AMEC Professors Win Fulbright-Hays Group Travel Grant

By Sasha Steinberg (MSU Public Relations)

Two well-traveled, cultural researchers in Mississippi State’s College of Arts and Sciences are receiving a prestigious federal overseas-study award.

A nearly $80,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad program recently was designated for James W. “Jimmy” Hardin and Kate McClellan. They are, respectively, associate and assistant professors in the university’s Department of Anthropology and Middle Eastern Cultures.

Administered by the federal agency’s International and Foreign Language Education Office, the Fulbright-Hays program supports international training, research and curriculum development programs in modern foreign languages and area studies for teachers, students, and faculty.

The MSU grant will fund a five-week seminar project examining connections among museums, memory, and heritage in the Middle East.

Last fall, an interdisciplinary academic minor launched by MSU in Middle Eastern studies became the first of its kind for undergraduate students in the Southeast.

Hardin and McClellan will travel during the 2017 summer to the neighboring nations of Israel and Jordan. Joining them will be a diverse group of MSU faculty members and undergraduate and graduate students—including an ROTC representative—as well as teachers from Starkville High School.

“As an undergraduate, study abroad was one of the best things I did,” said Hardin, a 1988 MSU anthropology graduate.

“Happy 2017 from Starkville! As this newsletter demonstrates, AMEC faculty, students, and staff had a busy summer, and even busier fall. Three field schools were held, in Mississippi, South Carolina, and St. Croix USVI. A record 11 graduate students defended theses! And the department’s Brown Bag lecture series did not disappoint, bringing in speakers from across campus, the state, and world. We have a new website: check it out at https://www.amec.msstate.edu/, with links to our social media accounts. If you are an alum, please get in touch. We’d love to hear from you!”

Michael L. Galaty

When the project is complete, the group will “bring all of their knowledge and experience back to the classroom in a way that is going to be really unique,” he added.

In addition to meeting representatives of different cultures in both countries, Hardin said the Mississippi travelers will work with Israeli and Jordanian staff members and students at museums, archaeological sites, and other cultural and educational institutions.

An archaeologist who has excavated for decades throughout Israel, Hardin is leading that part of the project. In addition to an MSU bachelor’s degree, he holds master’s and doctoral degrees from the University of Arizona.

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Faculty News—Jimmy Hardin

Dr. Jimmy Hardin spent the month of June working on a book he is co-authoring with Dr. Jeffrey A. Blakely (University of Wisconsin-Madison). The book describes recent research in the Tel el-Hesi region of southern Israel, a survey that produced archaeological data from the Paleolithic to 1947 and historical travelers’ accounts and other documents from the last 1600 years. Additionally, two book chapters were completed— one dealing with the use of sites in the Hesi region during the Iron Age II and another analyzing land use strategies (pastoral vs. agricultural) during the same period. Finally, Hardin and Blakely planned for future work in the Hesi region. This will include a five-week field season and field school at Khirbet Summeily, a small Iron Age site in the border region of Philistia and Judah during June and July of 2017. Students interested in the field school should contact Hardin.

