

Anthropology Newsletter



Department of Anthropology
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



About the Department

The MSU Department of Anthropology engages in our discipline as a humanistic science of cultural and biological diversity across time and space. Our strength is in our diversity of approaches to this fundamental inquiry. We specialize in sociocultural anthropology, archaeology, medical anthropology, biological anthropology, and anthropological linguistics. We work towards an understanding of the human condition, past and present, in countries across the world and in our own backyards.

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Success stories in anthropology come via many different paths. However anthropology informs your career, whether you are a practicing anthropologist inside or outside the academy, we want to hear from you.

Contact us with your stories.
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Cover Photo: MSU Forensic Anthropology Lab moves to Giltner Hall - page 7.

TABLE OF

Contents

- 03** Message from the Chair,
Dr. Todd Fenton
- 03** Operation United
- 04** Diversity Champion:
Dr. Heather Howard
- 05** MSU Alumnus Don Weir –
The artifacts of a career devoted
to archaeology
- 06** PhD Student Juan Carlos
Rico Noguera wins Whiteford
Cultural Anthropology Field
Work Scholarship
- 06** New Anthropology Scholarships
- 07** New MSU Forensic
Anthropology Lab
- 08** Dr. Najib Hourani Receives
Dean's Diversity, Equity and
Inclusion Faculty Award
- 09** MSU Department of
Anthropology hosts the
2021 Midwest Archaeology
Conference
- 10** Dr. Joseph T. Hefner member
of \$1.4 million NIH grant team to
develop image library for facial
features requiring surgery
- 11** PhD Student Marwa Bakabas
named diversity torch for MSU
College of Social Science
- 11** Jessica Yann named the new
NAGPRA Program Manager

Dr. Todd Fenton



This edition of the Department of Anthropology newsletter highlights outstanding faculty, students, and alumni and invites you to learn more about their work across the diverse fields of anthropology.

Although we are still navigating the global pandemic and following MSU safety mandates and protocols in accordance with directives from health and government officials, this fall semester we were delighted to welcome students back to campus to provide more

experiential learning opportunities. We celebrate the ability to once again safely engage with students in the classroom and in the field, and appreciate the ways in which we have adapted and incorporated new technologies into every aspect of our work. The tremendous effort and patience in adapting to this situation from across the Department of Anthropology deserves profound recognition.

Despite the obstacles we have recently faced, we have also enjoyed commemorating many accomplishments across the department this semester. In fact, we are looking forward to celebrating the graduating class of 2020 and 2021 in December at an in-person commencement ceremony.

This semester, we have honored faculty who have been recognized at the college level for their research that makes an impact in diversity, equity, and inclusion. Additionally, we have celebrated faculty who have received grants and published because of their timely research. We are also pleased to announce the new Forensic Anthropology lab space, as well as three new student scholarships. Additionally, the Department of Anthropology was honored to host the Midwest Archaeology Conference this year, and to recognize alumnus Don Weir for his important contributions to the field of archaeology and the Department of Anthropology at MSU.

In the midst of this global pandemic, many have regrettably experienced grief over the loss of family or friends, missed opportunities, unfulfilled endings, and imminent uncertainties. While it is difficult to reconcile these feelings of loss, I am grateful for how the people in this department have consoled and supported one another as we have navigated through these complicated times. My sincere pride in this department has only strengthened as we continue to navigate challenging times while continuing our mission. The Department of Anthropology has demonstrated its unwavering dedication to provide an exceptional education for our students and to engage in meaningful research, even when faced with unprecedented adversity. We will carry this commitment forward in the upcoming new year as we continue to manage ongoing challenges while prioritizing everyone's health and safety. ■

MSU Forensic Anthropology Lab participates in Operation UNITED

This September the MSU Forensic Anthropology Laboratory (MSUFAL) participated in Operation UNITED in collaboration with the FBI's Evidence Response Team, the Detroit Police Department (DPD), and several other local universities and law enforcement agencies. Operation UNITED is an acronym which stands for "Unknown Names Identified Through Exhumation and DNA."

