



PROFILES IN PRACTICE

On the recommendation of the Practicing Advisory Work Group, AN has launched a series of Practitioner Profiles to illustrate the work currently done by practicing anthropologists. It is very difficult to make sweeping generalizations about the practice of anthropology. While there are still fuzzy boundaries defining the identity of a practitioner or professional anthropologist, it is clear that there is a significant trend of more anthropologists working outside of academia. PAWG concludes that over half of all PhD anthropologists and virtually all anthropologists holding a master's degree work outside of full time academic positions, in a range of jobs, from methodological and statistical development, to analysis,

to management for the federal government, work as contractors, as independent consultants, for non-profits and for corporations large and small. Each month, this column will feature jobs held by practicing anthropologists.

Work in Repatriation

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PROFILES IN PRACTICE CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Career Path to Practice:

"When I was young, I was interested in history and science—and the overlap was archaeology. Even in the 7th grade, I knew I wanted to be an archaeologist and it was at this age that I went on my first dig with members of the South Texas Archaeological Association." Dorothy remembers working on the dig and picking through charcoal for a C-14 sample. "I felt so important to be allowed to do that!"

Did you have a family background in history or science, or was there some reason why you were drawn to it?

"My dad had a doctorate in education and was interested in all kinds of science. At one point, he gave me his geology textbook from college and I remember memorizing the different geologic periods. Mom has her master's degree in deaf education. I think that because they both had advanced degrees, I thought that it was completely normal to decide to get a doctorate in something."

Of all the fields and areas of archaeology, how did you end up in repatriation?

"Even as an undergraduate [at Rice], a lot of debates were being played out in school and one of my professors gave me some articles on repatriation. Being both [Choctaw] and an archaeologist, I felt naturally drawn [pushed is a better word!] into repatriation as a field of archaeology."

Just as Dorothy was starting her graduate work at the University of Texas at Austin in 1990, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was signed into law. A year earlier, the Museum of the American Indian Act, which guides repatriation efforts at the Smithsonian, was enacted.

Was there a particular professor, a class or personal experience that was pivotal in your developing a commitment to archaeology, particularly something that helped you bridge your Native American background and experience with that of becoming an archaeologist?

"What actually happened was that one of my professors handed me some articles from *Conflict in the Archaeology of Living Traditions*, a publication of the World Archaeological Congress, and this allowed me to see how my ethnic background intersected with my chosen course of study. It wasn't so much that I felt drawn to repatriation, as it was that I couldn't stand by and watch people on both sides misunderstand each other's intents and actions."

"Larry Zimmerman's writings were particularly important to me," she said, for it seemed to her, "his way of practicing anthropology allowed for multiple voices and perspectives rather than heavy-handed scientific silencing."

What was the path from graduate school to a practicing career?

"I looked into teaching after graduate school. I liked it, especially when I could see students really start to learn." But, wanting to affect a broader public, her first job was to work as the education coordinator for the McGovern Hall of the Americas at the Houston Museum of Natural Science. There she designed teacher workshops, lectures, curricula and special events to educate the public about archaeology and Native peo-

ples. She particularly enjoyed inviting Native artists to make presentations in the galleries alongside objects created by their ancestors.

Dorothy next moved to the National Museum of Natural History after seeing a job announcement for the repatriation job with the Smithsonian in Washington DC, which seemed to fit. "It is nice to be doing active anthropology, where you can see the results," she says of her five years at NMNH.

What do you do as a case officer in repatriation?

"As a case officer, I respond to repatriation claims by federally recognized tribes. A request comes in for human remains, sacred or funerary object. My job is to evaluate the claim and recommend what the Smithsonian should do. The ultimate decision lies with the secretary of the Smithsonian."

A different part of the repatriation office documents human remains and objects prior to repatriation. Both sides of the office undertake a great deal of research, so they can be certain they are dealing with the correct object, "so we know what human remains are present. Research also helps us understand the history of the collections and give accurate information to tribes as well."

"The repatriation office has two parts to our work. One part conducts research and develops recommendations for addressing repatriation requests.

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Dorothy Lippert

Title: Case Officer, Repatriation Office, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.

