

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE FUTURE

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I am posting this on the Day of Archaeology website, as well as the MSU Campus Archaeology website (<http://campusarch.msu.edu>).

I was not going to personally post today for Day of Archaeology (#dayofarch) since our field season ended a few weeks ago, and I am getting ready for surgery (hip replacement). All of our student workers are off doing other things, so our lab is pretty quiet right now. Field work is also on hold since construction projects are in their final phases, in an attempt to be completed before school begins. However, when I realized that this was the last Day of Archaeology, I felt compelled to write something since I am also coming to the end of a project.

I created and direct the Michigan State University Campus Archaeology Program (MSU CAP), and as of May 2018, I will be retiring from the University (although not from archaeology). The job of directing and administering MSU CAP will go to Dr. Stacey Camp, who has just arrived in East Lansing so that we can overlap for a year. MSU CAP is in very capable hands, and I am confident that the program will not only survive, but thrive. We will do a blog post welcoming and more completely introducing Stacey later in August.

Historic archaeology in general, and campus archaeology in particular, were never my primary research interests. But career paths are rarely straight, and I have found that one does best taking advantage of opportunities along the way. Given this, I have conducted excavations of several large and small historic

cemeteries across the U.S., and I created this campus program, which is primarily (although not exclusively) focused on historic sites.

I thought that a campus-focused program would be good for a number of reasons (beyond being able to sleep in my own bed each night), but found that there were even more reasons than I had anticipated. Here are a few of them:

1. Doing archaeology on campus raises awareness of archaeology and the fact that sites are everywhere, and that campus histories do not tell the complete story. We see ourselves as educating a large community (students, faculty staff, alumni, the general public) on the importance and value of archaeology.
2. Students and staff are more likely to get involved and excited when the sites being excavated are something they can directly relate to, and developing an appreciation for and learning more about the history of the campus is good for everyone.
3. Campus Archaeology has changed attitudes and approaches of the upper administration of the campus, as well as the workers. Physical plant employees have told us that working with CAP has definitely made their jobs more interesting.
4. Running a field school on campus (which we generally do every other year) allows students who cannot go on an expedition elsewhere the chance to learn archaeological methods and techniques. Some students cannot afford to go elsewhere, others have family commitments that constrain their opportunities.
5. In addition to training students in archaeological methods like every archaeological field school does, we also train students in archival research and to work with construction crews, staff, administration, etc. This additional training that our undergrad interns and graduate student fellows receive helps them get into graduate school and get better jobs. They have a kind of training that few others receive; they all also get extensive training in public outreach and engagement.
6. Social media has allowed a very small program to have a very large reach – we regularly engage with archaeologists and the public around the world. Students are trained in conducting such engagement, including writing regular blog posts.
7. Studying the history of higher education – particularly the land grant schools – through archaeology is fascinating, reflects larger changes in the overall culture, and is an area that has not been widely examined archaeologically. Each graduate fellow focuses their individual project on a different aspect of this history.

I feel privileged to have been able to create and direct this program, and I have to thank Michigan State University for its generous and enthusiastic support. Will I miss doing this? Of course, but it is also time to move on the next phase. I love Day of Archaeology because – on a single day – we can see what kinds of things archaeologists are doing all over the world. We are learning a lot about our past, with some clear possibilities for future directions if we listen.