

# Four Corners

## The McMaster Anthropology Society Newsletter

Issue 1

October 31, 2011

### McMaster Anthropology Society

#### Upcoming Events

##### October:

MSSS Halloween at London Taphouse – Come out Monday, October 31<sup>st</sup>, starting at 9:00 pm for a great evening hosted by the McMaster Social Science Society. Bring your costumes; you might even get a prize for best costume!

##### November:

Movie Night – Hang out with friends and take in an awesome movie!

##### December:

Holiday Social – stay tuned for further details.

#### PRESENTING THE 2011/2012 EXEC

President	Elizabeth Ouellete
Vice-President	Jodi Smillie
Treasurer	Julilla Paul
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2 <sup>nd</sup> Year Representative	Marissa Ledger
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1 <sup>st</sup> Year Representative	Helena Ramsaroop
1 <sup>st</sup> Year Representative	Emily Schutz
1 <sup>st</sup> Year Representative	Anastasia Toma

To find out more please join our mailing list at [mas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:mas@mcmaster.ca) or look us up at our website [macanthro.wordpress.com](http://macanthro.wordpress.com), Facebook group, or our poster board in the basement of CNH.

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### Field Shots

#### Archaeology Field Work, in Italy

Photo Credit: Tracy Prowse

1. Start of the dig.
2. Students drawing a burial.
3. Students Marissa and Jodi excavating a burial.



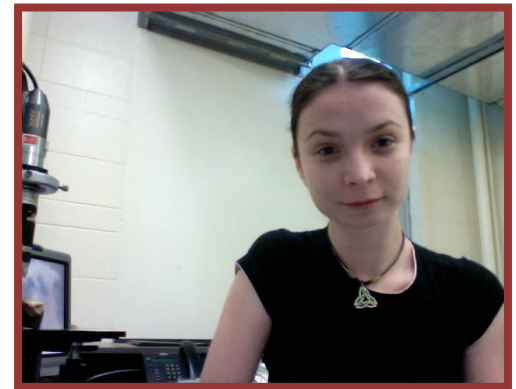
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## USRA Recipients: Adventures in Personal Research

The Undergraduate Student Research Awards (USRA) provided by the Social Science Faculty through the Experiential Education office and is awarded annually to undergraduates who seek to pursue their own research both within and outside of Canada. To receive the USRA, undergraduates have to go through a process of writing a proposal, and defining how their research project is unique, will provide a learning experience, and show that the knowledge they obtain will provide some academic benefit. This past year there were three undergraduates who were awarded the USRA; Ana-Maria Dragomir, her project was titled “Analysis of Smith's Knoll Human Skeletal Remains”, Cadell Last, “Finding a Home: Chimpanzee Nest Construction in Southwest Cameroon”, and Sarah Grant “Through a Glass Darkly: Viewing Mayan Social Differentiation via Obsidian Studies at Minanha, Belize”. All three recipients have provided their own thoughts on the process, and how undergraduates can get involved in this excellent opportunity.

### Ana-Maria Dragomir

Through the USRA I took an active role in bioarchaeological research undertaken at McMaster University, and it has been a unique opportunity to extend my skills and knowledge outside the classroom environment. During my time at McMaster I took all the courses on human osteology offered by the Department of Anthropology. By chance, the bioarchaeological projects I was involved in consisted of analyzing and interpreting fragmented and commingled human remains. Trying to piece together fragments of human bone and understanding their story has always been both challenging and rewarding at the same time. The USRA has been the ideal opportunity to further engage



myself in this type of work through receiving a research assistantship from Dr. Megan Brickley. Under Dr. Brickley's supervision I analyzed and recorded a large collection of fragmented and disarticulated skeletal remains representing soldiers who died on the Stoney Creek battlefield in the War of 1812. The results of my work will provide the basis for further research and various investigative analyses meant to answer questions regarding the status of the soldiers' health, manner of death, and their geographical origin.

The USRA has been a unique experience from the moment I wrote my proposal. I gained insight into the type of work undertaken at graduate level and was able to apply the skills and knowledge gained through academic training. I think that the USRA takes undergraduate experience to a different and exciting level. Regardless of what you chose to do in your research you can explore ideas and activities, meet and work with people who share your interests, and gain the satisfaction that your contribution can truly help to make a difference.

### Cadell Last

Over the past four months I have been working on my research for the Undergraduate Student Research Award (USRA). The goal of the research project was to learn more about chimpanzee behaviour and the intricate and complex social dynamics between human and non-human primates within the Lebialem-Mone Forest Landscape (LMFL) of Cameroon. Throughout the research period there were several people involved that proved integral to the completion of the project. My supervisor Dr. Tracy Prowse was involved throughout the first two months of my background research and



preparation for the field survey trip to Cameroon, to complete a physically challenging primate field survey. Without her guidance and support this would not have been possible. I also received support from Dr. Joyce Parga, my future MA supervisor at the University of Toronto, who taught me a lot about how to properly conduct a primate field survey. She helped me to generate ideas on how to structure the research paper that I produced from the data collected. There was also a very talented and dedicated research team at ERuDeF (The Environment and Rural Development Foundation) that I was working with in Cameroon that gave me a lot of assistance in coordinating the field survey.

