



# Department of Anthropology

## The College of Arts & Sciences

### The University of Alabama



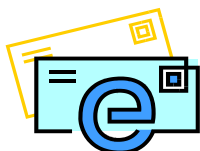
# Newsletter

November, 2006

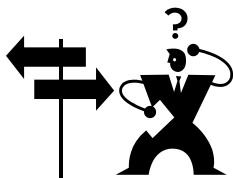
Volume 4, Number 2

Department of Anthropology  
The University of Alabama  
19 ten Hoor Hall  
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0210

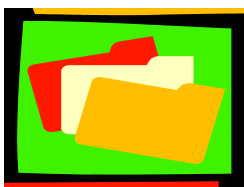
Phone: (205) 348-5947  
Fax: (205) 348-7937



**E-Mail Us**  
[anthro@tenhoor.as.ua.edu](mailto:anthro@tenhoor.as.ua.edu)



**Department Location**  
[www.as.ua.edu/ant/anthro%20location%20map.htm](http://www.as.ua.edu/ant/anthro%20location%20map.htm)



**Newsletter Archive**  
[www.as.ua.edu/ant/newsletter/newsletterarchive.htm](http://www.as.ua.edu/ant/newsletter/newsletterarchive.htm)

## Our Department's First Dissertation Defense!

We are delighted to announce that Amanda Regnier successfully defended her Ph.D. dissertation on October 18, and submitted the work to the Graduate School two weeks later.

Amanda thus has the distinct honor of being the first to graduate in the Department's Ph.D. program, which was begun officially in 2003. Her dissertation topic was "Pot-



**Amanda Regnier poses with her committee on the occasion of her dissertation defense. L-R Dr. Douglas E. Jones, Dr. Jim Knight (chair), Ms. Amanda Regnier, Dr. Ian W. Brown, Dr. Keith P. Jacobi, and Dr. Bill Dressler**

tery Styles and the Social Composition of Late Mississippian Towns in the Alabama River Valley." In this innovative work, Amanda used theory derived from cognitive anthropology together with multivariate statistics to infer the existence of multiethnic towns in the late prehistory of the region.

## We Welcome a New Family into the Fold



**Jason DeCaro**

The Anthropology Department is delighted to welcome a new faculty member and his family to the university community. Dr. Jason DeCaro accepted a tenure-track assistant professor position in biological anthropology beginning this fall. Jason comes to us fresh from his doctoral program at Emory University where he was investigating bioecocultural processes influencing children's health with Dr. Carol Worthman. His dissertation research was conducted in Atlanta and focused on children starting school and how the daily routine contributed to or reduced stress for the children. Jason did his undergraduate anthropology at Binghamton

University where his wife Erin also pursued anthropology. While in Atlanta, Erin got her MPH at Emory and worked as an epidemiologist for the state of Georgia and on numerous public health projects. Erin has accepted a position in public health at UAB (sorry about the commute). Jason and Erin are joined in Tuscaloosa by their two young daughters, Alexa and Becca, who can be seen on [Jason's web page](#).

Jason is also setting up The Developmental Ecology and Human Biology





Lab in the Mary Harmon Bryant building, down the hall from Dr. Jacobi's office and Osteology laboratory. With support from the department and the College of Arts and Sciences, this facility will provide biological wet lab capability for the analysis of immunological, endocrine, and other biological markers. Dr. DeCaro is well grounded in both cultural and biological anthropology and is perfectly suited to carry on the biocultural tradition of the department.

Help us welcome the DeCaros to the department.

### New Graduate Students, Fall 2006

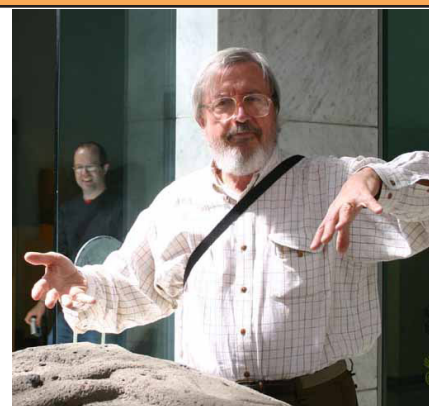
Pictured at left, preparing for a session in Dr. Oths's Methods class, are our new graduate students for fall, 2006. These are, from left to right, Meredith Bliss (physical anth.), Mary Seagrave (medical anth.), Krista Garcia (archaeology), Phillip Thompson (cultural anth.), Brandon Thompson (physical anth.), Jenelle Townsend (medical anth.), and Jeremy Davis (archaeology).