Faculty News—David Hoffman

Dr. David Hoffman was on sabbatical during the fall 2016 semester. He was named an “alternate” for a Fulbright Fellowship to Costa Rica, which means he has now returned to his regular duties. During his sabbatical, Hoffman continued his work on the NOAA Saltonstall-Kennedy grant looking into effective agency communication strategies with the Vietnamese-American fishing communities of Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana. In October, Hoffman joined the other co-PIs for a tour of facilities and Vietnamese fishing communities in South Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana. This is literally where the Mississippi River ends! He and his colleagues were graciously guided through port and processing facilities that illuminated a multi-ethnic workforce (Mexican migrant dock labor, Vietnamese-American fishermen, and European-American dock owners). The communities and environment of the Gulf Coast are still facing incredible uncertainty due to the after-effects of the BP Oil Spill. Hoffman will return to the coast early in the spring to pilot test a survey that will eventually be implemented dockside in all three states. In addition to continued regional fieldwork, Hoffman’s sabbatical plans included submitting two manuscripts, serving as a reviewer for the Anthropology and Environment Society’s junior scholar prize, and shepherding five MSU students through their Fulbright applications. Hoffman also presented a paper at the American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Lastly, Hoffman is excited to have won an SEC Faculty Travel Grant, which will allow him to visit the University of Georgia’s Center for Integrative Conservation Research (CICR) this spring.
This summer (June-July, 2016), Dr. Molly Zuckerman and Derek Anderson (Cobb Institute) co-directed an excavation-based bioarchaeological and archaeological field school at the prehistoric Aklis site, in Frederiksted, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. The site is a multi-component habitation, midden, and cemetery site dating to the pre-Columbian period, and their efforts are focused on mitigation, as the site is being rapidly destroyed by rising sea levels. This was their second field season, and they brought along master’s students and undergraduate students from the University of Tennessee Knoxville, University of Tulsa, and San Diego State University. Building on their 2014 field season, they completed additional site mapping, excavated, recovered, and preliminarily analyzed several sets of human remains, and also excavated and completed preliminary laboratory work on numerous artifacts from the site. They were supported and assisted in their endeavors by numerous avocational archaeologists, many of whom also volunteer at the MSU excavations at the prehistoric Topper Site in Allendale, South Carolina. Faculty from Mississippi State, Dr. Shane Miller, and from the University of Tulsa, Dr. Thomas Foster, also helped out. The field school could not have succeeded without the great generosity of staff at Sandy Point National Wildlife Refuge.

In addition to archaeological work, the field school visited numerous museums, sites of educational tourism, community markets and festivals, and national parks and monuments, and engaged in discussions with both local and visiting scholars and experts, providing an excellent understanding of how the heritage, history, and prehistory of St. Croix connects and informs the modern communities of the island. The next field school and field season will happen in June and July of 2018. Interested undergraduate and graduate students should feel free to contact either director for more information about the 2018 field school.

Last summer, Dr. Anna Osterholtz led the excavation of an early modern era cemetery in Varosfalva, Romania. The cemetery had two periods of use dated by artifact analysis. The first period dated to the 17th century and the second to the 19th century. The two different use periods are interesting as they show a history of migration, trade links, and changing populations within Transylvania. Both of the periods of use have been dated through rich grave goods, including silver and ceramics. Wealthy landowners and citizens likely made up the burial population during both periods.

In the 17th century, the area was primarily occupied by the Székely, ethnically and linguistically Hungarian peoples who still inhabit a large portion of Transylvania. The site is close to the historical border with Saxony, and trade links to Saxony were confirmed in the form of numerous silver beads and other trade goods.

The second period of use for the cemetery, the 19th century, presents a different story. By this time, trade with Saxony had tapered off somewhat and the population using the cemetery was different. Instead of the Székely using the cemetery, burials are culturally affiliated with Romanian groups that had begun to inhabit the area. Plague and warfare in the mid-19th century had reduced the local Székely populations significantly. Romanians moving north integrated into local populations very quickly and buried their dead in the local community cemetery. These graves were also very wealthy, including multiple coins, decorated coffins, and silver jewelry.

Christian artifacts were also recovered, specifically from a single grave (Grave 42). A pattern of staining was present on two bronze coins in the shape of a cross. This staining is most likely due to a piece of embroidered cloth sandwiched between two coins and placed in the hand of the deceased. This particular individual was found in an elaborate coffin with the remains of a leather pouch, copper buttons, and numerous bronze coins and buried in a semi-prone position (slightly face down within the coffin), possibly due to some jostling of the coffin during burial. So, even being very wealthy didn’t necessarily guarantee a smooth burial.