Operation UNITED began as a grassroots effort between DPD Sgt. Shannon Jones and FBI Special Agent Leslie Larsen to solve as many cold case homicides in Detroit as possible. By exhuming the remains of unidentified homicide victims and comparing their DNA with family reference samples, Operation UNITED seeks to make identifications and jump start cold case investigations. This is the third season of the project and participants have successfully exhumed the remains of over 100 unidentified homicide victims, several of which have ultimately led to positive identifications.

Dr. Carolyn Isaac, Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology and MSUFAL Laboratory Director, as well as graduate students in the Department of Anthropology Clara Devota, Rhian Dunn, Micayla Spiros, and Alex Goots attended the three-day excavation. Each graduate student joined an interdisciplinary team and worked to locate and excavate remains based on cemetery records and autopsy details. Dr. Isaac rotated between the teams, providing her expertise in forensic anthropology and confirming whether or not the remains matched the demographic details of the person in question.

According to Special Agent Leslie Larsen, "Forensic anthropologists on scene are the instrumental piece that we need to make sure we are exhuming the correct bodies from the ground. They review the case files and autopsy reports then match those findings with the human remains uncovered by our dig site teams. Without on-site forensic anthropologists working with us, we would not be able to do these body recoveries."

Over the course of the three day excavation, Operation UNITED was able to recover human remains from 21 individuals, bringing the running grand total of DNA samples to 121 individuals for the whole project. In short, 121 individuals who have been missing, some for decades, finally have the opportunity to be identified and properly laid to rest, thanks to the tireless efforts of everyone involved in Operation UNITED. ■

Dr. Heather Howard



Dr. Heather Howard is an associate professor in the Michigan State University Department of Anthropology. A passionate teacher and researcher, Dr. Howard's work focuses on promoting the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being of Indigenous communities across the country.

Recently, Dr. Howard is a co-PI on a grant awarded by the Robert

Wood Johnson Foundation for Public Policy Research to Advance Racial Equity and Racial Justice program for "Assessing whether Indigenous women of reproductive age had equitable access to and use of health care under the Affordable Care Act."

Dr. Howard joined MSU's campus as a tenure-stream faculty member in 2013. Since then, she has conducted important research exploring the politics of knowledge production and the representation of Indigenous peoples' heritage, cultures and traditions.

"My research interests have been primarily driven by Native American community priorities, and have mostly revolved around Indigenous well-being primarily within the Great Lakes region. I think of health and well-being in a broad, holistic sense that reflects both the perspectives of Indigenous peoples, as well as my discipline of anthropology. I don't just focus on physical health, but also on social, mental and spiritual well-being, as well as an understanding of human health as inextricable from environmental health.

"The most exciting project that I've been working on for the past couple of years is one collaborating with the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians. Together, we're working on creating a web portal that is aimed at supporting community knowledge transmission among Indigenous communities, as well as a public engagement piece that revolves around the art of porcupine quillwork. I was introduced to this project, which focuses on the art of making quill boxes, by renowned Odawa quillwork artist Yvonne Walker Keshick.

"This art is culturally important, has political and historical significance, embodies the respectful and reciprocal relationship between humans and the non-human world, and is entwined with oral traditions and Anishinaabe story. This artform also advocates for sustainable environmental stewardship, which necessitates cooperation and a consciousness outside of Indigenous community efforts,

and is effective for fostering conversations about protecting biodiversity and negating threats to the environment."

Dr. Howard offers ways that each of us can be better allies to Indigenous peoples and communities in our day-to-day lives.

"It is important for every person who lives in North America to take some time to try to understand that Indigenous peoples are living communities, and what it means to be living on Indigenous lands. That acknowledgement is extremely important because when discussing Native Americans, the past-tense is usually used without thinking, and this sustains another popular misconception that Indigenous peoples are conquered and vanished.

