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## NEWS

# Studying at UCL Institute of Archaeology: Past and Present

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Ranked in the top 5 in the UK for archaeology, for the 11th year in a row, in *The Guardian University Guide* League Tables.

Ranked in the top five for student satisfaction in *The Complete University Guide* 2018 League Table of UK archaeology departments (published in May 2017).

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### Research-led Teaching

Studying at UCL Institute of Archaeology (IoA) is an experience like no other. Consistently rated one of the best Archaeology departments in the UK, the IoA offers unique opportunities to each of its students, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Students at all stages in their academic careers are encouraged to engage with current archaeological research – guided by a 70-strong academic staff who are amongst the leaders in their field. To all those considering embarking on the adventure of a lifetime, here's how students at the Institute connect and engage with the very best archaeological research the UK has to offer!

With seven undergraduate degree programmes and twenty Masters degrees,

the IoA provides a huge variety of options for its students, covering a vast range of archaeological topics in both theoretical and practical terms (**Fig. 1**). A degree at the Institute aims to challenge student expectations and develop a wide range of transferable skills, so demands time and commitment. Each degree has a distinct character, and is structured around specified core courses and a dissertation.

**Information on both undergraduate and Masters degree courses can be found**



**Figure 1:** PXRf analysis demonstration with current undergraduates (Photo Lisa Daniel).

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**at:** <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/studying>.

Fieldwork also plays a vital role in the student experience, with undergraduates undertaking a minimum of 70 days throughout their three years (funding is available for all undergraduates). We currently have students on excavation in North, South and Central America, Europe, Africa and Asia. Working in the field helps students to gain a better understanding of the quality and range of data that can be collected from excavation and survey, or provides the experience of working at heritage sites or in museums. It offers the chance to travel to parts of the world that they have been learning about in their course work.

The Institute also has the largest and most diverse community of archaeology research students of any university in the world. Our academic staff offer PhD supervision across a wide topical, geographical and chronological range. With the support of a personal supervisor students research an individual topic over three years.

**Information on PhD and staff research interests can be found at:** <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/people>.

### Life at the Institute

Located in the heart of Central London, UCL's campus puts students within easy walking distance of museums, theatres, cultural life and even on-going archaeological excavations. The Institute itself sits on the northern side of Gordon Square, and is home to all our staff, undergraduates, Masters and PhD students. Amongst its many charms, the Institute houses: an exceptional archaeological library, world-renowned collections, laboratories, computing and photographic facilities, and much, much more. All of our students are encouraged to participate in Institute life, with the Society of Archaeological Students (SAS) and the Society of Archaeology Masters Students (SAMS) running a wide range of social and academic events throughout the year.



**Figure 2:** IoA Archaeology and Anthropology student, Bryony Stevens-Young (Photo Bryony Stevens-Young).

### Details of open days can be found at:

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/studying/undergraduate>.

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/studying/masters/degrees>.

### The Student Perspective

Want to know what it is really like to study at the IoA? Here are a few stories from our current students to give you a taste of the student experience.

**Bryony Stevens-Young** (*3<sup>rd</sup> Year Undergraduate BA Archaeology and Anthropology, Leaver 2017*)

"I chose UCL because of the top class rating of the Institute of Archaeology, and because the degree requires 70 days of fieldwork (which is funded). The IoA's emphasis on both practical and theoretical archaeology appealed to me. I was also inspired by the breadth of time and space that the IoA's courses covered, as this gave me such a variety of choice and sparked new interests.

As an Archaeology and Anthropology student (**Fig. 2**), I have studied a wide variety of topics. In Archaeology, my courses have covered the archaeology of Islam in

the Middle East, urbanisation and religion in South Asia, and the African diaspora, as well as the ethics of archaeology's past interaction with indigenous societies around the globe. In Anthropology, I have studied the anthropology of religion, Indian society, material and visual culture, as well as the biological evolution of humankind. Through all these courses, I have gained a deeper understanding and broader perspective of worldwide cultures and the development of humanity, which is important for our increasingly multi-cultural societies.