Another individual was buried with a silver ring bearing a family crest that is currently being researched by the regional museum. Nyárádi Zsolt, an archaeologist at the Haáz Rezső Múzeum, believes that the crest will ultimately lead to the identification of a minor royal lineage with land owning ties to the area. Excavations of the cemetery were completed in July of 2016; we look forward to continuing research into this assemblage in the future.
Faculty News—Jean Marcus

Beneath this stone lies a silent infant, forever cradled in her mother’s arms (Maple Hill Cemetery). There was a legend that if a dead baby was not buried with its mother, the mother would spend eternity searching for her infant. White Oddfellows Cemetery (Starkville) is dotted with the graves of infants and young children. Evidence of high mortality of infants and young children was common in white cemeteries in the early 1900s. As haunting as that legend and the tombstone are, Jean Marcus has not found this phenomenon in African American cemeteries. One wouldn’t expect the African American community to suffer fewer maternal and infant deaths from childbirth nor a high mortality rate of young children. After comparing African American and White female first names over a 200-year period in Oktibbeha County, she has made some interesting observations about who gets a tombstone in an African American cemetery. Her cemetery data revealed that a large number of African American women lived to their eighties, nineties, even to 100. These elderly ladies all were buried with legible, permanent headstones. Missing from the African American cemetery data were mothers buried with infants, children, and unnamed infants. Apparently it was a cultural practice to bury infants and children in unmarked graves until about 1990. Likewise, African American adult males were less likely to get a tombstone, unless they had a government-issued veteran’s marker. Numerous unmarked graves are a normal component of African American cemeteries. It appears that these unmarked graves do not reflect expected demographics of age and gender; rather, they may indicate differential burials. Marcus plans to investigate further this interesting aspect of the African American rites of passage concerning death.

Faculty News—Evan Peacock

Dr. Evan Peacock and his AMEC colleagues Dr. Michael Galaty and Dylan Kar- ges, an AMEC graduate student, are working on analysis of pottery from the Lyon’s Bluff site (22OK520), a large, palisaded mound and village site in northeastern Oktibbeha County. Comparisons are being made between macroscopic, low-power magnification and petrographic thin-section analysis to explore variability in surface slips and temper mixes. This work is being supported by a College of Arts & Sciences Henry Family Research Award. Peacock also is working with Mitchell Memorial Library faculty David Nolen and Sheeji Kathuria on a citation analysis of applied zooarchaeology, to assess the extent to which published data on archaeological faunal remains are being used by conservation biologists today.
Faculty News—Kate McClellan

Dr. Kate McClellan and her husband Sam welcomed baby Benjamin Moses on August 21, 2016. Ben is already preparing for a busy research trip to London and Jordan next summer! In her free time, McClellan has been working on grant applications, journal article submissions, and data analysis for her long-term project on human-animal relations in Jordan. She will also spend this fall and spring working with Jimmy Hardin on their awarded Fulbright-Hays project, which will bring 12 students and educators for a 4.5-week study tour of Israel and Jordan next summer.

Faculty News—Shane Miller

From May 9th–June 8th, Dr. Shane Miller, Derek Anderson (Cobb Institute), Jesse Tune (Fort Lewis College), and AMEC graduate students Kelsey Meer and Ryan Young led an excavation-based field school that followed up on the results from 2015’s survey field school of the Allendale chert quarries along the Savannah River in South Carolina. They focused their excavations on the Swag Site (38AL137), which was originally identified by Al Goodyear in the early 1980s. During the survey field school, they identified an area that produced a preform with overshot scars and another where multiple overshot flakes were identified. These types of artifacts are often found at Clovis age sites (ca. 13,250–12,850 calendar years ago) in eastern North America. During the 2016 field school, the field school students managed to excavate and identify several other intriguing artifacts, including what appear to be large scrapers, blade cores, and prismatic blades that were modified, presumably to be used as tools. This semester, two undergraduate participants in the field school, Cody Oscarson and Hunter Saunders, have been analyzing the assemblage and the preliminary results were presented at the Southeastern Archaeological Conference in Athens, Georgia. Miller is currently preparing for the 2017 excavation field school at the Hester site near Amory, Mississippi, which contains stratified Paleoindian through Middle Archaic deposits.
Brown Bags and Guest Lectures

September 8, 2016: **Dr. Jody Skipper**, University of Mississippi, “Reconciling Slavery: Tourism as a Social Force in Holly Springs, Mississippi.”

