

ANTHROPOLOGY AT ALABAMA

Newsletter of the University of Alabama Department of Anthropology
College of Arts and Sciences

LISA LECOUNT COMPLETES SIXTH SEASON AT ACTUNCAN



This summer, Lisa LeCount and colleagues undertook a sixth summer of archaeological research at the ancient Maya site of Actuncan in Belize, under LeCount's new National Geographic Society Committee for Research and Exploration grant. They have been investigating the institutionalization of Maya kingship during the Terminal Preclassic period (100 BC to AD 250). Previous seasons focused on understanding kingship from the perspective of elite and common households, and this strategy continued during the sixth season with the excavation of two additional elite houses. The project also investigated an E-Group, a commemorative and astronomical civic complex found on the eastern side of Maya sites. Studies have shown that the onset of dynastic kingship was marked by a shift in ritual practices at E-groups. Initially, ritual practices revolved around the placement of caches inside the architecture to animate them as the homes of mountain spirits, but later, rulers' ancestors were interred within them to fuse human and divine realms allowing living kings to claim descent from divine ancestors. The timing of these practices is site dependent. LeCount hypothesizes that Actuncan was slow to adopt divine kingship, and that the onset of hierarchical authority was later here than in Tikal and other larger Maya sites to the west. (More on this project on p. 8.)

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[NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE](#)

RICK BROWN - IN MEMORIAM

Rick Brown, Ph.D., 43, a post-doctoral fellow in the Institute for Circumpolar Health Studies at the University of Alaska-Anchorage, passed away on March 3, 2013, after suffering a massive stroke. He is survived by his wife Justina Chapala Brown (“Justy”), son Jackson (“Jake”), and daughter Isabella (“Bella”); his parents, Richard and Lillian Brown, and his brothers, Steve Schilling and Jay Brown.



Rick received his M.A. (2007) and Ph.D. (2011) from The University of Alabama in biocultural medical anthropology. Rick will be remembered as a valued student, friend, and colleague, one who fulfilled his life dream against tall odds. In his own words, “I feel fortunate that what I need to do is what I love to do.”

Rick was somewhat of a non-traditional student. He began his education at the Columbus College of Art & Design in Columbus, OH. After a short time he left school and embarked on a series of jobs, including as a manager of a rent-to-own furniture store and as a bouncer in a nightclub. Yes, Rick was large. And he could be a formidable presence. As a Teaching Assistant in Introductory Anthropology courses, he relished his “influence” on would-be exam cheaters and cut-ups as he ambled up and down the aisles with that “I dare you” look in his eyes. Once at an Anthro Club Meet and Greet at Wilhagen’s Rick admitted that he had to be careful about standing too close to the door in a bar because younger patrons would just automatically produce their IDs when they saw him. While many anthropologists like to tout a solidarity with the working class, Rick really knew what he was talking about.

Rick was also an entrepreneur. In the early days of the internet he built a very successful web-hosting business, using what he affectionately referred to as “Frankenstein computers” (he built his own web servers). He also had a successful business printing custom t-shirts.

But Rick was not satisfied to remain in these pursuits. His intellectual interests were too broad and insistent, so he returned to school at Indiana University-Purdue University at Ft. Wayne, IN. There he was a triple major in anthropology, philosophy, and psychology. Because of his enduring interests in cognitive science and the influence of culture on biology, he came to UA for graduate study. He immediately established himself as our most tech-savvy GTA of the era, helping more than one of us to enter into the brave new world of interactive teaching technologies (the infamous ‘clicker’).

Rick had a long-term interest in “the placebo effect,” or how symbols influence healing. For his master’s degree thesis, he carried out a study here in Tuscaloosa of patients’ cultural models of an ideal clinical encounter, the basic idea being that the degree to which a patient’s expectations were satisfied would enhance his/her recovery. Rick presented the results of his research at the 2008 meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology in Memphis, TN and his paper was very favorably received by anthropologists working in clinical settings. It generated a great deal of discussion.

