MSU Undergraduate Anthropology Club Meeting

Anthropology Graduate Student Panel

October 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2012

Reminders:

1. Next meeting:
   a. November 6\textsuperscript{th}, 2012
      i. We will be having Dr. Todd Fenton give us a tour of the MSU Forensic Anthropology Lab and demonstrate MSU Anthropology’s role in the field of Forensic Anthropology

2. MSU Anthropology Department Brown Bags
   a. Every Friday, 12:00pm, C103 McDonel Hall
      i. Bring a lunch and listen to students and professors informally share their research and anthropological experiences

3. Michigan Archaeological Society Meetings
   a. Typically the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Wednesday of the month
      i. 455 Baker Hall, 6:30pm’
      ii. November 14\textsuperscript{th}, 2012 is the next meeting!
         iii. “Data Recovery Investigations at Jácana, South-Central Puerto Rico”
            1. Chris Espenshade of CCRG will discuss the 2008 excavations at PO29/Jácana, which revealed an interesting site that was an integral part of a ceremonial landscape in south-central Puerto Rico in pre-Columbian times. During the first period of significance (AD 650-900), the site contained a hamlet, planting mounds, and a small batey (ballcourt or dance ground). In the second component (A.D. 1300-1500) the site was occupied only by a few caretakers (probably shamans), but featured one of the largest bateys known for Puerto Rico. The 40x50-meter batey featured a gallery of rock art, and attracted sojourners from throughout the island and possibly from Hispaniola.

MEETING:

Our Panelists:

1. Blair Starnes
   a. Doctoral Student, African American Studies, Cultural Economy
      b. starnesb@msu.edu

2. Jessica Yann
   a. Doctoral student, Archaeology
      b. yannjess@msu.edu

3. Amy Michael
   a. Michae76@msu.edu
      b. Doctoral student, Skeletal Biology, Bioarchaeology

4. Ashley Kendell
   a. kendella@msu.edu
      b. Doctoral student, Forensic Anthropology, Trauma Analysis

5. Taz Karim
   a. karimtaz@msu.edu
      b. Doctoral student, Medical (pharmaceutical) Anthropology, Cultural Anthropology
Challenges to getting into graduate school

1. Time frame and getting things turned in on time!!!
2. Knowing where you want to work is imperative
   a. “Graduate school will not make snow better.”
      i. Blair Starnes
3. Need to be sure that you are completely solidified in your choice or else you will not “make it”.
4. Anthropology degrees take a LOT of time and effort. Don’t take it lightly.
5. DO YOUR RESEARCH!
   a. Pick programs you are the best fit for.
6. Funding
   a. No guarantees, so look as good as possible “on paper”.
   b. Work your butt off!
7. “Cannot be on the fence.”
8. Get in contact with the professors you want to work with!
   a. Even emails are great!
9. Don’t be afraid to take a year off
   a. Grad school will still be there. Don’t be afraid to incorporate other interests.
10. The GOAL is NOT graduate school.
    a. It is a STEP towards your end goal. You need to strive toward being a professor, a business owner, etc...
    b. Think about what you want to do afterward.
       i. This, in turn, will be indicative of where you will go to graduate school!!!
11. “I went to college because I ‘had’ to go to college. I went to graduate school because I wanted to be a medical anthropologist.”
    a. Taz Karim

What if you take a year off?

1. Get experience in what you want to do.
   a. Internships, CRM work, doing things you enjoy.
2. Do things that may demonstrate if you really want to go to graduate school or not.
3. “Gives you time to ‘grow up’ and prioritize what you want to do.”
   a. Amy Michael
4. All of the students on the panel took at least 6 months off of school
5. “Take a mental recharge and relax!”
   a. Ashley Kendell
6. It makes taking the GRE a lot harder after taking time off.
   a. Consider taking it during/just after you graduate from undergraduate school.
7. Finding letter of recommendation may also be a bit difficult.
   a. Need to maintain contact with the people you know and want letters from.
   b. Make sure to make good impressions!
8. If graduate school is your ultimate goal, don’t make the time away from school deter your goals.
9. If you plan on taking time off but are applying the following fall, ask for letters of recommendation now! Less work for professors later and ensures a better quality of recommendation.
10. Be careful who you are asking for letters!
a. Better to choose people who can give you a strong, positive letter instead of someone in the field you want to work in giving you a luke-warm one, which would be far less helpful.