September 15, 2016: **Dr. James Bowley**, Millsaps College, “Destroying the Bible to Save the Ancient Israelites (and Ourselves).”

October 20, 2016: **Dr. Tamar Shirinian**, Millsaps College, “‘There Are No Men in Armenia’: Perversion and the Inadequacy of ‘Homophobia’ for Understanding the Nation’s Anxieties.”


November 3, 2016: **Jim Turner** and **John Underwood**, MS Dept. of Transportation, “Transportation Archaeology in Mississippi.”

November 10, 2016: **Dr. Anna Osterholtz**, Mississippi State University (AMEC), “Identity and Migration in Bronze Age Cyprus.”

November 21, 2016: **Dr. Helena Tomas**, University of Zagreb, Croatia, “Early Bronze Age Travels Along the Eastern Adriatic and Ionian Coasts: Cetina Culture from Croatia to Albania and Greece.”

Student Defenses

Christina Ramazani: “Death in the Gobi: A Case Study of Skeletal Trauma from the Hets Mountain Cave in Mongolia”

Joseph Smith: “Woodland Settlement Pattern Change in the North Central Hills of Mississippi”

Michael Davis: “An Osteobiography of a Turn of the Twentieth Century Skeletal Collection from Memphis, TN”

Jennifer Ryan: “Analysis of the Role of the Jackson Prairie in Settlement Patterns using Survey Data from the Bienville National Forest”

In Memoriam: Charles H. Pyne

We note with sadness the passing of Charles Henry Pyne, a long-time anthropology faculty member at MSU, who died on September 16 of this year. Charles was born on July 2, 1930 in Providence, Rhode Island. He received his M.A. at Indiana University, Bloomington, where he assisted Dr. Harold E. Driver on major compendium pieces and monographs related to North American Indians and comparative studies. Charles’ master’s thesis, completed in 1961, was a cross-cultural study of avoidance customs among indigenous groups. He joined the Department of Anthropology at MSU in 1967, where he established himself as an expert on African cultures and culture change. A dedicated teacher and student mentor, Charles was one of the founding members of the MSU Chapter of Lambda Alpha, the national anthropology honors society, in 1982. Among his many other duties, Charles was the Curator of Exhibits, spending much of his time organizing, setting up, and advertising museum displays in the Lois Dowdle Cobb Museum of the Cobb Institute of Archaeology. Examples include a major exhibition, “African Art from Mississippi Collections,” which was displayed for several weeks in 1983. This exhibit was a major success, drawing huge numbers of visitors and bringing national attention to a previously little-known aspect of the Magnolia State. The catalog remains a primary source for scholars of African Art held in the country.

Charles also was a major force in setting up the exhibit, “Exploring the City of David,” displayed in the museum in 1992 in conjunction with a series of special public programs.

Charles retired from MSU in 1995, moving to the Alabama Gulf Coast. After one hurricane too many later, he moved to Georgetown, Texas, from where he occasionally would call to catch up on the goings-on at MSU. He was 86 when he passed away. Charles is survived by his wife Heather and his daughter Justine, to whom the members of the anthropology family at MSU extend their condolences and respect.

_Evan Peacock and Kathy Elliott_
AMEC was well represented at several anthropological conferences during the fall semester. The following list includes all AMEC faculty and students who presented a poster or paper.

**European Association of Archaeologists (Vilnius, Lithuania)**

Dr. Evan Peacock, Dr. Janet Rafferty, and Jason Edmonds presented “Long-term Patterns of Human Land Use in the Temperate Woodlands of Northeastern Mississippi, U.S.A.”