"However, a land acknowledgement is not enough. In the United States and Canada, it has become common for colonial institutions to read or share a land acknowledgement at graduation or other big events, and then pat themselves on the back for doing their part. And while the gesture is a good start, there are many amazing Indigenous scholars who are saying, "Hang on a second - you don't get away with stopping there!" Especially at land-grant universities like MSU, it's important for students to know where this land came from, how we are all actively benefiting from the dispossession of Indigenous communities, and how institutions can do better.

"These days, we are definitely struggling to get across some basic facts about intercultural and interracial relations in American schools, so that when they come to the university, they have some sort of background to build on.

"One project I'm working on next semester with students in my Contemporary American Indian Communities course is designed to get students thinking about this question: whose lands are we on, how did we come to be here, and what does this mean for Americans? Land taken through treaties between Indigenous Nations and the United States mean that every U.S. citizen has the responsibility to understand the terms of these treaties and call upon their government to fulfill those obligations.

"For anyone looking for further reading surrounding federally-recognized tribes, I would suggest looking into the MSU library's collection of sources about Indigenous peoples." ■

MSU Alumnus Don Weir - The artifacts of a career devoted to archaeology



Don Weir came to Michigan State University in 1968 as part of an archaeology work study with the MSU Museum followed by a 10-week archaeological field school in in Northern Michigan directed by Charles Cleland, Ph.D., with field director William Lovis, Ph.D. Both of the individuals played an important role in mentoring him to be a future professional archaeologist.

“Doing my first field season with them in 1969 did it,” he said. “That’s when I decided what I wanted to do: be a full-time archaeologist.”

After graduating from MSU in 1970, Weir worked for Gilbert/Commonwealth Associates as a full-time archaeologist, then decided to continue his education, returning to MSU.

“In ‘76, I worked full time and went to graduate school full time with two kids, it was interesting at best,” he mused.

He graduated in 1979 with his M.A. from MSU and continued his work with Gilbert/Commonwealth Associates, an architectural and engineering firm. In 1988, he began his own cultural resources management company, Commonwealth Cultural Resources Group with Dr. Donna Roper, which he ran until his retirement, in 2017.

“It’s a viable career, and I’ve lectured at Michigan State several times to archaeology students,” he said. “There are viable alternatives to getting a Ph.D. and being a professor someplace. There are jobs at federal and state agencies and private firms, like mine.”

Whether sharing through lectures or meeting with students one-on-one, Weir wants to share his story with the next generation of archaeologists, so they understand the breadth of opportunities they have in the field.

Weir has a passion for the next generation, and in addition to giving of his time, he has also given to MSU through funding scholarships. The first is the Archaeology Alumni and Friends Fund. Most recently, Weir and his son, Andy Weir, have set up the Commonwealth Heritage Group Diversity Scholarship Award

in Archaeology at MSU for undergraduate and graduate students who are or who have been enrolled in archaeology courses offered by the Department of Anthropology.

“Diversity is a big issue in archaeology and anthropology, especially in archaeology,” he said. “I want to encourage diversity in the profession, and it will be to the betterment of society, and it’s important to have diversity in archaeology especially with Indigenous archaeologists.”

Weir has also been an advocate for archaeology, visiting state and federal representatives to share how policy impacts the field.

In October 2021, Weir received the Distinguished Career Award from the Michigan Archaeological Conference (MAC) which recognizes archaeologists who have demonstrated excellence and contributed significantly and regularly to the advancement of Midwestern archaeology.

“The award was really special because I received it in East Lansing where I studied for my career,” Weir said. “It’s an organization that is strictly an archaeological organization so it was special to be recognized by that group.”

As evidenced by widespread recognition in the field, Weir has had a far-reaching impact on the field of archaeology. He has been looking back on his legacy and reflecting on his achievements.

“I’m really proud of starting and running one of the largest and most successful CRM companies in the country,” he said. “I’m also proud that we’re able to do that and also do excellent work. Also, that I’ve given back to the profession: I’ve also encouraged my employees to be active professionally and provided professional development opportunities for them.” ■



Caption: Don Weir (right) at a field site in Kentucky in 1970.

