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GRAND CHALLENGE No. 2: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING Public Archaeology Internships and Partnerships: The Value of Experiential Education

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Abstract

Experiential education is a common part of undergraduate archaeology curricula, often provided in the form of lab and field courses. While these remain important elements, students are now looking for more applied forms of archaeological education that intertwine community needs with understanding the past. The following article outlines the steps taken to create an applied form of experiential education where MacEwan University students participate in an internship at a public archaeology center: Bodo Archaeological Interpretive Centre (BAIC) located in east central Alberta. In our case, students participate in the various tasks that archaeologists conduct, while at the same time serving the community as stewards of the past. Common goals, shared responsibilities, and open lines of correspondence are key to the success of the internship that is founded on a long-term partnership between a public society, the Bodo Archaeological Society (BAS), and MacEwan University in Alberta, Canada.

Introduction

Public outreach is an essential component of professional archaeological practice today and goes far beyond inviting the public to observe an excavation. Today, archaeologists are tasked with the responsibility of being “stewards of the past, and agents on the ground who discover, interpret and protect pieces of our collective heritage” (Versaggi 2007:203). Effective outreach must directly involve the public in the discovery of the past, while making the past both tangible and relevant. As a result, it is imperative that archaeology students learn how to translate the data they recover from sites into formats that are meaningful and significant to local communities and the public in general (see Kristensen et al., this issue). We suggest the most effective way to achieve this outcome is to have students participate in public archaeology internships.

The outcomes and skillsets that students gain through public archaeology internships are plentiful, including not only community service opportunities, but also becoming experts in communicating and interacting with the public. These are truly unique experiences that cannot be learned in the classroom or through textbooks; rather, students learn through experience by participating in day-to-day archaeological site management and directly interacting with the public. Students ‘learn by doing,’ applying their theoretical knowledge and conceptual understanding of the past as they interact with the public (Munge et al. 2018).

Students ultimately learn that public access and participation in the process of archaeological discovery and interpretation creates a dialogue about the past that encourages previously passive community members to become stewards of the past

(Versaggi 2007:204). This form of community engagement creates an educated public who, it is hoped, will develop a shared commitment to preserving the past.

This article outlines the steps we followed to create a long-term partnership between the Bodo Archaeological Society (BAS) and MacEwan University in order to establish a highly successful public archaeology internship program at the Bodo Archaeological Interpretative Centre (BAIC) and the Bodo Archaeological Site located in east-central Alberta, Canada. We identify the key components necessary to build and maintain this venture that began in 2014. It is hoped that this model may be used to establish comparable internships for students at other cultural heritage institutions and that many more undergraduates will have opportunities to work in public archaeology as part of their education (Malainey et al. 2017).

Experiential Education

As first described by Kolb (1984), students enrolled in experiential education programs are engaged and active participants in their learning through a process that includes doing, reflecting, and experimenting. Experiential education is different from traditional education because of an added emphasis on the process of students learning through participating in real-world situations, that often result in social rewards (Wurdinger and Carlson 2010). This form of learning is especially common in archaeological field school opportunities where students participate in excavations, surveys, and lab work, applying concepts, theories and techniques introduced in traditional classroom situations. Students in experiential education programs are highly motivated to learn due to an increased understanding of the value of their applied activities in community settings (Munge et al. 2018:42). Student internships in public archaeology are a salient example of experiential learning, that focus on students having hands-on or participatory experiences with the public. Moreover, archaeological internships are also a form of community service where students experience individualized social rewards through active participation with the community (Geiger 2004:166). Student interns often interact and network with other archaeologists, allowing the students to create a reputation in the archaeological community that may lead to future employment or graduate studies.

The Bodo Archaeological Site

The Bodo Archaeological Site is located in east-central Alberta, approximately 40 km south of Provost near the Saskatchewan border. It was discovered when several bison skulls were unearthed in 1995 during pipeline construction (Gibson and McKean 1996). The site consists of two main archaeological sites called FaOm-1 and FaOm-22. It is located in a transitional environment and shares the natural landscape characteristics of the parkland and the grassland regions (Grekul 2015). The Sounding Lake Sand Hills

and the Eyehill Creek Valley are the main geographic features of the Bodo site (Gibson 2005).