Salary Range: Civil Service Ranking of GS-11 (\$54,272–\$70,558, Washington DC area)

Education: BA in anthropology, Rice University; PhD in anthropology, University of Texas at Austin.

Dorothy Lippert poses with an effigy replica (hence the lack of gloves) in the Smithsonian's archives.



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This can involve archival work, collections documentation, and research into the archaeology and history of a specific region. The other part of our work consists of documenting the human remains present in the collections. The osteology lab works according to a standard protocol to conduct non-invasive documentation of the human remains. This can include taking photographs and x-rays."

The job focuses on a specific activity and process, so it's "not like an academic job where you have flexibility to design your own research projects. Here, [the research projects] are already set." In addition, there are budget constraints on the activities that can be done by Smithsonian employees.

Challenges:

"It's very difficult working in this type of situation ... it's very ... *confrontational*, because we're working with remains that are [objectified as Indians]; sometimes we work with named individuals whose remains were recently collected. I once came across the catalog record for a Choctaw female between 30 to 40 years old. It was shocking to me because I felt like I was seeing myself as a specimen in the museum's collections. It affected my work for a few days because I didn't want to return to the building."

"I know I'm a scientist and have the ability to do the science behind it—I know bioarchaeology. But seeing the numbers of human remains in the collections sometimes makes me feel I'm not as human as other people ... the way they were treated. It's very difficult."

However, there is a good support network for Native American archaeologists, which provides "support for what we face, whether repatriation or not. It's called the Chicken list" and "it's informal and it's sort of by invitation only."

I gathered from talking with Dorothy that the Chicken list works like the "moccasin telegraph"—as soon as a Native American student is heard about, they're immediately scooped into the network. "It started after a 2001 conference at Dartmouth organized by Deb Nichols and Joe Watkins after Native American archaeologists present all realized how important it was to support each other both personally and professionally." The group has since expanded to about 50 members and is evidently very effective in terms of support.

Proudest Accomplishment:

What made her most "happy" is "to be asked to be profiled in David Hurst Thomas's revised archaeology textbook," *Archaeology*, in its fourth edition last year co-authored with Robert Kelly. "That was my textbook that I had as an undergraduate."

Advice for graduate students:

Know where your interests are and pursue them. Also, look into alternative career paths.

"I expected to go into a university, but found that museum work was equally rewarding. 'Education coordinator' doesn't sound like a typical archaeologist's job, but it was satisfying both intellectually and ethically."

Has NAGPRA and Repatriation been beneficial to anthropology or has it hurt anthropology from your perspective?

"Definitely it's been beneficial for anthropology—it has drawn a lot of Native American people to work with anthropologists—a big point of intersection for Natives and anthropology. And as far as the *perception of anthropology* by Native peoples—well, it puts history right in front of people. It forces tribes to deal with the fact that anthropologists and collectors removed burials. It's good because it's meant that tribes are allowed to exercise their rights to religious freedom; but at the same time it's almost 'painful' for a tribe to have to review what all happened and how their ancestors were treated."

Anthropology unfortunately carries the baggage of objectifying the people that it has studied in the past—it's inherent in its method—Native Americans and the colonial enterprise were informed through Western natural sciences which treated the world as an object of study.

Do you see "holes" in NAGPRA which limit its repatriation to federally recognized tribes?

Does it leave out indigenous peoples or natives who are not recognized by the US government?

"That's a difficulty, because there are tribes that should be allowed to repatriate. But there are other groups that are not tribes that shouldn't have rights and it'd be an infringement on the other recognized tribes if they were able to reclaim remains and objects."

"In Virginia, state policies kept tribes from maintaining cultural affiliations and communities." They are currently seeking federal recognition, but federal recognition takes a minimum of several years. "It's very hard speaking to people who want to repatriate and it's clear that they are not doing it for economic or political reasons. They really are doing it for personal reasons—they want to bury their dead. It's very hard."

Are federal jobs for anthropologists working in repatriation increasing or decreasing?

"As far as the job market goes—it's probably level." Most of the programs hiring anthropologists, such as the National Park Service and other federally-funded agencies with collections hired their staffs in the 1990s and are not hiring presently. Dorothy pointed out the problems with limited funding through the NAGPRA national grants program administered by the NPS—often institutions cannot support someone through grant-money to work solely on repatriation. ☐