PhD Student Juan Carlos Rico Noguera wins Whiteford Cultural Anthropology Field Work Scholarship



The Department of Anthropology is pleased to announce that the inaugural Whiteford Cultural Anthropology Field Work Scholarship was awarded to PhD student Juan Carlos Rico Noguera. With the financial support of MSU Anthropology alumni Aaron and Jill Whiteford, the Whiteford Cultural Anthropology Field Work Scholarship has been established to support graduate students in sociocultural anthropology in

their field work endeavors, with preference given to those students conducting research in Latin America.

Rico Noguera's research involves different ways of understanding the human experience, including the conceptual definition of the State, the role experts have in modern politics, and the way collective memory is produced by political agents. In particular, his research focuses on the Colombian armed conflict, which began in 1964. According to Rico Noguera, after almost 60 years of political violence, it is difficult to find a common understanding over questions such as: what are the causes of the Colombian political violence? Who is responsible for massive human rights violations, such as forced disappearing, targeted killings, massacres, forced displacement, torture, and kidnapping? Paintings in walls across the country, like the one pictured above, dispute pervasive narratives suggesting Colombia is a regular and stable democracy by reminding people of the prevalence of targeted killings that have become hallmarks of political violence.

Rico Noguera is interested in contributing to a better understanding of Latin American social processes and the Colombian politics associated with how its violent past is collectively evoked. Further, Rico Noguera intends to explore how communities with very different experiences and understandings of the Colombian past engage with transitional justice mechanisms. His research will involve institutions such as the Truth Commission and other organizations who have a legal obligation to clarify human rights violations and the causes of those violations.

The funds from the Whiteford Cultural Anthropology Field Work Scholarship will enable Rico Noguera to cover research expenses for the first phase of his dissertation research in Colombia. This phase of research will explore how three different communities engage with the Colombian State and its duty to remember 50 years of armed conflict. The first phase of this ethnographic study will take place in the offices of the "Institutional Memory" group, belonging to the Colombian National Police.

Rico Noguera would like to express his gratitude to Aaron and Jill Whiteford, as their generosity is enabling Rico Noguera to begin his dissertation field work in Colombia. Rico Noguera notes that the Whiteford scholarship has provided him with a vital asset in the scholarly world: a vote of confidence. He plans to use both the funds and confidence gained from the Whiteford scholarship to seek further funding and successfully complete his dissertation field work. Additionally, Rico Noguera expresses his appreciation for the guidance and support of his dissertation committee: Dr. Elizabeth Drexler (chair), Dr. Lucero Radonic, Dr. Mindy Morgan, and Dr. Edward Murphy. ■

Announcing Three New Anthropology Scholarships

The Department of Anthropology is proud to announce three new scholarships, each generously funded by an MSU Anthropology alum! These scholarships will allow undergraduate and graduate students in the department to embark on travel, undertake research, and gain educational experiences that may not have otherwise been possible.

First, with the financial support of alumni Aaron and Jill Whiteford, the Whiteford Cultural Anthropology Field Work Scholarship has been established. Preference will be given to students conducting research in Latin America. The inaugural scholarship has recently been awarded to PhD student, Juan Carlos Rico Noguera.

Second, with the financial support of archaeology alum Don Weir, the Commonwealth Heritage Group Diversity Scholarship Award in Archaeology at Michigan State University has been established. Students who are or have been enrolled in archaeology courses and who have high financial need will be considered

for this award. Preference will also be given to students who are first generation to attend college and/or are educationally disadvantaged. Special consideration shall be given to ensure that this scholarship supports the Donor's desire of building and supporting a culture of diversity and inclusion in the Department of Anthropology.

Third, with the financial support of alum Emily Altimare, the Altimare Professional Development Scholarship has been established. This scholarship will support graduate students in the Department – the funds can be used for professional development support including conference training to learn new skills, online certifications, qualitative data analysis software, etc.

