

All About Discovery!

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New Curator Anna Strankman

Growing up in Berkeley, California, Anna Strankman knew that the Makah baskets in her home were “very special.” Though her father’s Native background includes Anishinaabe and Blackfeet, he lived on the Makah reservation at Neah Bay, Washington as a child, where the baskets were gifted to his family. “In our family, those baskets were always considered treasures. They held lots of stories. And so when I got older and started going to museums, [I] would see things in museums that always interested me. [I wondered] ‘How did these things get from where they were created to where they are today?’ And I always had a thought that I’d love to work in a museum.”

As the University Museum’s new Curator, Strankman is now preparing to work with a new set of special baskets. In a collaborative project with Dylan Retzinger, a PhD student in the Department of English, Strankman is working with Retzinger to prepare a new exhibit on Tohono O’odham and Akimel O’odham basketry. “Part of the focus will be on knowing specific artists and highlighting their signatures and them as individual artists. Much of Native American art in museum collections you don’t have a signature as you might on a painting or Western-style art. Often the artist’s name and identity has been lost, so we’re going to highlight the ones we do know.” The museum will also exhibit basketry materials, techniques, designs, and the culture and landscape of which the baskets are a part while working at “teasing out all the stories” of the baskets.

No day is typical when doing museum work. Strankman’s days are built around future museum projects and care for current collections. A good deal of grant writing is involved, as is fielding calls from the public regarding archival information or possible donations to the museum. For collections care, Strankman likes to encourage student involvement: “We are here at the university and it only makes sense. It is hoped that for every exhibit there is a student who is involved in it.” It is part of a greater interest in making the museum a place of education for students and the general public alike. “We can really be a resource for students here. We definitely want to be a destination for people to come and a real resource for the community. We also exist as a place for researchers to come and [to act] kind of as a treasure house.”

More than that, though, Strankman says, “We are the caretakers of these important objects and works of art and not only [do we have a responsibility] to take care of them but to [also] help tell their stories with collaborations with appropriate people. So for example with Native American art I would like to hope that we would always be able to collaborate with appropriate people to help tell the story in the appropriate way.” In fact, for Strankman, working with Native American advisory committees has “been some of the most rewarding parts of working in a museum. The knowledge that can be gained through their inputs can be gained in no other way. It’s just really invaluable.” Strankman is in fact continuing a trend toward both greater student involvement and increased collaboration with Native artists and scholars begun by University Museum director Dr. Monte McCrossin in 2007.

Strankman is also considering a “semi-permanent installation focused on the peoples of the Southwest” and “growing the [museum] collection thoughtfully to have a really rich representation of the cultures of the Southwest.” The foundation for such an installation has already been set by Dr. McCrossin, who for several years has argued for such an exhibit and worked to obtain suitable museum pieces. It is new territory for Strankman. While her previous work and studies focused on Native American art, her (Continued page 6)



Anna Strankman

Graduate Spotlight

These profiles feature just a few of the current MA students who are receiving funding for conducting their MA research. Anthropology Department Head Miriam Chaiken notes, “thanks to a new funding pool from our Dean Christa Slaton, and contributions of our alumni to the ‘Friends of Anthropology’ fund, we are now able to offer grants of up to \$1,000 to our MA students to complete their graduate research. We have been able to fund students working internationally as well as close to home, and students working on projects as diverse as primate behavior, to the archaeology of bee-keeping in the Yucatan, to students studying the perpetuation of traditional foodways. This is very exciting and provides crucial support to our students and permits them to conduct important original research.”

Briana Bianco: 2014 Outstanding Graduating Student



Briana Bianco, this year’s recipient of NMSU’s Outstanding Graduating Student award, has developed a method that can help detect bee keeping archaeologically and has, in the process, revealed an admirable tenacity towards learning: “When we came up this idea, Dr. Alexander and I, to look at honey production archaeologically, I didn’t really know what direction it was going to take. I didn’t know how I was going to be able to answer the questions I had. After doing a lot

of the preliminary research and background research, I said, ‘Okay, I’m going to need to learn some chemistry,’ and so I sat in on a class in the chemistry department with Dr. [Gary] Rayson and just tried to learn a lot about soil chemistry and spectroscopy. It was a very new thing for me. It still is.”