The site has extensive evidence of human habitation and bison hunting primarily during the late precontact period, with evidence of possible older, middle precontact occupation (Gibson 2005) and later protohistoric occupation as well (Gibson 2004). The site is currently at least 8 km² in size. Over the past 20 years, a considerable amount of archaeological assessment and excavation has taken place at the site, primarily during cultural resource management projects resulting from oilfield development, University of Alberta field schools, and work undertaken by the BAS. An abundance and variety of archaeological features and artifacts have been discovered at the site, including faunal, lithic, and pottery artifacts. Some of these artifacts are on display in the BAIC, forming an important component of the public education programming at Bodo.



Figure 1. Explaining archaeology to school age students at Bodo. Photo by BAIC.

What is the Bodo Archaeological Society?

The Bodo Archaeological Society (BAS) is a non-profit community organization that operates and maintains the Bodo Archaeological Interpretative Centre (BAIC) and associated sites (FaOm-1 and FaOm22).¹ The BAIC is located in a repurposed community school and is equipped with a classroom, a working archaeology laboratory, interpretive exhibits, artifact displays, and activity stations. Public programs offered at the BAIC are targeted toward all age groups, focusing on experiential, hands-on, archaeological mock excavations, as well as supervised tours of the archaeological site.

The length and audience of the public programs vary widely including daily tours to the archaeological site and surrounding landscape, elementary-school programs, high-school field trips, children's day camps, family lifeways camps, special programs, and public lectures (Figure 1). Program length varies from two hours to four days. The BAIC is far from a traditional museum; rather, it acts as a staging area, introducing the public to the site and the history of the area. Visitors are then transported to the site via the tour van which gives the public the unique opportunity to connect and engage directly with the past. The Blackfoot Historical Park² in southeastern Alberta hosts similar educational programs for all ages.

BAS and MacEwan University

In 2014, Christie Grekul, then an employee of the BAS, and Courtney Lakevold, the President of the BAS at the time, approached the Department of Anthropology at MacEwan University in Edmonton, Canada, to discuss the prospect of creating a collaborative, public archaeology student internship program. MacEwan embraced this opportunity, recognizing it as a way to expand experiential learning opportunities for students and giving them access to a successful community-run public archaeology center. Thus, the partnership with BAS was initiated and a formalized course was created that would allow students to participate as interns in the BAS public archaeology program while at the same time obtaining university credit.

The first step in this partnership involved working out various logistical and curricular issues. This included numerous meetings and correspondence between the authors and other MacEwan Anthropology faculty to agree upon course requirements, such as the appropriate curriculum pre-requisites, length of the program, course learning outcomes, and the skills that a student would acquire through the internship experience. Next, the Department of Anthropology approved a new course entitled, *ANTH 495: Anthropology Field Placement*, whereby students acquire course credit (3 credits) for participating in a variety of off-campus internships. A generalized anthropology field placement course was created so that in the future it may be adapted to other circumstances and collaborations within the community. The goal of the course is to provide opportunities for students to engage in meaningful community and/or employment placements that are focused on the profession of anthropology. Following the creation of the course curriculum, the next step was to schedule the intern program so that it was aligned with the needs of the BAIC and the availability of students (i.e., May through August). In our case, we found it best to have two interns with staggered start dates—one in May and one in July. This ensured that there were interns to help support the BAIC during the busiest times (June and July) and allowed the students to have a summer break from university. See Figure 2 for an overview of monthly milestones that are followed annually for the internship program.