RICK BROWN REMEMBERED, CONTINUED



Justy, Jake and Bella



Dr. Rick Brown

For his dissertation research Rick did fieldwork in Guadalajara, Mexico, working with our colleague Javier Eduardo de Alba Garcia, MD, PhD, in a social science and epidemiology research unit. Rick was interested in how a patient's cultural consonance with a shared cultural model of the treatment and management of diabetes might influence his/her blood sugar and subjective well-being during treatment. Rick worked hard, first at learning to speak Spanish, and then in identifying and interviewing patients from

all over the city. He successfully defended his dissertation in 2011 and presented his work at the Society for Applied Anthropology meetings in Seattle in 2011 and Baltimore in 2012. His work again received much praise in these sessions.

Rick joined the Institute for Circumpolar Health Studies at the University of Alaska in 2011 as a post-doctoral fellow and, at the time of his death, he had applied to become a permanent staff member and director of the Center for Alcohol and Addiction Studies. He had become an integral part of that Institute, successfully competing for several large research contracts with the state and managing a number of ongoing projects examining Alaskan Native health. His work included evaluating Housing First programs for the state (harm reduction intervention for chronically homeless persons with alcohol dependence and mental illness), sexual health interventions among Alaska Natives including HIV prevention in relation to alcohol consumption, and he was just starting on a project evaluating a local greenhouse that would employ developmentally disabled at-risk youth as part of a vocational training/social engagement intervention.

Rick was generous with his time, often helping our department solve its E-tech puzzles. Even in grad school he seemed to barely sleep for all the projects he had going at once. He was a steadfast husband to Justy and a doting yet tough-love father to his children. Rick was highly self-motivated, someone who lit the fire under his own tail. His work ethic was parallel to none. As one of his PhD cohort exclaimed, when we all still held out hope for his recovery, "I'm sure he is ready to pull through and write a first person account of his illness experience! If there is anyone with determination to make it back, its Rick. If not this lifetime, the next."

Rick was taken from us and from our profession at a tragically young age. Still, we can all feel a measure of solace in the fact that Rick overcame many obstacles in his life and was able to achieve what he set out to achieve: To receive a PhD and successfully embark on a career in the field that he loved. He is deeply missed by many.

Contributions can be made to the "Richard Brown II Memorial Account", a fund to support his children's college education, through the Fifth Third Bank, Beech Grove Financial Center, 4810 S. Emerson Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46203 (317-788-0167).

- Kathryn Oths and William Dressler

FRANCOIS DENGHAH COMPLETES PhD

In Spring 2013, Francois Dengah completed his dissertation entitled “Finding Success and Health through God: A Study of Cultural Models and Health among Brazilian Pentecostals,” advised by Dr. William Dressler. Francois, who studied with the support of a National Science Foundation Dissertation Improvement Grant, earned the 19th PhD awarded by the Anthropology Department. He is presently an Instructor at the University of Alabama, and is proceeding to publish his highly-regarded dissertation.



PHD STUDENT TINA THOMAS RECEIVES NSF GRANT

Martina Thomas, a doctoral student in The University of Alabama’s anthropology department, was awarded a \$16,000 Dissertation Improvement Grant from the National Science Foundation for her work in determining the social factors that influence a person’s knowledge and behavior regarding HIV risk.

She was chosen from 218 applicants nationwide. According to the NSF, fewer than 15 percent of students were awarded the grant this year. Tina is the sixth doctoral student in our program to garner this prestigious award.

Thomas’s project, “An Anthropological Study of the Social Ecology of Health Knowledge and Risk,” focuses on social ecological influences contributing to HIV/AIDS risk knowledge and behavior among African-American adolescent female teens in Tuscaloosa.