Specifically, Briana was examining traditional stingless bee honey production in the Yucatan. Her method of detecting honey production includes comparing the chemical signatures of soils, wax, and honey in present day stingless bee operations, soil from an archaeological site suspected to have housed apiaries, and soil away from any known or suspected apiaries. She says, “Dr. Rayson’s help was crucial. We found that sugar hydroxyls, which may be indicative of honey (but may be indicative of other things, like nearby orchards), was also found in some of the soils. So the results are very tentative at this point and a lot of refinement in the chemical analysis would need to be done to actually determine if there is a ‘biomarker’ for stingless bee honey and if it can be found in modern and archaeological soils.”

While Briana says that her method “doesn’t necessarily definitively answer the question” of how to detect bee keeping archaeologically, it is one possible way that archaeologists can now use. In developing

her technique, Briana also incorporated ethnographic interviews into her research as part of an effort to look at changes in bee keeping in the area over time. The use of ethnographic interview was fairly new to Briana, as well. She says she didn’t expect to have to “play a cultural anthropologist,” but enjoyed and appreciated the experience nonetheless.

Briana’s research has implications not only for archaeological method, however, but also for modern bee keeping in the Yucatan. Few people currently practice traditional stingless bee keeping in the area, and those who are practicing it do not make much money from it. That said, Briana believes that traditional honey production methods have both great importance and great potential: “It’s something that’s part of their culture and tradition that they truly value, and it would be sad if this stopped happening. Trying to find out the cultural value and the economic value of it throughout time archaeologically could increase people’s interest in it and really help the people that are still doing it.” In fact, some non-profits and colleges in the Yucatan are now creating programs to try and reintroduce traditional stingless bee keeping and honey production. “It requires a very deep knowledge of the flowering plants that are around and teaching people to plant certain plants for the bees,” she says, hence the need for education.

Briana will soon be joining Teach for America in Dallas, teaching elementary bilingual third grade. “I think that it’ll be good experience for me,” she says, “because even in the future if I continue in archaeology, I might want to get more into public archaeology and the teaching of archaeology itself.” Of the campus-wide Outstanding Graduating Student award, for which only one student is chosen each year, Briana says, “I feel very, very appreciative [to be] nominated for that. I just feel very thankful for [everyone’s] help, and I’m just very grateful that [the department] thought of me for that.”

Erin Brown-Meeks: Spider Monkey Feeding Behaviors



Can the temptation of marshmallows help fight environmental degradation? Perhaps. Erin Brown-Meeks, graduate anthropology student at NMSU, recently designed a new device to encourage suspensory feeding among captive spider monkeys at the El Paso Zoo. Marshmallows, a “high reward treat” for the monkeys, were integral to encouraging its use. As Brown-Meeks explains, primates such as spider monkeys are “necessary for their habitats”;

such habitats would be “devastated” without primates because, for example, they help spread fruit seeds for continued reproduction of forest plants. So how does a device to encourage suspensory feeding among captive monkeys fit into the picture? Brown-Meeks explains: “Zoos now have programs where they are breeding wild animals to release back into the wild. Studies have shown captive born [primate] individuals lacked foraging and locomotor skills that the wild born individuals had. And so if we are going to release these animals from a captive habitat into the wild we have to provide with the appropriate types (Continued page 3)

Cottonwood Spring Pueblo Collaboration

Just north of Las Cruces lies an abandoned pueblo now known as Cottonwood Spring. This archaeological site is estimated to date between 1300 and 1450 CE. Since 2012, NMSU has hosted an archaeological field school at Cottonwood Spring Pueblo, and NMSU graduate students Angel Peña and Kristin Corl are making some interesting discoveries. After analyzing a room which exhibited two separate burning events in the pueblo, they are now arguing that the burning seen in many pueblos may not always be the result of warfare or accidental fire, but rather, the result of ritual burning.