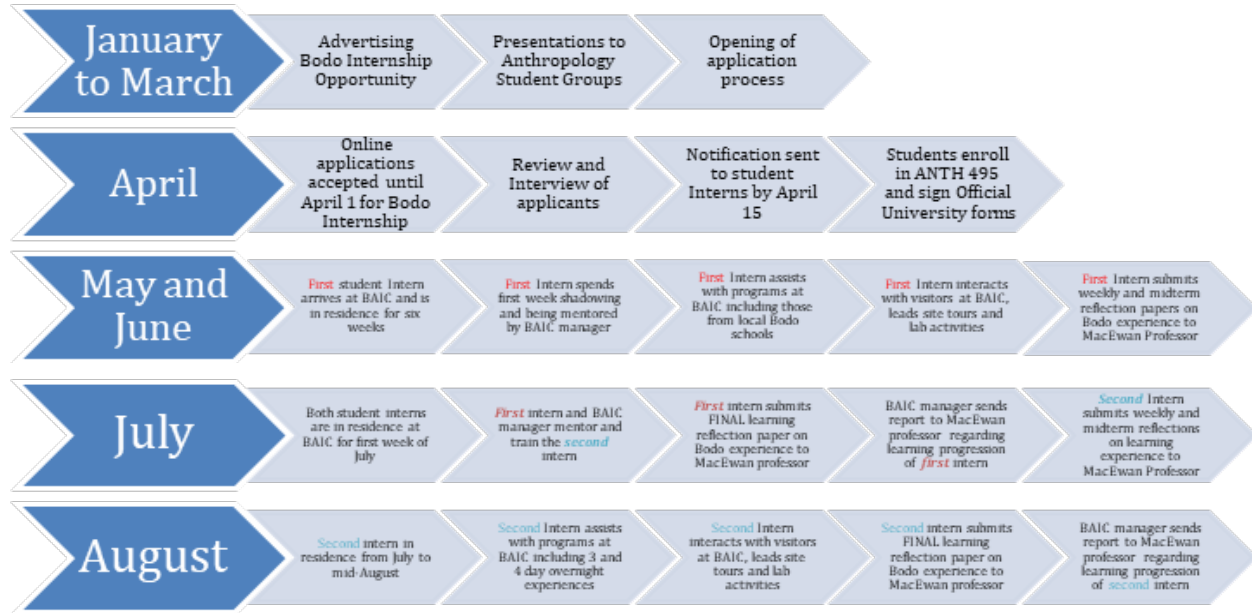


Figure 2. Monthly milestones for Bodo student internship program.

Course Description and Learning Outcomes

The MacEwan Course Calendar³ description reads as follows:

In this course, the students are assigned to a public, private, or non-profit organization where they apply their knowledge and skills in research or other practical aspects of a project. Acceptance into the field placement is competitive and subject to an application process, which includes an interview. The course will be assigned a grade of pass or fail only.

The outcomes of the public archaeology internship are listed as follows:

The students will

1. Acquire an in-depth knowledge of all aspects of the daily operation of a public archaeology program through hands-on practice,
2. Learn strategies for engaging the public in archaeological research and the stewardship of the archaeological record,
3. Be able to interpret the archaeological record for lay people and educators,
4. Disseminate the results of archaeological research through various media, and
5. Organize and manage the flow of data from an archaeological excavation through a lab for processing and technical reporting.

Lastly, in order to have students participate in the course at the Bodo site, a Work Integrated Learning Placement Agreement was signed between the BAS and MacEwan University to formalize the relationship and responsibilities of both entities. The agreement sets out the guidelines defining policies and procedures that the Host Organization (BAS) and MacEwan University will adhere to. This includes the proper conduct of the students at the BAIC, their rights and responsibilities as well as the supervisory roles and evaluation requirements of the BAS while the students are on site.

Application, Prerequisites, and Training

In order to participate in the internship, students must have taken a first-year course in anthropology and the second year Introduction to Archaeology course. Students from all years of study are welcome to apply and submit their application to the Department of Anthropology, but priority is given to senior level students. Generally, three to five students apply and are interviewed by the manager of the BAIC and professors from the Department of Anthropology. These interviews are a key component of the internship, assisting the interviewers in understanding the preparedness, skills, and motivations of the students who are applying to the internship. Students are asked in the interview to describe how they work in a collaborative environment, about their communication skills in public settings, and to outline why they are interested in an internship in archaeology. The manager and professor clearly set out roles and responsibilities of the students, while also ensuring that the students understand the time commitment and isolated location of the BAIC.

After the interns are chosen, the students are notified and meet with the supervising Anthropology professor at MacEwan to establish the curricular requirements of the internship. These components include daily reflective pieces outlining the student's experiences at Bodo, which must be submitted at the end of each week. In addition, each intern submits a midterm and final report that summarizes the learning experiences and skills that the student has achieved through the program.

Two interns are accepted each summer, spanning the months of May through August, with each internship running approximately six to eight weeks. Training is done during the first week that the intern is at BAIC and includes accompanying the manager as they present various programs to the public, along with reading reports of previous years' work at Bodo. The first intern is generally at BAIC from mid-May to early July, while the second intern is there from early July to mid-August with a short two-to-three-day overlap when they are both on site. The BAIC manager supervises the students on a daily basis and provides evaluations of the students' work to the MacEwan Professor. To help offset the costs of living and transportation to the site, the BAS has been able to provide each intern with \$1000 CAD honoraria from a variety of sources. These honoraria are not funded by a specific grant, but the BAS provides the funding because

they are committed to assisting interns with the costs of living in a remote rural area during the duration of the internship. In total, over \$10,000 CAD has been awarded to student interns.