She developed the idea for the project while conducting research for her master’s degree in Mobile where she studied the perceptions of body image among African-American women and their daughters. She found many of the people with whom she spoke held a misconception about the disease. “One of the things that influenced me was a couple of the mothers stating that they know who has HIV by the way they look,” Thomas said.

Now, Thomas plans to study how these perceptions affect the risk of African-American adolescent females in coming into contact with the disease. She hopes that besides a scholarly application, her work will show the ways in which members of a community are more at risk or more protected against the disease by their social ecology. This is a more optimistic view than most HIV/AIDS studies take, which often only examine the disadvantages that are presented, she said.

Dr. Jason DeCaro has mentored Thomas as a graduate student since 2008. DeCaro said he was struck by Thomas’s deep motivation to pursue theoretically sophisticated projects with meaningful applied implications. “She aims not only to advance scholarship in our discipline—which she will do—but also advance social justice and public health,” DeCaro said.

TEACHING TECHNOLOGIES FOR RESEARCH, COLLABORATION, AND DISSEMINATION



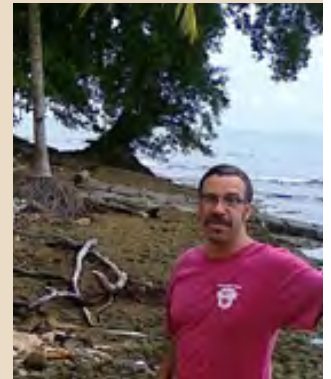
Elizabeth Cooper

Drs. Elizabeth Cooper, Christopher Lynn, and Matthew Wolfgram published an article in the February 2013 issue of *Anthropology News* exploring “Teaching Technologies for Research, Collaboration, and Dissemination.” An abstract of their article follows; the full text can be accessed at: <http://www.anthropology-news.org/index.php/2013/02/06/teaching-technologies-for-research-collaboration-and-dissemination/>

Successful pedagogy in anthropology has the potential to involve students in our discipline’s process of knowledge production. By engaging students in the work of anthropology, an active learning approach removes the discipline’s aura of esoterica and connects it to the immediate, practical concerns of our students. Thus, as instructors we prepare students to function as critical thinkers and future practitioners. Drawing on this teaching philosophy, we profile how current technologies are being used at the University of Alabama to promote student research, encourage collaboration among students and across the university, and facilitate the wider distribution of anthropological findings and perspectives to the public at large. More specifically, we (1) outline successful practices for training students in the use of digital technology for audiovisual projects and video ethnography; (2) discuss the educational adaptation of Podio, an online work platform for collaboration and project management that can be used with iPhone, iPad, and iPod touch devices; and (3) evaluate the pros, cons, and best practices for involving students in digital anthropology through blogging or other forms of social media. Video ethnography acquaints students with contemporary tools of data collection and analysis, while technology solutions such as Podio allow them to work cooperatively on-going projects with classmates and community stakeholders. Dissemination via digital anthropology provides means for students to engage with the discipline through public anthropology immediately, something not possible for previous generations. Building on specific examples from a broad range of courses, we explain how we have translated and adapted the tools of our trade for use in student-led projects in cultural, biological, and linguistic anthropology. We give special attention to issues of data management, security, and ethics; cost and necessary supplies; and the potential for technology-driven data collection and analysis to foster a sense of critical realism among students.



Matthew Wolfgram



Christopher Lynn

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WELCOME NEW STUDENTS

Welcome to our new graduate students for the 2013-2014 academic year!

MA: Brass Bralley, Angelica Callery, Lessye Demoss, Luke Donohue, Jolynn Amrine Goertz, Kareen Hawsey, Camille Morgan, Cynthia Snead, Brittany Yabczanka

PhD: Greg Batchelder, Mitchell Childress, Sarah Morrow (from MA program)

EVOLUTIONARY STUDIES PROGRAM TURNS TWO

Now two years old, the Evolutionary Studies (EvoS) program is toddling along on its own, thanks in no small part to increased student involvement. In the past academic year, the EvoS Club was revived and stepped in to offer support for the Alabama Lectures on Life's Evolution (ALLELE) speaker series for two talks by paleo-anthropologist Dr. John Hawks, who was invited on behalf of the ALLELE series by the Anthropology Department. Furthermore, this spring the EvoS Club hosted a first annual Darwin Day Research Colloquium.