Angel explains: “We’re thinking that there [were] ritual closures. So they [would] burn the room, for example, when someone die[d], and then re-plaster the floor, and then re-open the room. If you’re being attacked, you don’t have time to clear out the floor and



take the pots and pans out. You’re being attacked – you’re not going to grab everything. When we’re digging, there are no [household] artifacts. The rooms have been cleaned and cleared and then burned. We also find whole beautiful [projectile] points placed strategically on the floors, so [there’s] some ritual significance there, because it’s not common that you find big beautiful projectile points just everywhere, but when you find one in the center of a room, that leads us to believe this is something special.” Additionally, Angel and Kristin are finding partially reconstructable ceramic pots and a number of other ritually significant artifacts, like crystals, shells and specialized grinding stones in the same room. This is yet another factor that adds to the team’s sense that they have stumbled upon something “special.”

Angel and Kristin have been working together for about two years. Both have been crew chiefs at the field school, and both have worked with non-profit Groundwork Doña Ana, where they helped engage area youth in archaeological projects, including documentation of sites on the proposed Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument. They each have their own specialties. Within the shared Cottonwood Spring project, Angel is working on finding more precise dates for pottery while Kristin is completing analyses of faunal bones and macrobotanicals to learn about environmental and subsistence changes through time. Kristin explains that though they each have different projects in addition to their analysis of burn patterns at Cottonwood, “both of

Erin Brown-Meeks, Cont.

of experiences.”

Erin’s feeding device consists of a five gallon bucket with an attached PVC pipe around which the bucket spins. “Inside,” she says, “we designed it to have 4 chambers and . . . the food will fall from one chamber to the next, to the next, to the next until [it] reach[es] an exterior opening, and then the food will fall out.” It was part of research she conducted as part of her Master’s thesis in which she observed and compared the behavior of the El Paso Zoo’s spider monkeys with and without the device. While spider monkeys are arboreal in the wild, the El Paso Zoo spider monkeys have been terrestrial since birth, hence Erin’s interest in creating such a device.

Erin is also excited to be expecting a baby in a few months, and she is also “an educator at Museum of Nature and Science” in Las Cruces. It is a co-op position through NMSU. “It’s a wonderful position,” says Erin, that has piqued her interest in teaching in zoos or at reserves. In the future, she also hopes to continue her research at the PhD level.



A Spider monkey with Brown-Meeks’ feeding device

these things are going to help contribute to the bigger picture of Cottonwood.” She further explains, “The benefits of collaboration are that you get more time and energy put into one project. Then you get different views put into it, too. I think collaboration can contribute to a really strong argument.”

Angel is currently also the staff archaeologist for non-profit New Mexico Wilderness Alliance and is interested in doing more with government policy as it relates to archaeology. This is the second year that Kristin will be site director at Cottonwood, and she will continue to work on projects related to the area over the summer before finishing her thesis next year. Both Kristin and Angel have discovered that they love sharing their knowledge of anthropology with others, and after finishing her Master’s degree, Kristin hopes to finish a PhD and eventually teach.

Undergraduate Spotlight

Kobi Weaver



As a high school student, Kobi Weaver saw the pictures and heard the stories from an archaeologist friend about traveling to the jungle and studying ancient material remains. She did not realize, however, until she got to college that she could actually major in archaeology and anthropology. After taking her first archaeology class, Kobi seized the opportunity to go to field school in 2012 at the

Maya Research Program in northern Belize. “I fell in love with it,” she says and signed up to go back the following year with hopes of doing more targeted research. With the help of Dr. Rani Alexander, a project was arranged through Thomas Guderjan, who offered Weaver the opportunity to do soil chemistry and artifact analysis on a household unit at the site of Chum Balam-Nal, located in the ancient city of Blue Creek.