We are extremely grateful for these generous donations, which will allow our students to expand their educational horizons and become successful and marketable anthropologists. ■



The MSU Forensic Anthropology Lab moves to Giltner Hall

During the summer of 2021, the Michigan State University Forensic Anthropology Lab (MSUFAL), moved from its longtime home in East Fee Hall to a new laboratory and teaching space in Giltner Hall. The move has been bittersweet, due to the history of groundbreaking research and fruitful collaborations that were forged in East Fee Hall, but the new lab in Giltner offers the opportunity to expand the consulting, training, and research for which MSUFAL is known.

The MSUFAL has been an integral part of the MSU landscape since the 1970s, providing a variety of forensic services including forensic archaeological recovery, decedent identification, trauma analysis, and expert witness testimony. The lab has provided these services for diverse types of cases such as positive identification of unidentified human remains, human skeletal analysis, trauma analysis, human vs. nonhuman bone, and field search and recovery. The forensic anthropology faculty comprises Dr. Todd Fenton, who is currently serving as Department Chair until 2024, Dr. Joe Hefner, and Dr. Carolyn Isaac, the current lab director.

From the late 1970s to the late 1990s, the MSUFAL, under the direction of Dr. Norm Sauer, was housed in the basement of an administration building on campus, which offered very little analytical space and only one small sink. During this time, most of MSUFAL's work was done at the local morgue, as the on-campus laboratory facilities were not conducive to forensic casework. In the mid-1990s, the MSUFAL moved to its most recent home in East Fee Hall, where the larger space and the addition of Dr. Fenton to the faculty allowed casework, teaching, and research efforts to substantially expand.

Throughout the two decades during which the MSUFAL called East Fee Hall home, members of the MSUFAL participated in trauma research, ancestry research, bioarchaeology projects and dissertations,

skull-photo superimposition, forensic image comparisons, and countless forensic cases. In addition, the location in East Fee Hall allowed for close collaboration with the anatomy department, medical school, and biomechanical engineers, all of whom also had labs in the building. While the MSUFAL was housed in East Fee Hall, MSUFAL faculty and graduate students consulted on over 1,200 forensic cases, averaging approximately 60 forensic cases per year. Further, over the past 14 years, MSUFAL faculty have garnered over \$5,000,000 in external research funding, cementing MSUFAL as one of the premier forensic anthropology research laboratories in the country.

Given MSUFAL's expanding faculty, increasing casework, and new research initiatives, and despite the great success of students and faculty over the last five decades, it became clear that the lab had finally outgrown the space in East Fee Hall. In May 2021, faculty and students packed up the laboratory and moved to a beautiful new space in Giltner Hall. This move was motivated by the prospect of a larger space and being in the same building as the other physical anthropologists, as well as Giltner's proximity to the rest of the department in Baker Hall.

The new lab space in Giltner Hall has proven to be an upgrade in many ways, with its centralized location being perhaps the greatest advantage. Instead of the disparate lab spaces of East Fee, the new Giltner lab boasts a connected dry lab, wet lab, radiography and photography space, grad student office, lab director office, and a large classroom. Overall, the new lab is an ideal place to conduct sensitive casework, safely and securely house skeletal material, conduct meaningful research, and train the next generation of forensic anthropologists! ■

Dr. Najib Hourani Receives Dean's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Faculty Award



Dr. Najib Hourani, an associate professor in the Department of Anthropology and the Global Urban Studies Program and core faculty in the Muslim Studies Program, is the winner of the inaugural 2021 College of Social Science Dean's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Excellence Faculty Award. The award recognizes social science faculty who have made comprehensive,

impressive and sustained efforts surrounding diversity, equity and inclusion.

"Dr. Hourani is richly deserving of the inaugural DEI Faculty award because he has a demonstrated and sustained record of making our campus a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment for all," said Dr. Nwando Achebe, the Associate Dean of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the College of Social Science.