I participated in the UCL West Sussex training dig, the UCL Tasnad research dig in Romania, a dig in Saveock (Cornwall) and the UCL Elthorne Park (Islington) public outreach dig. I also volunteered at the Museum of London as Visitor Events Manager Assistant during my second and third year, which contributed towards my field days, and gave me valuable experience in a museum context.

My experience of archaeological excavation has been a huge source of interest at job interviews, especially given the wealth of transferable skills involved such as teamwork, initiative, attention to detail and flexibility. Furthermore, the high amount of independent research and presentations undertaken in my degree demonstrates strong written and communication skills. In August 2017, I started a job at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew as the Events Assistant. This role is perfect for me as it combines elements of my degree and interest in heritage, as Kew Gardens is a UNESCO site, and also builds upon my voluntary experience as Visitor Events Manager Assistant at the Museum of London.

I would strongly recommend studying Archaeology at UCL; it is diverse in its expanse of courses and global digging destinations, and provides degrees that open doors to a variety of future career paths. Furthermore, the pastoral support at the IoA is second to none, so you will be well supported throughout your studies. Your degree will expand and transform your understanding and



**Figure 3:** MA student Dominic Pollard during fieldwork at the Roman bath complex in Pollena Trocchia, Italy (Photo Dominic Pollard).

perspective of the world and humanity's place within it".

**Dominic Pollard** (*MA Mediterranean Archaeology*)

"One of the best things about studying archaeology at UCL at graduate level is the range of different courses on offer. When I saw they had a dedicated programme in Mediterranean Archaeology, I knew I had to apply! I had heard really good things about the department from students, and academics at other universities, and it hasn't disappointed (**Fig. 3**).

We undertake a number of mandatory and optional modules on a wide range of topics. These might involve lectures, seminars, or practical classes such as object-handling sessions, often in quite small groups, allowing for really focussed teaching and discussion. Then we are assessed through coursework and a 15,000-word dissertation. The generally exceptional quality of the teaching has been a real stand-out aspect of the course. Seminars

are often lively, with discussions between students actively encouraged. I've also had seminars and object handling sessions in the British Museum, which provided a fascinating chance to get a closer look at one of the world's best archaeological collections.

As somebody that wants to go into academia, I feel my programme has helped me to develop many of the core skills I will draw on in my future working life. Independent thought, considerate debate, good time management (and not to mention faster reading!) are among the many areas I've grown in this year, and which I think would be useful for many career paths, inside and outside archaeology. I am starting a PhD in September here at UCL. I love the department and have found an excellent supervisor who specialises in my area, so it seemed like the obvious choice going forward!"

### Careers: A future in Archaeology

A degree in Archaeology prepares you for work in any sector after graduation, with the most transferable skills of any degree. At the IoA, we have two internal careers advisors, one academic and one professional, to help you throughout your studies. We work closely with the UCL Careers office offering students support, guidance and opportunities leading to careers in Archaeology, Heritage, and related fields. We run annual careers days (open to both undergraduate and postgraduate students) and maintain strong links with London Museums, Heritage organisations and our alumni in order to aid students in securing volunteer positions and extend their experience.

### Alumni Reflections

Graduates from the IoA go on to do amazing things with their degrees, from taking the traditional academic route to being policy makers in government and even becoming well-known TV personalities. Here are a few of their stories.

**Jazmin Sexton** (*MSc Bioarchaeology and Forensic Anthropology 2016*)

"I completed my undergraduate degree in Archaeology at the IoA and having done so, I knew there was nowhere else I could possibly consider to study for my Masters degree. The course itself had put so much energy and drive into my passion for archaeology, everything from the classes, the lecturers, the practical excavations (**Fig. 4**) and even the enthusiastic attitude of every single member of the IoA, had contributed to the experience.

When it came to choosing my Masters, the fact that UCL had one of the very few courses in Forensic Anthropology, with a link into Archaeology, definitely put it in the top spot. Having some of the best lecturers in the world for my specific subject, and my past enthusiasm for UCL there was really no other place for me to go. The Institute has such a family-like supportive environment, the classes are a good size and your lecturers are so easy to contact; they even know your name!