Weaver was able to identify cooking areas and determined that the household unit was abandoned at the time of the Maya collapse in a planned, rather than sudden, pattern. Kobi received a \$5,000 scholarship from the Honors College for international research in order to complete the research, which became part of her Honor’s Thesis. She also recently presented a poster of her findings at NMSU’s Under-



Chum Balam-Nal household unit

graduate Research and Creative Arts Symposium (URCAS).

The type of project Weaver finished, household archaeology, is integral to a feminist archaeology, where Kobi says she “found [her] passion.” “Women don’t really show up in records,” says Kobi. “Whenever you excavate places of higher ranked power, those [tend to be] places where women weren’t allowed in, so you don’t get to hear their stories.” Therefore, different methods are required for study-



Kobi taking samples

ing women, such as using chemical analysis to determine household activity patterns, as Kobi did. With feminist archaeological methods, Kobi says, “You can really tell the stories of people that didn’t get a chance to tell their own stories. We know more about Maya women because of household archaeology than we did before.” While she calls her own work “just a tiny little drop in the bucket,” Kobi also explains that sooner or later those little drops add up.

Kobi is graduating and will soon be moving to Baton Rouge to join Teach for America where she will teach high school science for two years. She is looking forward to teaching and hopes to “tangibly make a difference.” She wants to continue to be involved in archaeology, though. In fact, she expects to go back to the Maya Research Program to work again and hopes to go to graduate school in future, as well.

Department of Anthropology

Archaeology

Rani Alexander
Beth O’Leary
William Walker
Fumi Arakawa

Biological Anthropology

Brenda Benefit
Monte McCrossin

Cultural Anthropology

Miriam Chaiken, Dept. Head
W. Thomas Conelly
Don Pepion
Scott Rushforth
M. Lois Stanford
Mary Alice Scott

Emeritus

Christine Eber
Edward Staski
Wenda Trevathan

University Museum
Anna Strankman

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Weldon Lamb
Jennifer Robles
Judy Berryman
Debra LeBeau
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Barbara Burrell

Alumni Spotlight

Matthew Padilla



Matthew Padilla is busy putting his anthropology education to work for the U.S. Forest Service. Since graduating with his M.A. from NMSU in 2006, Matthew has been working to preserve archaeological treasures in U.S. National Forests. “My education in cultural resource management, archaeological theory, and GIS at NSMU has immensely helped me perform well with the Forest Service,” he says.

Currently, Matthew is working as a district archaeologist at Black Hills National Forest, where he supervises other archaeologists and acts as a liaison between the U.S. government and Native American tribes for various projects. As a liaison, Padilla prepares reports for the State Historic Preservation Office and Native American tribes to address the historical and cultural significance of sites and to ensure compliance with various federal laws such as the Antiquities Act, the Sacred Sites Act, and others “in preparation [for] timber sales, util-

ity line construction,” and other projects. An important aspect of these reports is their role in “stimulat[ing] conversation between the government and the tribes” regarding these projects. “In short,” he says, “my job is to be a good field archaeologist/researcher so that I have the knowledge to give sound legal advice to decision makers.”

This means that in his day to day work, Matthew must “be a jack-of-all-trades.” Routine tasks can include overseeing excavations, leading surveys, evaluating sites for National Register of Historic Places qualification, and even learning old construction techniques in order to help preserve historic structures. Matthew also helps coordinate fire crew efforts during wild fires to make sure that archaeological sites are not harmed during fire control operations. The breadth of his responsibilities ensure that Matthew does not get bored. “With over 500,000 acres of land to manage on my part of the forest,” he says, “I won’t be running out of new [archaeological] finds any time soon. The most enjoyable part of my job is in getting satisfaction from protecting priceless pieces of history, whether it’s from wild-fires, logging, or natural deterioration. Knowing that the work I do will allow future generations to enjoy our history is a good feeling.”

