Archaeology

Archaeology provides the opportunity to investigate the material remains of past societies and cultures and the methods by which they are recovered, analyzed, interpreted and reconstructed.

Archaeologists investigate the entire human past, from the first evidence of tool use 3 million years ago to historical studies as recent as the 20th century. To provide a comprehensive understanding of archaeology, the program emphasizes two approaches: the humanistic, which is represented by classical archaeology, and the social scientific, which is represented by anthropological archaeology.

Archaeology students will encounter a range of specialties within the field, from topical studies in areas such as prehistoric pastoralism, hunter-and-gatherer societies, Mayan archaeology, and Greek and Roman archaeology to methodological approaches involving historical archaeology, ethnoarchaeology, zooarchaeology, paleoethnobotany, geoarchaeology, geographic information systems (GIS) and trace element analysis. A strength of this institution in anthropological archaeology is the focus on biologically based studies (paleoethnobotany, zooarchaeology and GIS) to investigate such questions as the origins of food production or complex societies. The strength of the classical archaeological program capitalizes on the use of ancient documents to investigate the more recent Eurasian human past.

While acquiring basic training in archaeology, students may choose to concentrate on a specific region, such as the Eastern Woodlands of the United States, the Andes, Mesoamerica, Africa, Central Asia, China or the Mediterranean world. Ancient and modern languages as well as history and art are essential for some areas of study. Students, in conjunction with their advisers, can identify a specialized set of courses that meet their goals.

Washington University archaeology faculty members are involved in research projects in many regions, such as Central Asia, Northern Africa, China, Greece, the Andes, the Mayan area, New Mexico and the Mississippi River valley. With a degree in archaeology, a graduate can work in academia, private consulting firms, government conservation and compliance agencies, and museums. Academic and museum positions generally require graduate-level training.

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