CONTINUING A TRADITION OF TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH

Dr. Hourani joined MSU's faculty in the fall of 2006, and quickly established himself as a campus expert on the political anthropology of the Middle East, civil conflict, and cities of the Arab world. His past research focused on the Lebanese civil war and post-conflict urban reconstruction, and his current research builds upon the lessons learned in Beirut to address the rebirth of Syrian cities as that country's decade-long civil war comes to an end.

Unable to visit Syria due to U.S. travel restrictions, Dr. Hourani was recently awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to work with Syrian refugees in the neighboring country of Jordan to better understand their needs, hopes and aspirations for returning to their home villages, towns and cities.

Though his work in Jordan ended prematurely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Hourani is still finding ways to

transform the human experience through his scholarship closer to home. Teaming up with faculty from Global Studies in Arts and Humanities in the College of Arts and Letters, Dr. Hourani is exploring new research on the relationship between African American and Arab American communities in the United States.

"The relationship between these two communities has historically been complicated, as there have been periods of both conflict and allyship between these groups in the past," Dr. Hourani explained.

CREATING SPACE FOR DEI CONVERSATIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

On top of his research, Dr. Hourani teaches several undergraduate and graduate-level Anthropology courses. Upon his arrival at MSU, he developed the Anthropology of the Middle East course, which, in addition to exploring the peoples and cultures of the region, begins with discussions of race and representation. "There are a lot of stereotypes and misconceptions about what it means to be Arab that many people carry with them that they may not even realize," explained Dr. Hourani.

In his classes, Dr. Hourani believes in fostering conversations about race and identity rather than shying away from them. For example, Dr. Hourani helps students to recognize harmful portrayals that normalize bigotry against Arab people in US popular culture, and encourages them to engage with such portrayals critically.

Dr. Hourani emphasizes the incredible opportunity that Spartan students have to learn about Arab culture, heritage and history at MSU - especially from Arab American faculty.

"Many people may not realize that, outside of the Middle East, Michigan has the largest Arab population in the world," Dr. Hourani explained. "Arabs and Arab Americans have made tremendous contributions to the state and to the country. In an increasingly diverse country, it is important for students to learn about Arab peoples and cultures. Unlearning biases and stereotypes is hard work. I am gratified to see so many students willing to take it on at MSU." ■



MSU Department of Anthropology hosts the 2021 Midwest Archaeology Conference

Photo caption: MAC conference participants greet and view a poster session at the MSU Kellogg Center. Photo courtesy of Angela Collins, MAC Website Manager.

The Michigan State University Department of Anthropology hosted the joint annual meeting of the Midwest Archaeological Conference and the Midwest Historical Archaeology Conference October 7-9, 2021, on MSU's campus. Jodie O'Gorman, MSU associate professor and archaeologist, led the team responsible for organizing the conference.

"Our membership gets together every year to share the research we've been doing. It's an important opportunity for us to see colleagues, meet new and prospective students, and debate and discuss issues that are important to all of us," O'Gorman said.

The Midwest Archaeological Conference is the regional association for archaeologists and students working in the Mid-continent. It has been held annually for the last 64 years, except last year due to the novel coronavirus pandemic. This year, the Department of Anthropology brought over 150 people and 21 student volunteers together again with special precautions to allow for social distancing.

"MSU has always been one of the most influential institutions in Midwest and Great Lakes archaeology," O'Gorman said. "Many of our archaeology alumni still live and work in the Midwest and are members of MAC. They hold some of the most influential archaeology positions in national, state, and private organizations. We celebrate the opportunity to reconnect with them. We also see it as an opportunity to let others see how strong our program is."

The meeting this year was a joint meeting with the Midwest Historical Archaeology Conference because O'Gorman and her colleagues decided to co-host this meeting to stress the importance of both kinds of archaeology at MSU. The co-organizers were Drs. Jessica Yann and Stacey Camp, Director of MSU's Campus Archaeology Program.

"I hope people enjoyed reconnecting with colleagues. Some of the papers reflect on archaeology in the time of COVID, and I think it's important for us to share that and to support each other,"

O'Gorman said. "I think people also enjoyed just getting back to a bit of normalcy in terms of hearing research papers."

