

Welcome Back!

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As we wrap up the final weeks of summer and look forward to the beginning of the new academic year, I thought I would let you know some of what we have been up to this summer.

Like everyone, our staff and faculty members have been working hard to cope with this challenging new COVID-19 environment. We have juggled setting up home offices, home schooling kids and helping elderly parents while ramping up course development during a time that is normally dedicated to vacations, fieldwork, research and writing. We have risen to the challenge and accomplished a lot, and even managed to squeeze in a bit of R&R too. Here are the highlights.

Undergraduate experience

In May, we decided to move all of our courses for 2020-21 fully online. We are working hard to make the online learning experience a great one. We are committed to offering courses that are challenging, interesting, accessible, and highly relevant to the world as we find it today.

- Many of our instructors took an intensive Online Instructional Skills Workshop with the Centre for Teaching and Learning in June.
- Andrew Walsh has led a collaborative effort to pool OWL tools, best practices and “how tos”.
- We surveyed and had several online “open house” sessions for our undergraduate students to share what does and does not work from their perspective in effective online courses. They have also been working to build up our outreach capacity.
- We hired two interns (Nicole Phillips and Dani Frinton) through a Western program to support online teaching. They assisted with gathering content and advising instructors from a student perspective.
- We got dedicated support from the Centre for Teaching and Learning to help Olga Kharytonava “soup up” the online version of Anthropology 1027 – Introduction to Linguistics.
- Andrew Walsh and Laura Cousins worked hard to make sure all the course outlines match the new requirements.
- Finally, professors in our Department employed 5 students over the summer under Western’s new Undergraduate Summer Research Internship program and several students from our program will participate in Western’s new Peer Mentoring Program for first year students.

As the fall approaches, there are many uncertainties about enrollments and how students will respond to the new 100% online timetable. Several of our students have been active monitoring social media, and they have been great advocates for the Department when others have sought advice. A number of faculty members have also developed info-videos about courses, hoping that this new approach might generate interest in specific topics. Examples can be seen here:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cB8DbWGuLb8&t=3s>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=POYSszWEdN8>
- <https://www.facebook.com/Western-Anthropology-316082931907314/>

We are committed to making the undergraduate student experience in this new virtual environment as effective and engaging as possible!

Graduate Program

Our grad students have shown great flexibility and resilience as COVID disrupted everyone's research plans. With Lisa Hodgetts' and Christine Wall's support, they have forged ahead, modifying their projects, and reorganizing their workflow.

- We received welcome word during the lockdown that a large number of our students received prestigious external scholarships this year. See the full list here: https://anthropology.uwo.ca/graduate/funding_scholarships/award_winners.html
Congratulations to all!
- All of our first year MA students defended their thesis proposals on Zoom, and the first year PhDs have all begun the qualifying exam process – so they have all stayed on schedule despite the pandemic. Several upper year PhD students also submitted their quals. Well done!
- Several students completed and defended their theses this summer: Corbin Berger, Marie-Pier Cantin, Alana Kehoe, Kayla Golay Lausanne, and Wade Paul – congrats to all! Several more are lined up to defend this fall.
- We have an incoming cohort of 17 students, 9 of whom will be in London for the fall term, with the remainder participating remotely (hopefully coming soon!) – welcome to all!

Research

The COVID-19 pandemic created challenges for many of our research programs. Some projects have been halted completely. Others have continued, but with new strategies and approaches. Here are just a few examples:

- I was supposed to be in Peru for May and June to x-ray and CT scan mummies with my “Mummies as Microcosms” team... so much for that plan! However, one benefit of learning the ins and outs of Zoom is that I have continued to work with grad students here

on material we gathered last year, and I have 2 meetings a week with colleagues in Peru to work through CT scans by sharing screens over Zoom. We are also generating content for the website of the Pachacamac Site Museum (in Lima, Peru).

- Lisa Hodgetts has been leading a research team conducting Zoom interviews with Canadian archaeologists from diverse backgrounds about their experiences in the discipline with an eye to making Canadian archaeology more inclusive and equitable. She has also been collaborating virtually with research partners in NWT and BC to expand the Inuvialuit Living History website.
- Pam Block has been organizing a discussion group of disabled Brazilian emerging scholars using OWL as the discussion platform. She received a \$5000 grant from Wenner Gren to support this effort. Several projects are emerging from this effort, including blogs, virtual curricula on eugenics and ableism, a post-COVID Disability Anthropology summer program and more.
- Neal Ferris has been generating video content for the Museum of Ontario Archaeology, including:
 - a description of the Lawson Site (the site at the MOA):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-mNhwXIKiI>
 - and an interview by Neal Ferris with Mima Kapches, formerly of the Royal Ontario Museum
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynw7fE5nKa4>

The Year Ahead

This summer will definitely go down in the history books. I think the perspective of time will show that the small but mighty Anthropology Department has shown great resilience, collaborative spirit and dedication. We look forward to connecting with you all virtually over the coming year. Our seminar and speakers' series will continue online, and both WAGS and the Anthropology Society are planning virtual events.

Welcome back all – *let's get to it.*