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During the field survey we set up base camp in the middle of the Lebialem-Mone Forest Landscape and conducted arduous daylong field surveys every day. Throughout the field surveys we would try and track chimpanzee groups and locate nest sites, while always recording pertinent information related to the study such as tool use, food consumed, shell casings, and snare traps. Throughout the survey I experienced some of the most challenging moments in my life. The weather turned horrendous half way through the survey, and at one point we experienced torrential downpours for 72 hours straight. On one evening I remember sitting in my tent listening to the rain and falling asleep, then waking up 30 minutes later in a tent soaked with up to a foot of water breaking in. Everything was ruined but there was no escape from the rain, since it ended up raining for another two days. I ended up spending the night outside shivering, without getting any sleep. Then, in trying to get out of the rainforest, we discovered that the local villagers had closed down the roads because the rain made the mud roads impossible to drive through. At the end of the day it was definitely worth it because throughout the survey I collected more data than I expected and luckily, I was able to defend my initial hypothesis.

The research project meant a great deal to me academically, personally and professionally. This project allowed me to gain invaluable experience that I would not have been able to do in any other way. It has allowed me to develop my skills as a social science researcher, academic major research paper writer, and conservationist. Through this process I have developed important connections with professionals around the world that I respect and have learnt a great deal from, and it has also given me the opportunity to see the world and experience other cultures that I otherwise would never get a chance to have experienced. In Cameroon I discovered that I truly do have a deep passion for trying to solve social problems; I believe a lot of individuals during their undergraduate career develop opinions and beliefs about social problems but they rarely are committed enough to those beliefs to actually do something about them. This experience taught me that I could in fact dedicate my life to a social cause that I believe in. As an organization, ERuDeF is dedicated to the conservation of the two rarest great apes on the planet, and my research, if published, could give this cause an international voice, and I hope I will have the opportunity to continue this research in the future. I would like to thank everyone involved in making the Undergraduate Student Research Award to students like me. This really was an amazing experience that has opened up opportunities to me that I would never have had otherwise.

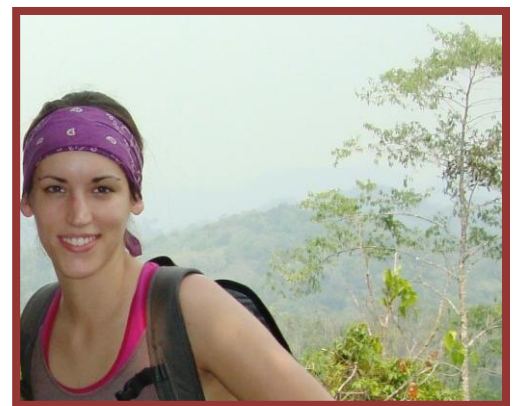
### **Sarah Grant**

For 15 weeks during the summer of 2011, I undertook an independent research project funded by McMaster University's Experiential Education (EE) Office, and the Undergraduate Student Research Award (USRA). This project, though independently motivated and undertaken, has been supervised and guided by Dr. Tristan Carter as well as collaboration with several other Maya archaeologists and specialists.

The major focus and goal of this project has been to analyze the obsidian from Minanha, an ancient elite Maya center, in the Belizean lowlands. This was undertaken in order to gain insight into the social differentiation practices within the site and the Maya culture in-general, as well as trade practices and change over time.

My position as a USRA researcher has allowed me to expand my experiences in ways that will be extremely beneficial to my continuing education and future career. I have gained valuable new colleagues and connections that can provide references and opportunities. This project has taught me skills that will be valuable when in grad school such as the process of research, sampling, and report writing. Having this project on my CV as well as resulting publications and conference papers will help gain projects and connections in the future, and it will make me stand out when applying for graduate studies.

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## Faculty Interview: Dr. Andy Roddick

### **What drew you to the field of archaeology as a student?**

I was interested in history pretty early on, so I wasn't one of those archaeologists who grew up knowing they wanted to be an archaeologist. I entered my undergraduate degree as a history major, but it was my first anthropology class where I realized you could do fieldwork, a little more hands on than just reading books. Cultural anthropology initially drew me in while at University of British Columbia, and then I had a T.A. who did field work in Belize, so I took that opportunity and sort of jumped on board and did some fieldwork with him and that was it!