Attendees attended sessions, workshops and a Campus Archaeology tour of MSU.

"One unique event was the MAC-sponsored symposium I co-organized with several former and current students," O'Gorman said. "We assembled 13 papers on 'Midcontinental Cuisine: Recent Archaeological Explorations of Food and Cooking in the Heartland,' about cuisine from ancient times to MSU's early history. We also featured MSU historical cuisine at the following reception in collaboration with MSU chefs."

Other events during the conference were a workshop on building an inclusive culture in the field, and two workshops (one for students and one for practicing archaeologists) on 3D Digitization, Preservation, and Access in Archaeology and Heritage. The 3D workshops were presented by Dr. Ethan Watrall in the college's Lab for the Education and Advancement in Digital Research (LEADR), an interdisciplinary venture of Anthropology, History, and Matrix.

"The past cultures we study lived from the edge of the Plains into the forests of the Northeast, around the Great Lakes as well as smaller inland lakes, and along major and minor river valleys," O'Gorman said. "Indigenous groups have been here since at least 15,000 years ago and their cultural heritage is especially rich and varied."

Hosting the conference had special meaning to O'Gorman.

"I first became interested in MSU when I attended a MAC meeting here 22 years ago," O'Gorman said. "That meeting led to my application for the position I hold now. As I think about retirement, I hope the younger generation of Midwest archaeologists that attended this year saw what an exciting program we have." ■

Dr. Joseph T. Hefner member of \$1.4 million NIH grant team to develop image library for facial features requiring surgery

The National Institute of Dental & Craniofacial Research of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) awarded Joseph T. Hefner, Ph.D., and colleagues at the University of Kentucky a five-year, \$1.4 million grant to develop a standardized graphic library to assist clinicians and biomedical researchers to communicate anatomical concepts with their patients and their families. Hefner is an MSU Department of Anthropology assistant professor and CO-PI on the grant team led by Melissa Clarkson, Ph.D., assistant professor of biomedical informatics from the University of Kentucky. The project, titled, “Developing standardized graphic libraries for anatomy: A focus on human craniofacial anatomy and phenotypes,” began Summer of 2021.

“The focus is on creating standards for clinicians and surgeons who meet with patients and their family members and engage them about the type of craniofacial anomaly they have and the necessary reconstructive surgery,” Hefner said.

Craniofacial anomalies are irregular facial features, such as cleft palate or cleft lip, and might require surgery. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about one in every 1,600 babies is born with cleft lip and cleft palate in the United States.

“We are generating illustrations that can be used to guide family members through the process of understanding anomalies like cleft lip or cleft palate,” Hefner said. “We have the clinical language which is very complex, but with the addition of line drawings, clinicians can talk to family members in a more easily understood way and using tools to help the family visualize how the reconstruction will proceed.”

The team is led by Clarkson who specializes in addressing the gap between complex information and the people who need to understand it. The team members represent an interdisciplinary approach that includes a plastic surgeon, an odontologist, a traditional human anatomist, and Hefner, a biological anthropologist. Hefner’s knowledge and research on global human craniofacial variation is a key component of the project from a perspective of equity. The earliest models for the current clinical language and images of craniofacial anomalies are based upon American white populations.

“These models really miss some of the nuances of craniofacial morphology here in the United States, and my job is to provide data and an expertise on human variation to more accurately capture craniofacial variation,” Hefner said.

In other words, Hefner’s contribution will help to shape clinical language and imagery that reflect the diverse people in the United States.

“For example, ‘wide mouth’ is defined clinically as ‘the distance between the corners of the mouth greater than two standard deviations above the mean,’ - but what does that look like in a living individual?” Clarkson explained. “Drawing that phenotype [set of observable characteristics] will depend on population-level data, and that data should reflect different ages and populations. Dr. Hefner will help us to understand population-level differences in phenotypes and how to incorporate craniometric [the scientific measurement of skulls] and macromorphoscopic [soft tissue differences] datasets into our work.”