The Cascajal Block

### The Earliest Writing System in the New World Discovered

Several years ago workers extracting gravel from an archaeological site near the Early Formative (1200-900 BC) Olmec center of San Lorenzo in southern Veracruz, Mexico, uncovered a serpentine block with 62 glyphs lightly incised on one face. Mexican archaeologists Maria del Carmen Rodríguez Martínez and Ponciano Ortiz Ceballos were called in to examine the stone. They later presented a paper on what is now known as the Cascajal Block (named after the archaeological site where it was found) at a national meeting in Mexico, claiming that the text and its glyphs were Olmec in origin and represented an unknown writing system. In 2006, they invited Richard A. Diehl (University of Alabama), Michael D. Coe (Yale University), Stephen Houston (Brown University) and Karl Taube (University of California, Riverside) to reexamine the stone and take a new set of photographs. The Cascajal Team reported its results in the September 15, 2006, edition of *Science*. According to this study, the Block contains the oldest known writing in the Americas, in an un-deciphered script which is not related to any known later writing systems, such as Maya, Aztec, Isthmian, or Zapotec. Publication of the article created an explosion of interest worldwide, as evidenced by more than 93,000 references on Google and the appearance of a seriously flawed entry on Wikipedia less than 24 hours after the article appeared. While many scholars and lay people are making serious attempts at decipherment, others claim it is Chinese, Runic, a star chart, the map of an Olmec garden, or an ancient insect checklist for Olmec entomologists! Things have reached the point where Diehl now needs two cups of coffee rather than just one before he dares open e-mail in the morning.



Dick Diehl

Brad Lieb receiving a 2006 Chickasaw Nation Heritage Preservation Award from Governor Bill Anoatubby and Lt. Governor Jefferson Keel



### Brad Lieb Wins Chickasaw Heritage Award

The 2006 Chickasaw Nation Arts and Culture Awards ceremony was held on the evening of October 5 in the Fletcher Auditorium at Tishomingo, Oklahoma, the historic capital of the Chickasaw Nation. Brad R. Lieb, an archaeologist earning his Ph.D. in our Department, was awarded a Chickasaw Nation Heritage Preservation Award for his U.A. Master of Arts thesis completed in 2005. The award included a commemorative plaque and cash prize. Brad's research has focused on the archaeology and ethnohistory of the rapid cultural adaptations that took place in American Indian societies from 1540 to 1840 in Mississippi and the greater Southeast.





Kathy Oths

### Kathy Oths Delivers Kassen Lecture at Case

In October, another significant honor accrued to UA medical anthropologist Kathy Oths, as she delivered the prestigious Kassen Lecture in the Department of Anthropology at Case Western Reserve University, her alma mater. Her topic was "Sociocultural Dimensions of Birth Outcomes: An Anthropological Approach to the Persistent Ethnic Gap." This lectureship follows closely upon two UA honors Kathy received last year, the Morris Mayer Award and the College of Arts and Sciences' Outstanding Commitment to Teaching Award.



### Claire Nanfro wins DeJarnette Scholarship

We are delighted to announce that the David and Elizabeth DeJarnette Scholarship for 2006-07 was awarded to Claire Nanfro, a Ph.D. student in the Department

whose dissertation research concerns the origins of social inequality at the household level at the Moundville site.

### John Blitz Leads Museum Expedition to Moundville

An important aspect of our Department's mission is public outreach. This summer, UA archaeologist John Blitz served as Scientific Director for the annual Alabama Museum of Natural History's Expedition program. Participants are primarily high school students drawn from across the state, who experience camp life and scientific research in a field setting. This year, the Expedition came to Moundville, where Prof. Blitz led the team in excavating village debris

At right, undergrad major Anna Rich instructs Expedition participants



Jim Bindon with his granddaughter Mia

### Jim Bindon named McNair Fellow

UA biological anthropologist Jim Bindon was named a McNair Scholars Program Fellow for 2006. He is currently teaching the fall seminar for the program that provides a research internship and specializes in preparing underrepresented students for graduate school. In other news, Jim presented two papers in Croatia this summer with the support of the Wenner-Gren Foundation. In Zagreb, he presented a paper on biocultural linkages to the School of Biological Research, and in Hvar, he presented a paper on cross-cultural perspectives on obesity. These papers are currently under review for publication in Collegium Antropologicum.