### **While you have performed ceramic analysis as your primary method in your research at the Late Formative Period sites of Tiwanaku in Bolivia and Taraco Peninsula on Lake Titicaca, Peru, you have stated to have also used analytical techniques in geochemistry and mineralogy. How has a multi disciplined approach helped you in your work?**

I'm a 'jack of all trades'. Actually one of the great ironies of what I do is that both my parents were geologists, and I swore I'd never become a geologist, and it's come full circle in a lot of ways, because I'm very much interdisciplinary in what I do. I spend time talking to geologists and get them to take a second look at some of the things I'm doing with some of the crossovers in geochemistry and mineralogy. Also I've been involved in the other directions too, away from science, in the more humanistic side of things, such as sociology and philosophy. So I consider myself to be very interdisciplinary, and I will definitely continue to do so, since I think archaeologists have to be. I've even had students here at McMaster ask me if I would teach them petrography, [a branch of science concerned with the study of properties and composition of rocks] my response usually is, I can guide you in petrography in ceramics, but you need to take a geology class, since students need to also make that bridge in their own minds between the disciplines.



### **Often undergraduates think of themselves as being part of a sub-discipline within anthropology, would you suggest a more interdisciplinary approach to anthropology, rather than a definite separation between sub disciplines?**

Yes, I absolutely believe that! I think we benefit from taking each other's classes, and I even remember a colleague of mine mentioning while I was applying for grad school that every archaeologist should do ethnography, and the same thing with ethnographers, they need to also know a bit about archaeology. Getting the sense of history and long-term processes that archaeologists focus on is equally important for us to think about as the short-term ethnographic studies, and understanding the living, breathing human beings that are behind our material patterns. There's been a lot of debate over the last 20 years on whether the four fields of anthropology are one, or if they're just an accident of history, or if there's more to it, and I firmly fall on the side that there's more to it.

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**If anthropology students were interested in ceramic analysis, or the study of South American cultures, what courses would you suggest they take, and what skills would you suggest they need to succeed?**

Well, for the ceramic analysis, obviously the Ceramic Analysis course, 3CA3, that I'm doing next semester, and Professor Carter teaches Archaeological Interpretations, 3K03, which is a good precursor, where you're getting a basic introduction to ceramics, and from there it depends on personal interest. Certainly in terms of doing more fine-grain, detailed work, as well as material science, the Geology Department would be a good place to pick up that knowledge. I'm still getting my sense from what's over there, but this campus has a lot to offer in terms of fine detail analysis possibilities, including the use of the reactor as well. In Andean work, I'll be offering a course, hopefully next year, which will build on some of the current courses offered by Dr. Finsten, but be more specific to the Andean region. Other classes we'll build on interest, but more thematic, such as 'state level society'.

**Are there any interesting projects that you will be working on in the near future, and will there be any opportunities for undergraduates to get involved in this research?**

Absolutely! There are a couple of projects going on, one of them building on my work in Bolivia, where there's a larger regional project looking at the pottery within the region. Everything from database development, which students could get involved in very soon, and potentially, not this summer, but next summer there will be the opportunity for students to come down with me to South America. Also I will be involved in a larger, longer project with ceramics from Ontario, which I don't have a lot of background in at this point, but I'm learning quickly from the huge collections that are available even here at McMaster. Dr. Cannon has been heavily involved in the set up at McMaster Innovation Park, and down the road there will be a lot of ceramic analysis associated with that as well. I'd have to say that the regional project that I'm

doing right now in Bolivia is amazing, since the pottery has been studied for 30 or 40 years, but not systematically, so there's huge amounts of material, which has not been studied on a larger scale, and there's all sorts of interesting questions we can start asking. The huge urban centre of Teotihuacan in the highlands of Bolivia, which has some of the most impressive ceramics, but has very little systematic studies conducted, so this is a project that's sort of in the wings. All the facilities here at McMaster provide a great opportunity to do a lot of this research, and building on what Dr. Michelaki was doing before me, the opportunity for me to be involved in the set up of a world class ceramic analysis centre here is something to look forward to.

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## 3CC6 Students Gain Hands-on Experience

Celeste Remillard



Some people believe that getting to go on an archaeological dig means that you may find a long lost ancient civilization, there will be a shoot-out while trying to rescue the artifacts to return them (provenience NOT recorded) to their rightful owner and at least one person will have an Indiana Jones whip... Well this year during McMaster's Anthropology 3CC6 class, students got to do a little bit more than practice their Indiana Jones whipping style! Not only did students get to dig, they were able to participate in pottery making, flint knapping, and zooarchaeology. While everyone may not necessarily enjoy pottery making,

Instructor Burchell used the days when the rain prevailed to extend this year's students learning beyond the trowel.