Dr. Copeland is also on the board of the Society for Anthropological Science of the AAA.

Dr. Molly Zuckerman presented “Recovering the Lived Body from Bodies of Evidence: Interrogation of Diagnostic Criteria and Parameters for Disease Ecology, and Reconstruction of Life Histories and Immunological Status of Individuals with Syphilis in North American Anatomical Collections.” She also sits on the Ethics Committee of the AAA.

Dr. David Hoffman delivered a paper titled “A Dirty Secret of the ‘Green Republic’: Uncontrolled Hunting in Costa Rican National Parks.” He also serves as a board member for the Anthropology and Environment Society of the AAA.

**Southeastern Archaeological Conference (Athens, Georgia)**

Dr. Evan Peacock, Joseph Mitchell, and C. Andrew Buchner presented “Freshwater Mussel Shell Biogeography at a Woodland-Period Site on the Yazoo River, Mississippi.”

Dr. Shane Miller presented a paper, “Changing Channels: Considering the Effects of River Channel Migration on Shellbearing Site Histories,” with Thaddeus Bissett and Stephen Carmody, and a poster, “The Swag Site (38AL137): Another Paleoindian Site at the Allendale Quarries?,” with Jesse W. Tune, AMEC graduate students Kelsey J. Meer and J. Ryan Young, Derek T. Anderson (Cobb Institute), and anthropology majors Cody Oscarson and Hunter Saunders.

**American Anthropological Association (Minneapolis, Minnesota)**

Dr. Kate McClellan presented “Multispecies Development: Labor, Productivity, and Moral Progress in Jordanian Animal Welfare Work.”

Graduate student Curtis Kennett and Dr. Toni Copeland co-authored a poster titled “AIDS: Acquired Information Deficiency: HIV, Cultural Competence, and Consonance Among College Students in MS” in a session organized by Copeland and Dr. Francois Dengah (Utah State).

Also in that session, Dr. Toni Copeland and graduate students Caitlin Ostrowski, Heather Foster, Curtis Kennett, Dylan Karges, Victoria Lee, and Lydia Buckner presented a poster titled “Food for Thought: Familiarity with Fresh Fruits and Vegetables among Mississippi Schoolchildren.”

Dr. Copeland is also on the board of the Society for Anthropological Science of the AAA.

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**American Schools of Oriental Research (San Antonio, Texas)**

AMEC graduate students Lydia Buckner and Dylan Karges delivered a poster titled “IIB or not IIB? Complications in dealing with burnishing techniques.”

Dylan Karges also presented a poster titled “Drawn Conclusions: Clarity and Conventions in Archaeological Illustrations.”

AMEC graduate student Latif Oksuz co-authored a poster with Vedat Keles (Ondokuz Mayis University) and H. Ertug Ergurer (Karamanoglu Mehmetbey University) titled “The Shining City of Ancient Troad: Parion from 2005 to 2016.”

Dr. Jimmy Hardin presented a paper, “The Zoomorphic Head from Khirbet Summeily” with Nancy Serwint (Arizona State University), and a poster, “The Near Eastern Archaeomagnetic Dating Curve (NEAC): A Complementary Geochronometer for Building Robust Archaeological Chronologies,” with Michelle Stillinger and Joshua Feinberg (University of Minnesota), and Jeffrey Blakely (University of Wisconsin-Madison).
Kudos

Dr. Shane Miller co-edited a special issue of *Tennessee Archaeology* with Jesse Tune in honor of John Broster, who recently retired from the Tennessee Division of Archaeology. He also published an article and a book review in the most recent issue of *American Antiquity*.

Dr. Molly Zuckerman’s book, *New Directions in Biocultural Anthropology*, coauthored with Dr. Deborah Martin (University of Nevada-Las Vegas), was published by Wiley Blackwell.

Dr. Evan Peacock was awarded an $82,000 US Fish and Wildlife Service, Cooperative Agreement, Cultural Resource Analysis, Assessment and Educational Opportunity on National Wildlife Refuges in Region Four. Funds will be used to support AMEC graduate internships.