Cecily Marroquin



Since graduating with a Bachelor’s degree in Anthropology and Geography from NMSU in 2011, Cecily Marroquin has further pursued an interest in medical anthropology. As a research assistant at the Smithsonian Institute for several years, she worked with Alain Touwaide who founded non-profit Institute for the Preservation of Medical Traditions. “That’s what

really sparked my medical anthropology interest,” says Marroquin. As a result, she completed a Master’s degree at The George Washington University in International Development and Medical Anthropology. She is now working on her Master’s of Public Health at The George Washington University in order to gain a “more substantive background” for future medical anthropology research.

Cecily also acts as Program Coordinator at The American Board of Medical Genetics. As Program Coordinator, she oversees the maintenance of the certification program for board certified medi-

cal geneticists and works to make sure they understand certification requirements. “Being a medical anthropology graduate student,” she says, “I wanted to at least learn more about the medical field in the United States [be]cause I feel like although I have the theoretical background for medical anthropology, I really don’t know much about our health system. And so I felt like this kind of position would give me an entry into that, and it’s actually been pretty interesting. It’s not an anthropological position, but that lens is always there.”

Marroquin is also still affiliated with the Institute for the Preservation of Medical Traditions, though she admits she does not have nearly enough time to work with the institute these days. She has become increasingly interested in philosophical and psychological anthropology and how understandings of self translate into wellness and disease. She is now “trying to fine-tune” her research interests in preparation for finishing her Master’s of Public Health and, she hopes, a future PhD. “The more I’m away from my medical anthropology graduate program, the more I realize that that’s what I really want to do,” she says. “Anthropology [has an] incredible ability to be critical, [to] really [interrogate] things that you take for granted just because this is how things are. I think that’s what’s always pulled me in. It just looks at so many different sides of things and can explain things from a broader perspective.”

New Curator Anna Strankman, Cont.

focus has been with Native American art from the Pacific Northwest. Prior to coming to NMSU, for example, Strankman worked at the Seattle Art Museum for 5 years, reinstalling their Native American collection and working on a travelling Coast Salish exhibit. After that, she was hired at the Portland Art Museum as Curator of Native American Art. "And now I find myself here in a completely different part of the world, which is very exciting and I'm enjoying being somewhere different and learning much more about the Native groups of the Southwest."

For more information about the University Museum, visit <http://univmuseum.nmsu.edu/> or the University Museum Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/University-Museum/81663082432>.



One of the University Museum's newest acquisitions, a basket by Tohono O'odham contemporary artist Terrol Dew Johnson

In case your perusal of this newsletter has made you inclined to open your wallet and send some green good wishes our way, we want to let you know that there is now a way for you to make tax deductible donations to "Friends of Anthropology" at NMSU, through the Foundation for NMSU. We have our own account (number 102314 in case you need it) and if you donate through the secure web site the funds will come directly to us...not to the football team, not to paving parking lots, not for buying library books...directly to anthropology!

To make a donation select the following web site: <http://fndforms.nmsu.edu/giving.php> and then click on the option to "Find a giving area or fund." If you then type in "Anthropology" you can select the option it will offer for "Friends of Anthropology". Once you have chosen to be our friend you can follow the directions to make a donation. Whether you are inclined to give \$10.00 or \$1,000.00, please know we are very appreciative, and our long-term goal is to use these funds to support future student learning opportunities. We are truly grateful for your support.

We Want to Hear From You!

What have you done since graduation? Do you have any news or an event you would like to contribute to the Department of Anthropology newsletter? Please fill in the information coupon and attach it to your news story. Send it to: New Mexico State University, Department of Anthropology, MSC 3BV, P.O. Box 30001, Las Cruces, NM 88003-8001 or email your news to mchaiken@NMSU.edu.

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