The ability to create the pottery through hands on learning increased the student's perception and appreciation of how much work and effort was put into the formation of the pottery that may be found at the Nursery Site where the students would be excavating. Giving students a hands on approach for what it might look like out in the field, Burchell also provided the students with flint knapping tools to recreate scrapers, or even projectile points, and in turn the students got a first-hand appreciation for the time and commitment it would take to create one small projectile point. After several hours and only a few students coming close to making a large not-so-bifacial scraper, it was unanimously decided that flint knapping is hard, painful, requires a great deal of experience and best when done in groups!



Another learning experience offered to this year's field school students was zooarchaeology. The students learned how to identify bone from glacial till, disarticulate a fish, as well as different ways to visually identify an ill animal from its insides (thanks Christine!). After the course was complete students were offered the opportunity to categorize the artifacts and faunal remains that had been collected from the site.

Instructor Burchell's hands on techniques offered the students many different facets to learn from. There was never a dull moment and plenty of hands on work. The discoveries at the site this year included a historic trade bead, a projectile point (pictured below), pipe stems, faunal remains, an earring (to be dated) and hundreds of chert flakes. Using a different technique to measure soil/artifact density, student discoveries also helped develop a possible new outlook on water locations throughout the site, as well as potential locations for future excavations.



McMaster's 3CC6 Field School is an amazing opportunity to get 6 course credits in a spring day class (May to June), and learn about the earliest people who lived in the Hamilton area. Thank you to Dr. Cannon for the use of the Total Station, Natalie Brewster and Brandi MacDonald, who gave us an awesome tour. I'd also like to thank the Anthropology Department for making this year's Field School an incredible journey into Hamilton's Archaeological record, and mostly to Meghan: Who encouraged the students to create their own interpretations based on the information in front of us and from those who had passed through before.

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## Sean Doyle

The McMaster archaeological field school ANTH 3CC6 was a very educational and rewarding experience. Superbly taught by Meghan Burchell, and assisted by Natalie Brewster, the course opened up a number of opportunities for me. Previously I had been ignorant of the potential and excitement of archaeology in Ontario. For six weeks this past spring I explored field archaeology in exciting ways in and outside of the classroom. The course took place at the Nursery Site located on the north shore of Cootes Paradise in the Royal Botanical Gardens. The Nursery Site was occupied for over 3000 years, and consists of materials dating from the Archaic period to modern times. The course forever changed the way I view the profession in this province, and probably even the future direction of my career.

During the first two weeks of the field school the weather was dreadful, so we worked inside the archaeology lab in McMaster most days. Luckily we had the opportunity to practice some experimental archeology, such as ceramic making, which we tried to fashion after that of the Princess Point tradition that we were studying. Some of us ground up shells to add as temper. Other students made different designs with various instruments such as cord-wrapped sticks and the edges of shells. Another activity we attempted was flint knapping in the outdoor lab for experimental archaeology. We used a hard hammerstone to break off pieces of chert, which we then tried to make tools out of by pressure flaking the edges to shape and sharpen them. It was extremely difficult, and helped us to appreciate how difficult life may have been in past times. One of our field trips took us to the McMaster nuclear reactor, which I'll admit I didn't even know existed. It turns out there are archaeologists, such as Brandi Lee MacDonald, working in there performing Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis (INAA). This technique helps determine the composition of archaeological materials, such as ceramics, metals and stone tools. We had the opportunity to visit the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford, a museum run by the Six Nations. We also had the opportunity to hike to other villages, camps, and smaller sites in Cootes Paradise contemporary to our site.

When we finally got out to the field everything was soaked from record-breaking spring rainfall. As it turns out, it is really difficult to pick artifacts out of thick mud while pushing it through a 2mm screen, so we worked slowly and carefully. Within the first week we were able to apply the knowledge we had learned during the previous two weeks to our fieldwork. We soon became quite adept at triangulating 1 x 1 m excavation units, mapping, setting up and using the total station, using a bucket-auger to quickly test the sub-soil for the presence of micro-artifacts, digging test pits and determining where to set up excavation units. Having acquired these abilities, all the field school students are now qualified to work cultural resource management (CRM) archaeology as field technicians. CRM is contract archaeology done before any developments or construction projects, large and small-scale, to get all the archaeological material out before it is lost forever under a concrete jungle.

I'm sure you're wondering whether or not we found any cool artifacts. Among the hundreds of artifacts we found, most of them small and fragmented remains of lithics, ceramics and bone. A few complete stone tools were found, including a scraper and projectile points, as well as some more recent items like a few .22 caliber shell casings, glass trade beads and a military button. The most interesting piece to me was an earring, which I personally excavated with my trowel. After a quick X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF) test in the lab a couple days later, we were able to tell it consisted mostly of silver, with trace amounts of lead. This preliminary analysis helped us narrow down the composition of the earring, which can be further refined using INAA to see if it dates to pre-European contact times. To sum up, it was an amazing experience that I fully recommend to anyone interested. It's good for six credits, is a great way to spend half a summer and might get you hired in the profession!