Dr. Jimmy Hardin was awarded a James W. Kriss Trust Award for $2,682 to hire two AMEC majors, Vincent Macon and Reed Miller, to identify, conserve, and prepare a collection of artifacts for exhibit. The artifacts were generously donated to the Cobb Institute by Dr. Robert C. West, Professor Emeritus of Chemistry at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Dr. Evan Peacock co-authored an article with former AMEC graduate student Dr. Joseph Miller titled “Sampling to Redundancy in an Applied Zooarchaeology: A Case Study from a Freshwater Shell Ring in the Mississippi Delta, Southeastern USA,” published in the *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports*.

In October, Dr. David Hoffman was awarded the College of Arts & Sciences Wallace Eminent Scholars Award for distinguished research in the social sciences.

Dr. Hoffman being presented his award by A&S Interim Dean Dr. Rick Travis.

Dr. Molly Zuckerman has been awarded an Early-concept Grant for Exploratory Research (EAGER) by the National Science Foundation, “Evidence-based experimental pathogen identification in dental calculus,” with co-PIs Dr. Courtney Hofman and Dr. Christina Warinner (both University of Oklahoma). Because dental calculus is ubiquitous and generally well preserved in the archaeological record, it has great potential to yield valuable data on causative disease agents in the past. To test the feasibility of obtaining ancient pathogen information from dental calculus, Dr. Zuckerman’s project will develop protocols and best practices for recovering pathogen DNA and proteins from the dental calculus of historic (19th and 20th centuries) individuals with known clinical diagnoses of infectious diseases, including tuberculosis, syphilis, and pneumonia.

Dr. Zuckerman also published “More Harm than Healing? Mercury Treatments for Syphilis in 17th to 19th Century London” in a special issue of *Open Archaeology*, edited by Sylvia Deskaj (Cobb Institute).
Fulbright-Hays Grant

McClellan, leader of the Jordan excursion, has lived and worked in the Middle East for many years, most recently conducting six months of research in that country. She is a magna cum laude anthropology graduate of Oberlin (Ohio) College, with a master’s and doctorate in the major from the University of Michigan.

In preparation, team members will be learning basic phrases in Hebrew and Arabic. The orientation process also will include an in-depth tour of the university’s Cobb Museum of Archaeology and sessions on how to use the well-known campus repository in post-trip educational activities.

The hands-on Middle Eastern trip will include workshops, lectures and excavations, among other activities. All participants will be sharing their experiences through blog posts and lesson-plan preparations.

Though at peace since 1994, Israel and Jordan entered a state of war when the former earned international recognition as a separate nation in 1948.

As Hardin explained, “We will be introducing seminar participants not only to more accurate depictions of the cultures, languages and history of the Middle East, but also to various ways in which the construction of collective memories through museums and other heritage institutions are integral to understanding the highly contested relationship between these two countries.”

Beyond direct educational benefits for all involved, he and McClellan agreed the project also should be regarded as a significant MSU response to the growing need in Mississippi for new courses in Middle Eastern studies at both secondary and post-secondary levels.

Providing professional development for secondary school teachers in the social sciences and humanities is a key goal of the project, Hardin emphasized.

McClellan also joined Hardin in expressing appreciation for MSU’s continuing commitment to career preparation such as this to help students succeed professionally in an increasingly globalized world.

AMEC Celebrates Day of the Dead

On November 1, the Anthropology Club partnered with the Latino Student Association to celebrate Día de los Muertos (the Day of the Dead) at the Cobb Institute of Archaeology. This is a holiday typically celebrated throughout Mexico and the Southwestern U.S. In 2008, UNESCO put this holiday on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The celebration includes the creation and decoration of sugar skulls (calaveras), decorating with marigolds, and the creation of altars (ofrendas) on which food, beverages, calaveras, and photos of deceased loved ones are placed. This is a time to honor and celebrate those who have passed, and festivities tend to take place in the home as well as in cemeteries.