My studies in Bioarchaeology and Forensic Anthropology were truly amazing. Despite having a rather tough personal year, the year of my Masters was the best year I'd ever had in education. I was excited to go to every class as I was so keen to find out what we were going to be taught that day. The best part of the course was the practical aspect; almost every class contained a practical element which I believe is key when studying subjects such as this. The study collections we had available to us at the Institute were brilliant.



**Figure 4:** IoA alumna Jazmin Sexton on excavation (Photo Jazmin Sexton).

However, what made this course a step above the rest was the ability to use the Wellcome Museum of Anatomy and Pathology at the Royal College of Surgeons. Unfortunately, it is currently closed for refurbishment but I'm sure it will be a major part of the course once it is open again.

I am currently an archaeological researcher at CgMS planning consultants. In this job I use all the skills I learnt as an undergrad and the additional skills I learnt throughout my Masters. I research sites and plots of land before they are built on to advise consultants and clients of the archaeological potential. With my background I already know what key things I'm looking for. I'm often asked to go to sites to shed light on things I may be able to recognise that others cannot, especially sites with burials. As I am the only person in the office with human remains and osteological knowledge, I am often consulted when burials appear unexpectedly at some of our sites. Too many institutions allow their archaeological students to complete an archaeology degree without any fieldwork skills, UCL does not allow this and in my opinion it is completely the right decision. No archaeological student should be allowed into the world of archaeology without knowing how to use a trowel!"

**Owen O'Donnell** (*BA Archaeology, 2005, MSc in Palaeoanthropology and Palaeolithic Archaeology, 2013*)

"I first went into higher education as a mature student when I was 30. My interviews for several universities all happened in one long week of travelling, taking tests and talking about my interest in archaeology. A busy week, but it helped me to compare the various colleges I might be attending. The Institute of Archaeology at UCL stood out for me; the facilities were superb, but more importantly the staff were so welcoming and friendly, without a trace of self-importance. They were happy to welcome a budding student (who knew nothing) into their offices and labs, explaining in simple terms what

they were working on and why it was important. That open approach continued throughout my undergraduate years – it was always possible to knock on someone's door and have an informal chat with them about their specialism, regardless of whether they were a caretaker or a professor. The focus is very much on knowledge and learning, not hierarchy and power.

I graduated with a BA in Archaeology in 2005, and returned to UCL to study for an MSc in Palaeoanthropology and Palaeolithic Archaeology, from which I graduated in 2013. I've been actively involved in fieldwork at a variety of sites in southern England throughout this time – though these have been almost entirely Medieval, Roman and Prehistoric sites, rather than anything of the kind of time depth of the Palaeolithic. There aren't really that many Palaeolithic sites to get my teeth into in the UK, thanks to the glaciers of the last Ice Age (they tended to erase everything under them, and they covered most of the UK) (**Fig. 5**).

I've always been a hands-on student; working with the materials helps you to understand thoughts and processes that a practitioner from the deep past would also have experienced. It also helps you to gain a deep understanding of the raw materials,



**Figure 5:** IoA alumnus Owen O'Donnell in Athens in 2016 (Photo Owen O'Donnell).

which provides insights when you encounter the same materials in the archaeological record. I practise flint knapping, woodworking with flint tools, bone working, horn and antler working and other Palaeolithic-era technologies. My degrees really helped me to focus on these skills and develop other related practical skills, as well as to put my replica-making skills to good use. Thanks to my time at UCL I've been able to make replicas of Palaeolithic artefacts for research purposes and for museum displays, and I've taught sessions in making and using Palaeolithic projectile weapons at the UCL IoA annual undergraduate experimental

archaeology field course, fondly nicknamed 'PrimTech'.

Today I live in Andalucía, where I've been for eight months. I'm putting some of my practical skills to good use restoring a large, traditionally-built building, with a view to using it to run a small archaeology field school. There's a good deal for a Palaeolithic specialist to enjoy in Spain, too – in recent years it's become a goldmine for students of our family tree in the period before *Homo sapiens* reached Europe. When I get some time off from dressing wooden beams and stones for walls, I'm looking forward to some Palaeolithic fieldwork here".

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