

## 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 10<sup>th</sup> year in a row, in *The Guardian University Guide* League Tables.

Ranked in the top five for student satisfaction in *The Complete University Guide* 2017 League Table of UK archaeology departments (published in May 2016).

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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 very best Archaeology departments in the UK, the IoA offers a unique experience for 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 six 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 from both theoretical and practical points of view (**Fig. 1**). Every 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 degrees can be found 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 offers them the experience of



**Figure 1:** Undergraduate students learning how to identify and measure animal bones (Photo Lisa Daniel).

working at heritage sites or in museums, and 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, Master's 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.

#### **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's 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.

**Lawrence Rees** (*3rd Year Undergraduate; Leaver 2016*)

'I chose the IoA because it is truly global in its outlook, with its academic focus in so many different parts of the world, but also because of the students who come here. It

has been very exciting to learn from specialists looking at such a diverse range of places and periods, and I feel like my time here has transformed my academic perspectives, and indeed my overall world-view.

For my dissertation, I undertook a landscape study in my native County Durham, and it was striking how my time at the IoA had transformed the way I understood a landscape so familiar to me. Before my degree, I saw my local area from a slightly romantic, parochial perspective, whereas I was now aware and critical of my own theoretical frameworks, and was able to place it within a wider context. I was able to use skills I had developed, both in desk based research but also in the field, whether from Mark Robert's survey course, James Steele's project in Knoydart, or with my work in Uzbekistan with UNESCO (**Fig. 2**).

For me, the single greatest strength of the IoA is the breadth of research undertaken here, the cross-pollination between sub-disciplines that this allows, and the opportunities this presents for undergraduates.'



**Figure 2:** Lawrence Rees surveying the Muhammad Amin-khan Madrassah, Itchen Kala, Uzbekistan (Photo Lawrence Rees).

**Iida Kayhko** (*3rd Year Undergraduate; Leaver 2016*)

'I came to London with very little knowledge about what exactly a degree in archaeology would entail. All I knew was that I wanted to do archaeology – to really *do* it, in the field, not just in lectures. I chose to come to the Institute because of the option of doing a full ten weeks of fieldwork – and because, much as I view London and its museums as emblems of colonial looting, there are few better places to easily access the material culture of all of past humanity.

I have spent a month on the shore of the Sea of Galilee in northern Israel with the Tel Bet Yerah project, digging every day from sunrise in the ruins of an Early Bronze Age city. I have also travelled to Naples to dig with the Apolline Project (**Fig. 3**), where I spent two weeks excavating at a Roman villa and wandering around Pompeii and Herculaneum. Not only were these digs amazing experiences in the gritty (very literally) side of archaeology, teaching me how to trowel, shovel and sift, but they also gave me the opportunity to really immerse myself in archaeology. Over the course of



**Figure 3:** Iida Kayhko surveying in Naples (Photo Iida Kayhko).

carrying out fieldwork in the past three years, someone seems to have removed my blinkers and exposed me to the deep and wide past of humanity. This is the greatest thing I could have wished to gain from my degree.

I came to the Institute because I wanted a connection with the human past. Having had the human past find its way beneath my fingernails and onto my sprawling bookshelf over the past three years, all I can say is that I owe an enormous debt to everyone at the Institute for enabling and encouraging this mutual obsession we all share – and for building a community where getting excited about baby mandibles is normal and acceptable. Archaeology is an eye-opening, life-changing degree that exposes you to all of humanity and its past. I can't think of a single more exciting and worthwhile degree to do, or any better place to do it than the Institute.'

**Tristan French** (*MA Public Archaeology*)

'Studying in London was always a personal goal of mine. This is more than likely due to the extended amount of time I would spend in this city over the summer months (to escape the now hottest country in the world!). A UCL alumnus (who also happened to be my cousin) had just completed her BA in Anthropology and that instantly intrigued me, and I started delving into more and more research about University College London. It was during said delving that I stumbled across the Institute of Archaeology, and instantly knew that this offered the perfect degree for me to pursue (despite knowing next to nothing about the discipline at the time).