Things you wish people would have told you ahead of time:
1. Go to the Writing Center!!!
   a. It makes your quality of writing even stronger. Being a strong writer now doesn’t ensure it is good enough later.
2. Know that there will be intense competitiveness!
   a. It may not even be between each other, but within yourself.
   b. “Graduate school is like a melting pot of personalities.”
      i. Just because some people aren’t helpful or are condescending, don’t let that discourage you.
      1. Amy Michael
   c. Be friends with your cohort and don’t let the competition get in the way.
3. Interact with your graduate students as undergraduates!
   a. Form bonds and ask questions!
      i. They ARE WILLING TO HELP!!!
   b. “Graduate students love to talk about themselves and their research. It makes them feel like what they are doing is important.”
      i. Amy Michael
   c. Send emails! They will answer eventually. They are busy, but they would love to help!!!
4. Talk to people!!!
   a. Don’t struggle or feel like you “don’t get it” alone. Get in touch with people. “It is important for your sanity.”
      i. Everyone feels like they “don’t get it” at some point. There are many resources at your disposal.

Doing Programs Abroad:
• Be careful!
• “Do an international master’s only if you get government funding like the Rhode’s.”
  o Blair
• Don’t go just because it’s only 1 year!
  o It will be a terribly busy and hectic time.
• DON’T go for archaeology or forensics.
  o Advisors don’t like to see this and won’t accept you into their PhD programs.
  o “Psh, what is that?”
  ▪ Amy Michael
• Schools will accept people who have the money to pay them.
  o It isn’t merit-based, but monetary based.
• Take this all with a grain of salt!

General Advice:
• Forensic’s people: the Master’s program is for you!
  o “It is almost impossible to get into a PhD program.”
  o Master’s programs will help you get a suite of experience that will make you more marketable and attractive to PhD programs in the future.
• Timing:
- 6 or 7 years in graduate school doesn’t seem like 6 or 7 years.
  - It is completely different from undergraduate.
  - It isn’t completely coursework anymore. You get to be in the field!
    - “It’s the best part!”
- It is better to go get at least a Master’s degree at an institution different from MSU.
  - You get to be an adult!
  - You get more experiences and a different view on anthropology.
  - You learn differently at different institutions.
  - HIGHLY recommended!!!
- “I think you are all adaptable.”
  - Don’t be afraid of branching out!
- “Be prepared for everything they are going to throw at you.”
- Don’t go to a place that only has ONE person who you would like to work with.
  - "Life happens"
    - Blair Starnes
  - Go for the broad range of the program.
  - Sabbaticals, getting into disagreements, people leave, etc.
  - You need a well-rounded committee!
  - Your interests may change and you will need to change advisors, etc.
- Other Master’s programs to get into a PhD program for Forensics
  - Biomechanics, skeletal biology, bioarchaeology, forensic anthropology
  - NOT because of CSI stuff. You’re not going to get anywhere.
  - “You NEED to be interested in bone biology to be a forensic anthropologist.”
- Get a REALLY good support system! It is important!
  - It will get you through those times when you want to give up.
  - “You can do it!”
  - “Remember what you love about it!”
    - Jessica Yann
  - “Existential crises come on a weekly basis!”
    - Things will get you past it!
      - “Ride that pony for as long as you can.”
        - Taz Karim
- “There’s always something to reach for [in graduate school].”
  - Amy Michael
    - “If you like the idea of building your own career, getting paid for what you love to do, and not have to answer to a boss, this if for you!”
  - “Graduate school is just training for what I want for the future...it’s just practice!”
    - Blair Starnes
      - “You’re never going to die from an email.”
  - “Imposter syndrome”
    - “Fake it ‘til you make it!”
      - Not everyone is “on” every day.
        - Not everything is 100% all the time.
    - You are not all experts coming in to graduate school, so it is okay to calm down and remember that everyone is in the same boat (even if they don’t act like it).
  - Use your experiences to explain away your flaws!
    - Use your personal statements and essays as a way to show how great you are and why you made your mistakes/how you learned.
    - “Make the most of your essays!”
• Do stuff besides just show up to class!!!
  o Volunteer, be a part of clubs, etc.
    ▪ Will take precedence over low grades if you are super involved and are able to write great essays.
      • “Anthropologists love great writing skills!”
        o Jessica Yann
      • “Low math GRE scores may be forgiven if you have an amazing writing score!”
        o It happened to Jessica and Amy!
• “If departments recognize your name, you get put in a different pile [of applicants]”
  o If you don't meet them, they have no idea who you are and may not want to take the chance to working with you for years and years.
• GO TO CONFERENCES!!!!
  o Dr. O’Gorman may help with costs!
  o Get out and get a better perspective of what is out there!
  o Better idea of what a good presentation is.
  o “They hold undergrads to lower standards, so don't be afraid! You don't have to be ‘on’ every single moment.”