The EvoS program includes an interdisciplinary minor and the student-led club. The minor is housed in the Department of Anthropology. Given that evolution is one of the foundational theories of anthropology, it is a natural fit for our department. Nevertheless, the program is administered in conjunction with the Department of Biological Sciences and maintains an interdisciplinary philosophy and approach. It is based on a model developed at the Binghamton University (SUNY) and SUNY New Paltz that entails team-taught courses to introduce students to the myriad disciplinary applications of evolutionary principles, foundational courses in key disciplines—such as our course in the Principles of Physical Anthropology—and electives in other fields involved, which currently include Biology, Geology, Philosophy, Astronomy, and Psychology. The minor promotes interdisciplinarity through the capstone courses that include lectures by faculty from the aforementioned departments and visiting ALLELE lecturers, as well as new additions from Chemistry and Aerospace Engineering. The EvoS program is a feather in the cap of our Anthropology Department and the UA community at large. Out of over 40 similar program affiliated with the international EvoS Consortium, ours is the only EvoS program at a flagship state research institution and one of only four full minors in the Consortium.



Dr. John Hawks

Complementing the minor, interested students started a club to further these interdisciplinary efforts, which started strong but floundered for about a year until it could get a sufficient core of kindling going. The EvoS Club includes some in the minor but is open to any student interested in better understanding and promoting one of the fundamental theories for explaining all life to come out of the modern era. Club members were integral in assisting with our December ALLELE event, a visit by John Hawks. Dr. Hawks received his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan, where he trained with the eminent Milford Wolfpoff, then completed postdoctoral work in evolutionary genetics under Henry Harpending at the University of Utah. Dr. Hawks's current research interests involve Neanderthal and Denisovan genomes, which he spoke about in the ALLELE talk entitled "Neandertime: What Ancient Genomes Can Tell us About Our Past and Present." His previous work was in the population dynamics of hominid ancestors, which he presented in a sub-

sequent lecture for the Anthropology Department called "Human Evolution during the Holocene." In addition to his expertise in paleoanthropology and genetics, Dr. Hawks is among the foremost anthropological bloggers in the world and at the forefront of the digital anthropology movement and efforts to integrate technology in anthropological pedagogy, aspects of which he discussed in independent meetings with EvoS students and anthropology graduate students.

EVOLUTION STUDIES, CONTINUED

The culmination of this year's EvoS efforts was a Research Colloquium on February 12 in honor of Darwin Day. The EvoS minor involves the development of a research project over the course of the program, and the colloquium gives students in the minor and others involved in related activities a chance to showcase their work and develop a supportive network based on these interests. This year's colloquium included eight talks and three posters, with faculty presentations by Dr. Patrick Frantom from the Department of Chemistry, J. Brett Smith from Spellman College, and Dr. Michael Sandel from UAB. The keynote speaker was evolutionary psychologist Dr. Jaime Cloud from Birmingham-Southern, whose talk was entitled "The Meaning of Beauty: Cues of Women's Fertility and Reproductive Value."

To date, over 20 students have enrolled in the minor, and two have graduated and entered graduate school in related programs. A rotating cast of approximately 25 students are involved in the club and preparing additional activities for this spring and the coming year. We hope the EvoS program continues to grow and enhance our department and UA community.

For more information, visit the EvoS minor webpage at <http://www.as.ua.edu/evolutionarystudies/> and the EvoS Club at <http://www.facebook.com/#!/groups/307415545972644/>.