Starting as an Undergraduate in 2011, I was surprised to find just how personal and attentive the Institute was. It was both refreshing and reassuring to know that every member of staff, whether it be your personal tutor, your degree co-ordinator or the central administrator, everybody was around to help at all times. This definitely made the transition into university life easier for me. What truly set this degree apart from others however, was the fieldwork requirement.

Undergraduate archaeology students are required to fulfil 70 days (at least) of archaeological fieldwork, ranging from excavation, to laboratory work to archiving. This didn't feel at all like a requirement, as the Institute offered more than enough avenues of fieldwork to go down, and I was able to excavate in some truly amazing places as a result.

Currently I'm studying for my Masters in Public Archaeology and could not be happier with that choice. With such enthusiastic degree co-ordinators and tutors, I and my fellow students have had the opportunity to converse with experts in the field and with high ranking academic archaeologists. We have also been able to visit some key sites and museums across the UK (including an up-close and personal tour of Stonehenge) (**Fig. 4**) increasing my ever-growing love for the discipline. I have been able to pursue my true interests, focusing on both archaeology's relationship with the media, and archaeology in conflict zones, in order to



**Figure 4:** Tristan French: 'Probably the best moment of my archaeological life, walking through the stones at Stonehenge' (Photo Tristan French).

truly understand the ways in which archaeology can relate to the public.

Overall, the Institute of Archaeology has made me more well rounded as a person. I am now definitely more relaxed than when I started and can now attempt new endeavours with an unfamiliar confidence that I would not have otherwise.

### **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 regarding 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 Bodies and our Alumni to aid students in securing volunteer positions in their spare time.

### **Alumni Reflections**

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

#### **Eduardo Escalante** (*MA Managing Archaeological Sites 2012–2013*)

In the beginning, it seemed almost impossible for me to study a Masters degree abroad. I chose UCL's Institute of Archaeology for its specialist programme in the field of archaeological heritage management, but I needed a scholarship. I found CONACyT (National Council of Science and Technology), the main scholarship programme in Mexico for postgraduate studies within the country or abroad. I was aware that CONACyT prioritises scientific study, and archaeology is not one of them, but I tried anyway. I was successful in getting a partial scholarship, and then UCL and the Institute of Archaeology

made my academic dream possible – I was accepted to the MA programme. However, I had to hold my place for a year in order to get the economic resources I needed. Lisa Daniel (Graduate Administrator) told me about the complementary grants that I was able to apply for as an overseas student and more specifically as a Mexican. I successfully applied for the UCL Santander Scholarship, then UCL covered a percentage of the tuition fees because of an agreement with CONACyT. Suddenly, a year later, I was on a plane to London, on the very symbolic date of September 16<sup>th</sup> 2012, the day of the Mexican Independence.

I share this part of my story just to let you know how hard I tried to make this possible, and how the IoA's guidance was crucial. So I spent a year earning a Masters degree in Managing Archaeological Sites under the supervision of Tim Williams. I immediately fell in love with the MA programme, and with the content, with all the incredible speakers, with my classmates/friends, with the IoA's environment, with the library, and with the campus. Everything! The main thing I noticed from the MA course was that the academic staff were so supportive of my academic interests, so I was able to do my MA dissertation research about Mexico City, about my home country. Here I should also thank Tim Schadla-Hall and Gabe Moshenska for opening my eyes about public archaeology in Mexico, and Chiara Bonacchi and Daniel Pett for their insights into digital heritage. I felt supported all the way long, on both academic and personal levels.