The main tasks that the interns undertake involve a range of public archaeology programming. This includes:

- Providing interpretation of the site as a part of the development and delivery of educational programs.
- Guiding visitors and students through the interpretive center and the archaeological site.
- Working with parents and teachers while overseeing day camps and school tours.
- Creating posts for various media including newspapers, websites, and social media.

The following diagram (Figure 3) articulates how these student tasks align the learning outcomes set out in the ANTH 495 course outline.

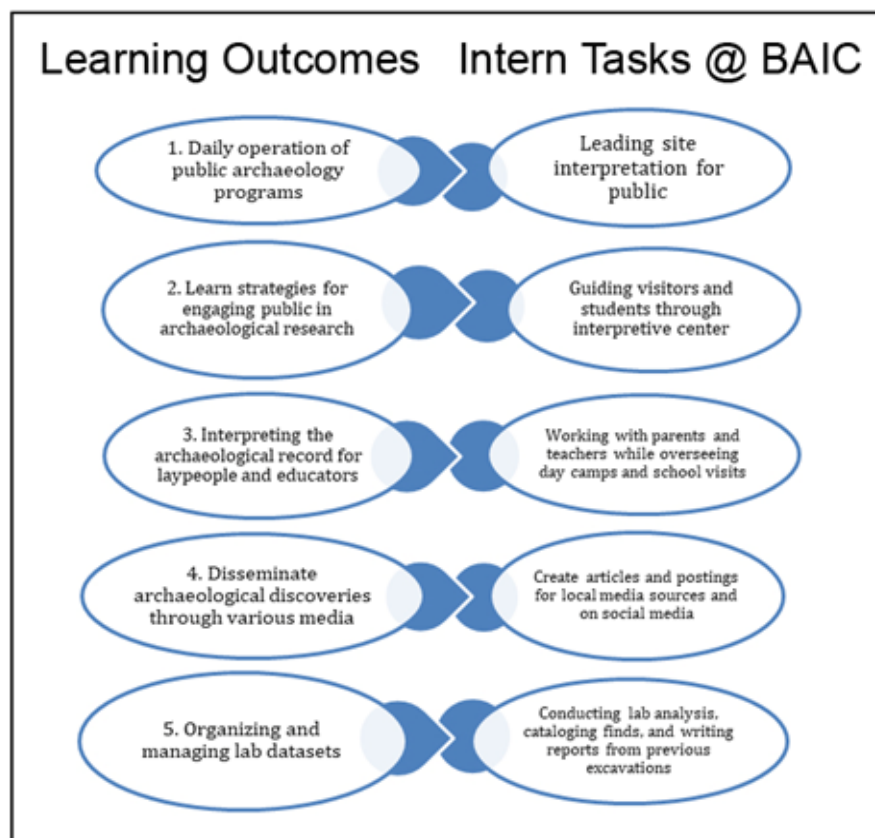


Figure 3. Alignment of course learning outcomes with intern tasks at BAIC.

Interns also participate in all aspects of archaeological fieldwork and lab analysis, from supervising community dig participants to catching up with cataloging and reporting on previous archaeological excavations (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Intern doing lab work on artifacts at BAIC. Photo by the BAIC.

Lastly, the interns work cooperatively with the manager and other BAS employees on the daily operation of the BAIC. This includes assisting in the operation of a gift shop, responding to public inquiries on websites and social media, managing tour and program bookings, maintaining interpretive displays, general upkeep of the center, documenting the number of visitors, and, sometimes, food preparation for special events.

What Have the Interns Learned?

Since it was established in 2014, thirteen MacEwan students have completed the Bodo Intern program. In general, these interns reported that the program was a great learning experience and that they were enthusiastic about their experiences at Bodo. All agreed that sharing archaeology with the public gave them the opportunity to be immersed in hands-on, in-depth teaching of diverse aspects of archaeology. They were able to practice the transference of the skills and knowledge that they learned in the classroom

to a general public audience. Students became educators instead of only consumers of knowledge (Smith 2002) and recognized that they were learning alongside the people they were teaching. They all felt that after participating in this internship they were able to gain more from their traditional classroom education because of the opportunity they had to navigate real experiences in the field. Participation in this program produced students who are excited, energized, curious, and hungry for more experiences and opportunities to learn.