Though often confused with Halloween, this is a separate holiday with its own history. Celebrated in southern and central Mexico prior to Spanish colonization, the holiday has spread throughout Latin America and the southwestern U.S. The timing of the holiday has shifted through time from occurring around the beginning of September to coincide with Halloween and All Saints’ Eve, All Saints’, and All Souls’ Day.

The Anthropology Club created the sugar skulls over the course of a few weeks. They are a mixture of sugar and meringue and need about a week to fully set up. These were then set out for anyone interested to decorate in the lobby of the Cobb during November 1 and 2. The Latino Student Association provided delicious refreshments including pan dulce, Mexican hot chocolate, cupcakes, and rice pudding. It was a wonderful celebration for everyone who attended.

The celebration of Día de los Muertos has changed in terms of timing, location, and elements of Christianity became intertwined as well. But it remains an inclusive event for the celebration of those who have gone before us. It is a time to remember and celebrate their lives and to introduce the living to the dead through conversation, sharing food, and decorating calaveras. In anthropology, we strive to tell the stories of the dead through the things they left behind, and we thank the Latino Student Association for sharing their time and treats with us during this celebration.

Anna Osterholtz
Fourth Annual AMEC Field Photo Contest

Send an AMEC student into the field to conduct archaeological research! Support a star major!

Donate to the Janet Rafferty Student Fund for Archaeological Survey and to the Richard Marshall Memorial Annual Scholarship.

Contact mgalaty@anthro.msstate.edu.

FIRST PLACE: Jason Irvin (at right) (Photo taken by Jamie Hinrichs.)

SECOND PLACE: Caitlin Ostrowski

THIRD PLACE: Dylan Karges
2016 AMEC Archaeological Survey Field School

From June 13 – July 13, 2016, the AMEC archaeological survey field school was taught in the Big Black River Basin of north-central Mississippi by Cobb Institute archaeologist Jeffrey Alvey. The field school focused on training undergraduate and graduate students in the methods of archaeological survey routinely employed in the southeastern U.S. These included standard survey techniques for the location of previously unrecorded archaeological sites and methods used for preliminary site investigation and mapping. Of equal importance was the understanding students received of how past settlement of the region correlated with environmental variables, and how modern land management practices have affected, and continue to affect, the archaeological record. Using the Big Black River Basin as an outdoor laboratory, students explored the cultural landscape defined by prehistoric Native Americans and early European settlers. Through these explorations, students developed an appreciation for the importance of regional-scale archaeological research and how to design research methodologies for addressing research questions at this scale.

Along with training students in archaeological survey, with special emphasis on how survey is undertaken in both the context of cultural resource management and academic research, the field school also provided support of Jeffrey Alvey’s dissertation research at the University of Missouri, Columbia. Jeffrey’s research is focused on a drainage-wide study of the Big Black River Basin with the goal of modeling population dynamics during the Woodland to Mississippian transition. This effort is especially focused on the nature and timing of the appearance of Mississippian traits in the region, such as the use of mussel shell temper in pottery production.

The efforts of the field school resulted in the identification of 47 previously unrecorded archaeological sites dating to both the prehistoric and historic periods. Additionally, two sites that had been previously recorded as Indian mounds were revisited. Our investigations demonstrated that the supposed mounds are actually geological, rather than cultural, features, and, thus, not constructed by Native Americans.

We want to thank the many individuals whose generosity contributed to the successful execution of the field school. Most importantly, this includes the landowners who allowed us to perform survey on their land: Joseph Guess, Tommy Garrett, Jacques Word, and the Jenkins family. We are also indebted to our archaeological colleague, Cliff Jenkins, who is a MSU alumnus, and currently an archaeologist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Through his connections to farmers in the region, Cliff arranged for all of the land access we were granted. Without his generous assistance, it is unlikely we would have been able to make the connections we made to landowners in the region.

Jeffrey Alvey

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