Kirsty Norman and Tim Williams recommended that I do a placement outside the UK, and if I wanted to, I could do a second placement in London to get an even fuller experience. Which I did. Kirsty and Tim helped me to go to Uzbekistan, a country that I never imagined visiting. That experience changed my perspective of Cultural Heritage Management and shaped my current professional journey. I spent a month in Bukhara, where I met Ona Vileikis, Tatiana Trudolubova and Sanjar Allayarov, now my colleagues and friends. I worked on the

Management Plan for the Bukhara Project and co-ordinated the Chor Bakr Condition Assessment. This experience was so encouraging and life changing that I went back in 2015, invited by Ona and Sanjar because of my previous experience, so I could co-ordinate the fieldwork in Samarkand.

After my encouraging experience at the IoA, I finally did my MA dissertation on the interpretation and management of archaeological sites within Mexico City's Historic Centre. Since then I have specialised in issues of management and conservation of archaeological sites in modern urban contexts and this made it possible to find the right work place once I got back to Mexico. Although it took me about 6 months to find a job, I finally found work in the Sites Operation Department of the National Institute of Anthropology and History in Mexico City (**Fig. 5**). This Department is responsible for the management of all the archaeological sites open to the public in the country – a huge challenge because I am responsible to develop management strategies and to

coordinate the elaboration of management plans. Today, 3 years after my studies at the IoA, I still go back to my MA notes and experiences to be a better professional archaeologist, always thankful to all the people that made my professional development possible.

**Paul McGarrity** (*BA Archaeology, 2006*)

Since graduating I have worked in commercial archaeology for almost a decade (**Fig. 6**) and I have been performing stand up comedy since the summer of 2009, but it was only a couple of years ago that I decided to combine the two. Ever since, my life has become far more unpredictable and exciting. My fairly unique approach to comedy has seen me perform in some unusual locations including at a conference for historians of science, in several breweries (in which all of the gigs were surprisingly well run) and even in an inflatable tent next to Hadrian's wall. The audiences I've performed to have also been a diverse bunch; students, pensioners, whole rooms full of children and even the occasional stag and hen night. Getting people to



**Figure 5:** Eduardo Escalante supervising the condition assessment of the pre-Hispanic archaeological remains within the National Palace, in Mexico City (2015) (Photo Eduardo Escalante).



**Figure 6:** Paul McGarrity on the Curtain Theatre site with MOLA (*Museum of London Archaeology*) (Photo Paul McGarrity/MOLA).

laugh in comedy clubs at historically accurate jokes about Vikings is admittedly an unusual method of public engagement, but I can assure you that it is definitely thrilling.

My time performing stand up, and in theatre shows like ‘Knightmare Live!’, of which I was a cast member for three years, has sharpened my ability to talk in front of groups and this in turn has fed back into my work as an archaeologist. Public engagement is, I feel, one of the most important aspects of archaeology. It’s important to document sites and research our history, but if we didn’t share our findings with a wider audience it would be nothing but an academic echo chamber.

In recent years I have been lucky enough to work on several sites where outreach programs within the local community have been key elements of the project. I’ve led public tours around sites, worked with visiting school groups and even popped up on TV occasionally (mostly walking past far enough in the background that my Nanna still doesn’t believe it’s me). These events can be exhausting – at a recent site I was taking a

45 minute tour starting every hour on the hour for six hours, which sounds more like the set up for an elaborate bet rather than a program of work. However, the overwhelming sense of excitement from the groups I was showing around always made up for my exhaustion.

I’ve found that archaeology and comedy are surprisingly comfortable bedfellows and I’m interested to see where mixing them together will take me next. Plans in the next few years include writing a stage show for children based around the archaeological process and possibly making a few more videos poking fun at history documentaries (I’ve got one on YouTube called ‘Punkspeare’ if you find yourself with a spare 4 minutes). Before all that though, in August I have another hour of stand up called ‘Ask an Archaeologist’. It should be funny, but if not at the very least an audience might learn something by surprise, and I get to talk about a career I love.’

### **Competing Interests**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

**How to cite this article:** Frearson, C and Rando, C 2016 Studying at UCL Institute of Archaeology: Past and Present. *Archaeology International*, No. 19: pp. 18–25, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/ai.1904>

**Published:** 12 December 2016

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