In general, the interns agreed that connecting people to the land as well as the cultural materials at BAIC helped develop a visitor's sense of pride in the history of Alberta. The interns identified their work at BAIC as the first step in public outreach without which we cannot build a foundation of understanding the importance of archaeological research. This was especially salient when working with the children, as the interns reflected on this as an opportunity to teach the younger generation that the past is a crucial component of who we are and how we connect to the present. Further, the interns noted that a significant amount of learning and teaching was done in the field, providing them with a more in-depth understanding of concepts and factors that they could not have learned during class lectures. In other words, they were active participants in their experiential education journey. In essence, the interns moved through the four stages of experiential education that Kolb (1984) outlined including participating in public archaeology, reflecting on their engagement with the public, forming generalizations on how to express the past to the public, and then applying their knowledge to improve their interactions with visitors at BAIC.

The program highlights the personal growth of the interns, a maturation process that includes living in a remote area far from home and collaborating with a small group of co-workers. As well, the program is identified as a unique learning opportunity that enhanced their university-based archaeological training. The interns suggest that their experience with teaching the public leads them to a new career as educators and how their work at BAIC although challenging, pushed them out of their comfort zone.

As these observations and outcomes suggest, the Bodo public archaeology internship has been a success on many levels. Not only have thirteen students had a once-in-a-lifetime educational opportunity that will forever stay with them regardless of their future endeavors, but also a long-term partnership has been established between a community archaeology society and a post-secondary institution that will ensure students have the opportunity to experience public archaeology and become 'stewards of the past.'

Value-Added Learning Outcomes from the Bodo Intern Program

After completing the intern program, three industrious students decided to undertake a research program outside of their course requirements. Bringing Alberta Archaeology

into your Classroom was a research project led by three of the Bodo interns and aptly named “Doing Bodo without Bodo.” They collaborated on a project that involved bringing archaeology into elementary school classrooms, specifically grade four, throughout the Edmonton area. The students then created a poster illustrating the outcomes of the “Doing Bodo without Bodo” project that was presented at the 2016 Annual Meeting of the Canadian Archaeological Association in Whitehorse, Yukon Territories, Canada (Ali et. al. 2016). Their poster was awarded Best Student Poster at the conference. This research project exemplifies how these student interns used their experience in public archaeology at Bodo to bring public archaeology into the classrooms of Edmonton, modeling the true spirit of being ‘stewards of the past.’

Conclusion

The Bodo internship program demonstrates the benefits of experiential education for students and the role that archaeological interpretive centers have in contributing to these one-on-one learning opportunities. Internships, in general, are the best form of experiential education for students providing individualized and inspiring experiences for the future generation of professional archaeologists (see Welsh and Corbishley, this issue). Like traditional archaeology field schools, internships are opportunities for students to learn and develop skills in an applied environment outside of the traditional academic setting; however, unique to internships are the opportunities for students to interact and communicate with the public, often becoming teachers of the past themselves. In many ways, this allows for a transformative learning process for students who become co-producers of our knowledge of the past through day-to-day experiences as a public archaeologist.

At the heart of the internship program discussed in this article are collaborations and partnerships (both formal and informal) between students, professors, and community partners. This form of collaboration allows students to become active citizens; thus, they become the link between the university and the community (Hertner et al. 2016:2). Our experiences demonstrate that public archaeology internships at museums and interpretive centers contribute to the development of well-rounded archaeologists who are qualified to take on the ever-increasing challenge of public education in archaeology. We have found that collaborative partnerships and internships result in quality learning experiences that are not difficult to establish or maintain, and create strong alliances between students, universities, and community heritage institutions.

The positive outcomes of these internships are numerous for all stakeholders and the benefits extend into the wider discipline of archaeology. Most importantly, it is the students who benefit most, receiving hands-on training opportunities necessary for success in archaeology, where the practice of meaningful community outreach

becomes a central aspect of their future careers. Within the coming years, we will continue to refine, adapt, and implement ANTH 495 as an essential component of the undergraduate pedagogy in the field of archaeology and beyond—taking learning outside of the classroom and into the community.

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge all the interns who have participated in ANTH 495.

Endnotes

- 1 <https://bodoarchaeology.com/>
- 2 <http://www.blackfootcrossing.ca/index.html>
- 3 <https://calendar.macewan.ca/>

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