



**Archaeological Institute of America  
Statement on the Value of Archaeology in the University and College Curriculum**

The Archaeological Institute of America (AIA) registers its deep concern over recent decisions, in North America and abroad, to close university departments and programs of archaeology, or to dismantle such programs and disperse their faculties, students, and staffs. Although we recognize the financial hardships that colleges and universities around the world have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, the sustained assault on archaeology and other humanistic and social science disciplines is short-sighted and unlikely to result in better social outcomes or economic benefit.

Archaeology imparts knowledge in a unique way that accrues significant tangible and intangible benefits to society. Through the recovery and analysis of the material remains of the past, archaeology offers consistent methods and theories through which we have learned and continue to study and understand human origins and evolution, technological innovations, agriculture and animal husbandry, the birth of civilization, the rise of cities and their subsequent development, human relationships with the environment and responses to previous episodes of climate change from the dawn of humanity to the present day. Archaeology gives unique insights also into the cognition, creativity, communication, and belief systems of humans.

Archaeology benefits university students by drawing from the broadest range of humanities, social sciences, and physical sciences of any discipline, thus offering a uniquely comprehensive curriculum that fulfilled the aspirations of a STEAM education long before that concept had a name. Archaeology bridges disciplinary divides and brings together scholars and students who otherwise would rarely interact, if at all; it is inherently collaborative and interdisciplinary. Scholars of many other disciplines use the results of archaeological work in their teaching and research.

In the classroom, students learn core competencies and skills, including familiarity with the foundational methods and theories of diverse disciplines, ancient and modern languages, and the material culture and art of one or more societies. In archaeology laboratories, students learn the essential protocols of scientific research through macroscopic identification and classification; optical and scanning electron microscopy; and chemical analytical methods such as x-ray fluorescence and x-ray diffraction. Students learn to prepare both precise, data-rich scientific reports and empirically based stories of past peoples' lives.

Archaeologists regularly provide opportunities for students to participate in field projects, both domestically and abroad. These are often transformative experiences where students learn a range of recovery techniques and technical tools, as well as teamwork skills and cultural sensitivity. In the field, students are trained in methods of excavation and landscape analysis, and exposed to geomorphology; GPS and Geographic Information Systems; remote sensing techniques including satellite imagery, LiDAR, drone photography and photogrammetry; and geophysical techniques such as radar, magnetometry, and electromagnetics.

With these varied experiences, graduates from archaeology programs possess advanced skills in empirical observation, communication, and problem-solving, making them ideally prepared for success in today's workplace.

Every year, millions of people visit ancient sites and museums around the world to learn about and engage with the past, driven by the uniquely human drive to understand human achievements and what it is to be human. Archaeologists bear the responsibility of presenting the past to the public in a way that captures that fascination, while at the same time remaining faithful to the empirical evidence.

In recent years, archaeology has taken on an ever-increasing role in protecting global cultural heritage and advancing causes of social justice. Archaeologists from the AIA and its peer organizations have been at the forefront of these efforts, which can have implications for cultural diplomacy at the highest levels. Archaeologists work actively to support the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and international agreements to prevent the illicit trafficking of antiquities in the United States. These endeavors represent the tireless commitment of archaeologists to counteracting the theft and destruction of cultural heritage and the violation of cultural rights of indigenous and minority communities.

In the struggle for social justice, archaeology is uniquely situated to give voice to oppressed and voiceless people of the past, including women, children, enslaved and otherwise marginalized people, allowing for a more realistic and honest history. These voices are urgently needed to counteract cultural illiteracy and to advance the cause of social progress in countries around the world.

Archaeology departments and programs tend to be small, but highly productive and economically viable as their instructors usually teach a fair share of large lecture courses that attract students of all majors and interests. There is little to gain financially in eliminating programs and instructors of archaeology. The AIA encourages university officials to look closely at the enrichment of the students' experience and their post-graduation success in finding meaningful positions in a range of professions within and beyond archaeology.

*Approved by the Executive Committee on June 29, 2021.*