### Where Are They Now?



Periodically the Newsletter will feature short profiles on former students, bringing you up to date on their present circumstances.

### Agneta Johannsen



### Renee Rivas wins Cummings Prize

Renee Rivas, a junior double major in anthro and biology from Plano, Texas, has received the prestigious Benjamin Cummings Biology Prize for 2006. The Cummings Prize is a \$1,000 grant awarded to only four students nationally each year. Rivas was selected from more than 100 applicants by the international textbook publisher. A Goldwater Scholar, Rivas is the second UA student to receive this award, making UA the only college or university in the country to have two Benjamin Cummings Prize recipients during the past five years.

Undergrad major Renee Rivas



Having graduated from the University of Alabama with a Master's in Anthropology I knew I wanted to apply my anthropology training to life contexts, preferably to those that contained the thorny issues of justice and peace. The step to working for NGOs in the field of what is now called peace building was therefore not difficult. I spent 4 years in London working in the Europe Department of Quaker Peace and Service, and focused on minority and refugee issues and ethnic conflict right at the time when the iron curtain had finally come down. After a few stints with other NGOs I joined the United Nations in 1995 to work on a special project of "Rebuilding War-torn Societies". This work took me to many war-ravaged countries, including Somalia,

Mozambique and Eritrea. Memories of the teachings of my dear professors at UofA surfaced almost daily on these trips, as these societies were under enormous pressure of cultural change, brought on by the political change that had come in the aftermath of the war. At the time I helped to enumerate a set of lessons for international assistance actors, which concerned the rebuilding of trust and confidence, restoring dignity and a sense of self-worth among people.

While having kept my focus for many years on groups of people, societies and systems I was then curious to complement that focus with more of an understanding of how individual people tick. After all individuals are the building blocks

of societies. I thus embarked on a second master's in psychological counselling, which I completed in 2003. Having become a mother as well in the meantime I decided to rebalance my life thereafter. I started my small private practice in individual and couples counselling in 2003, while continuing at 50% at the UN. In 2005 I quit the UN job and, together with a business partner, began doing international consultancies in the field of peacebuilding. My latest assignment was writing chapters for and co-editing a Handbook for Transition Assistance for the Japanese government. We also developed a set of training materials, which we piloted in Japan just about two weeks ago.

It is with fondness and admiration that I think back to my times at the University of Alabama. It is there that I learned a great deal about the foundations of life, as anthropology provides such a unique perspective on human beings, their cultures and their interactions. Anthropology has been a key resource in my professional career, and I am deeply grateful to those who taught me the elements of that resource.

### The Richard A. Krause Award for Excellence in Graduate Studies



The Anthropology Department has established a new student award in honor of the distinguished career of Emeritus Professor Richard A. Krause over 31 years of teaching, research, and administration. We are now making solicitations for the Krause Fund, to

be administered by the College in support of a stipend to accompany the award. Please consider contributing to the Krause Fund in recognition of Dick's abundant contributions.

### Giving Opportunities

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

**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 most recent major purchase from this fund was a work truck that has proven invaluable to faculty and graduate student research. 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 Moundville or Moundville-related topics. 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 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.

**The Bob Work Award** is a graduate student paper competition with a monetary prize of \$100. Each January, archaeology graduate students submit papers for review by a faculty committee. The winner receives recognition during Honors Week.

Checks directed to any of these initiatives should be made out to the UA College of Arts and Sciences and mailed to the Department at Box 870210, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487. If you would like to discuss a contribution, please contact Jim Knight, Director of Departmental Development.

### Scenes from the UA conference, *The Search for Mabila*, organized by Jim Knight and Douglas Jones, September 28-30, 2006