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE IN THE PERUVIAN ANDES

For two weeks in August 2012 and ten days in August 2013, four students traveled with Dr. Kathy Oths to Chugurpampa, in La Libertad, Peru: Ana Ochoa, Max Stein, Adam Booher, a recent graduate of our BA program, and Rodrigo Lazo, from Catholic University of Lima, Peru. They initiated a restudy of the medical system of the highland peasant community where Dr. Oths worked more than 20 years ago. Traditional medicine is an integral component of the health of many populations, and the group wished to explore how culture and the environment have shaped people's medical treatment choice over time, since changes in economic and social life have occurred in the region along with dramatic environmental alterations largely due to climate change. The northern Peruvian Andes is the least studied area of Peru, with virtually no exploration of its medical system in over two decades. The team jointly presented their findings at AAA in San Francisco in November. Dr. Oths and Mr. Booher, a cinematographer, have collaborated on an ethnographic film. With the support of many friends and colleagues through an Indiegogo campaign, they then organized and filmed a hugely successful Summer 2013 two-day workshop showcasing the skills of Andean healer Don Felipe.



Interviewing a peasant farmer: Ana Ochoa, Rodrigo Lazo, Max Stein, Julio Aguilar, Kathy Oths, and Adam Booher

FACULTY AND STUDENT NOTES

John Blitz reports that last fall, graduate student Erik Porth, and undergraduate students in the Field Archaeology course partnered with Matt Gage and Brandon Thompson, Office of Archaeological Research, in excavations on Mound P, Moundville Archaeological Park. The excavations were in preparation for a new stairway on Mound P and the results will be reported by Porth and Thompson. The excavations were filmed for the National Endowment for the Humanities documentary project, *Mark of the Mississippians*.

Lisa LeCount reports that a major focus of the Actuncan Archaeological Project that she directs is to develop an understanding of the nature of early Maya rulership from the perspective of households at Actuncan, Belize. As a component of that goal, identification and excavation of the ruler's residence is a primary element. Structure 19, the largest palace on the site, was chosen as a likely residence of the ruler of the site due to its central location overlooking a ball court and the presence of an enclosed courtyard attached to the north side of the structure (Figure 1). In the winter of 2012, excavations at this complex defined three out of the five rooms of the palace (Figure 2), trenched the substructure to investigate earlier phases of construction, and explored buildings surrounding the courtyard including an ancestor shrine and other domestic structures. It was found that the palace was initially built in the Terminal Preclassic period (100 BC to AD 250) at the height of the site's power and authority but fell into disrepair sometime during the Early Classic period (AD 250 to 500). After this hiatus, the palace was revitalized and the courtyard was built to serve as the court of an Actuncan noble family whose members were likely vassals of powerful *k'ul ajawob* (divine kings) of the Late Classic capital of Xunantunich 2 km south of the site. Besides Drs. LeCount and John Blitz from the University of Alabama, members of the palace project included Drs. Thomas Jamison (Hartgen Associates), Carolyn Freiwald (University of Mississippi), David Mixter (Washington University at St. Louis), and many dedicated Belizean men and women from San Jose de Succotz and Benque Viejo (Figure 3). Bobbie Simova and Emma Koenig, UA graduate students, took part in summer research projects at the site during which plazas and patio spaces were excavated and artifact analyses were undertaken.

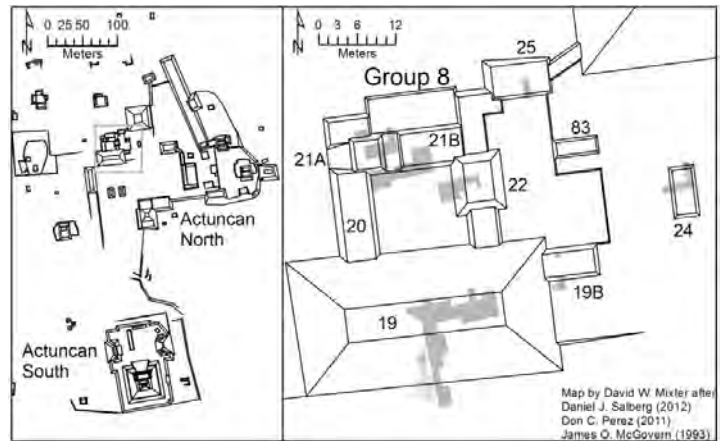


Figure 1. The site of Actuncan (left) and the locations of 2012 excavations at the palace complex (right)