Additionally, their research will serve as standardized visual representations for information systems and software applications. For example, their work will include developing prototypes for web-based tools such as the Human Phenotype Ontology.

This project is a new application of Hefner’s research. Much of his previous work has involved forensic anthropology and working with medical and legal death investigations.

“The exciting thing for me is that I’ve never done anything like it,” Hefner said. “I can use my love of human craniofacial morphology for a far-reaching, great cause. We’re dealing with people who have craniofacial anomalies, which is very common here in the United States, to provide them and their families and clinicians a common visual language, improving discussions between patients and doctors.” ■



PhD Student Marwa Bakabas named diversity torch for MSU College of Social Science

Department of Anthropology doctoral student Marwa Bakabas was featured as the Diversity Torch in the College of Social Science "Diversity Matters" issue for Arab American Heritage Month. Arab American Heritage Month commemorates the contributions of Arab Americans to American life and their struggles to receive full protections as American citizens. The College of Social Science Diversity Torches celebrate students who uphold a diversity value or ideal. As "Diversity Torches," they provide light, guidance, and awareness to their fellow students and all who see them.

Marwa Bakabas is a sociocultural anthropology PhD student in the Department of Anthropology whose work centers on violence, forced migration, exile, and trauma in the Middle East. While writing her Master's thesis in Lebanon, Marwa decided she wanted to apply for a PhD and expand her focus from studying refugees that are displaced in Lebanon and Greece to also include the Yemeni refugee community. Marwa explains that MSU was a great fit because they had more opportunities to both become an academic practitioner and to continue work as an activist. Her dissertation will focus on the visibility of the war and conflict in Yemen and the subsequent displacement/exile of Yemenis.

In both her personal and professional life, Marwa is inspired by the Arab Americans making a difference in their communities, noting "as Arab-Americans, we have a choice in how we embrace or neglect our identity and so many of my counterparts and friends that I have crossed paths with have inspired me, especially those who continue to preserve our traditions while helping spread awareness and knowledge to break stereotypes."

Marwa also explains, "we can all be better allies by standing in solidarity with one another. Many groups face marginalization and racism in America and all over the world. We need to stand together and build stronger allyship instead of amplifying our differences." ■



INTRODUCING:

Jessica Yann, NAGPRA Program Manager



The Department of Anthropology is pleased to introduce the new NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) Program Manager, MSU Anthropology alum Jessica Yann, who began this role in August 2021. Although the role is based in the Office of the Associate Provost for University Collections and Art Initiatives, Jessica also continues to work with the archaeology collections and teach through the Department of Anthropology.

This position is designed to create and take a proactive approach to NAGPRA compliance and outreach, including creating a strategic plan for effectively implementing NAGPRA work. This includes auditing collections for potentially NAGPRA eligible ancestors or objects, writing grants to facilitate collections research, management, and outreach with Tribal communities, facilitating consultations, creating draft Inventories and Summaries in collaboration with Tribal partners, facilitating respectful repatriations and returns, curating the NAGPRA collections, and ensuring that MSU stewards all collections according to the policies and procedures in the MSU NAGPRA and MSU Collections Policies.

Jessica started at MSU as a graduate student in the Department of Anthropology, completing her PhD degree in 2019. She took over as the NAGPRA Assistant in March of 2019 and continued in that capacity until beginning her current role in August. Prior to Jessica's position as the NAGPRA Assistant, she worked with the State Archaeologist in the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office for 9.5 years, an experience that Jessica credits with having been incredibly helpful in her new role as Program Manager.

Jessica notes that she is excited to continue to consult and collaborate with all the Tribes that are connected to Michigan as she helps continue the journey towards repatriation and rematriation, stating "I'm honored by the privilege of assisting them in this work, and thankful for the trust they have placed in me."

In her free time, Jessica enjoys dabbling in arts and crafts, trying crazy new recipes, and running. We look forward to all the amazing work Jessica will do in her new role!

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