.

Participating in the Advanced Field School will be something I continue to benefit from for the remainder of my life. As I begin my first semester of graduate school this year, I know I have a solid foundation of knowledge. I will continue to grow and build upon the concepts that I have learned this summer. I also look forward to continuing to expand and improve the technical writing and communication skills I have gained.

Again, I would like to thank the Archaeological Institute of America for their generosity which made it possible for me to have these experiences. I would also like to thank Dr. Jane Buikstra, Dr. Jason King, and the entire summer staff for sharing their knowledge and their understanding during such an unprecedented time. Additionally, my peers in the field school were essential as they continuously provided support and offered their perspectives and knowledge. I also thank the entire town of Kampsville, Illinois as everyone was welcoming, kind, and always willing to discuss their own experiences with archaeology.