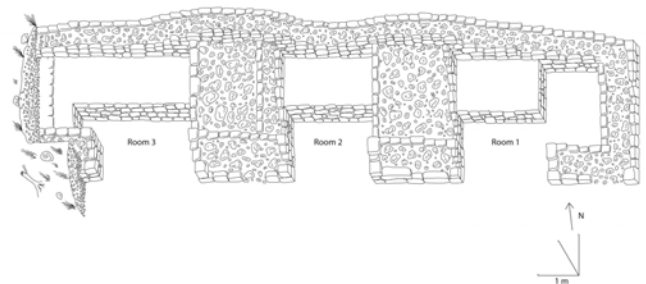


Figure 2. Axiometric drawing of Structure 19-1st, Rooms 1 to 3 (illustration by Merle Alfaro)



Figure 3. Members of the winter 2012 Actuncan Archaeological Project

A WORD OF THANKS

We are humbled by and deeply appreciate a generous gift of \$500 by Anna Singer to the The Allen R. Maxwell Endowed Anthropology Scholarship in honor of Prof. Michael Murphy's decade of service as Chair of the Department and of Norman Singer's 75th birthday. We cannot easily express how deeply we and our students are indebted to Anna, and to all the generous donors who have made the scholarship programs of the Department of Anthropology possible, and sustained them over many years.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GIVING

We humbly invite you to consider making a tax-free donation to one of the following initiatives:

The Allen R. Maxwell Endowed Anthropology Scholarship is awarded to support graduate student research in the areas of ethnography or linguistic anthropology. Newly established through a bequest from Dr. Maxwell's estate, it will begin awarding prizes this year, and is our first award specifically dedicated to ethnographic or linguistic field research.

The Anthropology Field School Gift Fund goes to the support of our undergraduate field schools in archaeology. Our field schools receive no budget from the University, and depend heavily on these gifts for supplies and operating expenses. Our major purchase from this fund was a work truck that has proven invaluable to faculty and graduate student research, but is now starting to show its age. Our annual field schools for undergraduates date back to 1956. Traditionally they are among the most memorable experiences of our alumni.

The Anthropology Lectureship Fund goes to support distinguished guest speakers from outside the University. We try to have at least four guest speakers per year. These speakers greatly enrich our undergraduate and graduate programs by exposing our students to prominent ideas by the leading lights in our discipline.

The David and Elizabeth DeJarnette Endowed Scholarship in Anthropology is awarded to support graduate student research on Southeastern or Mesoamerican archaeology. Each spring, the award is made during the popular DeJarnette Barbecue, held at Moundville Archaeological Park during the Saturday of Honors Week. Since it was founded in 1993 by Sarah and James Caldwell, the endowment has steadily grown. In recent years our DeJarnette Scholars have received awards of as much as \$6,000.

The Hughes Prize recognizes students who have captured the imagination of the faculty by potential, intransigence, inventiveness, perseverance, insight, or a combination of those traits.

The Richard A. Krause Award is given for academic excellence at the graduate level in anthropology. The recipient of this annual award is chosen by the Graduate Studies Committee of the Department based on classroom performance, research, and service.

The C. Earle Smith Award is given for academic excellence at the undergraduate level in anthropology. The annual award goes to the graduating senior in anthropology having the highest overall grade point average. Names of former "Smitty" award winners are prominently displayed on a plaque in the Department.