2017 ACUA Panel Recap: Where Education and the Professional World Collide

We hope you had a great time in Fort Worth, Texas at the 2017 Society for Historical Archaeology conference! This year’s ACUA forum, titled “Where Education and the Professional World Collide: A Discussion on the ACUA’s Maritime Archaeology Job Market Survey”, was a great success and we appreciate the support from all who attended. For those who could not make it, or for those who did and want a recap, this newsletter will discuss some of the highlights from our 2017 panel.

First, some background information: In 2015, the ACUA created a survey for students and professionals asking participants to rank professional skills on a scale from “Not Important” to “Very Important”. The survey identified a few discrepancies in how employers and students valued certain skill sets; thus, the 2017 ACUA Panel was developed to bridge this perception gap.

The following highlights some of the key questions asked during our Job Market Survey Panel. The answers are intended to provide students with insight on how to be a more competitive candidate in the underwater archaeology job market and help students navigate their time in academia.

>> CONT. PAGE TWO
2017 Panel

QUESTION 1: “How do you qualify/quantify job experience? Most students have mainly field school experience, but according to the ACUA Job Market Survey, employers seem to prefer individuals with 5+ years of experience. What do you recommend to supplement only field school experience? For students who are able to receive jobs immediately upon graduation, what do you see as their advantage over other students?”

Answer: Seek volunteer experiences and diversify your skill sets. Volunteer experience not only looks great on a CV, it exposes the participant to a wider range of activities they may not have otherwise engaged in. Say you’re interested mostly in diving – that’s fine, but don’t hesitate to pick up an opportunity in the lab! Conservation is a critical part of underwater archaeology, and even if that’s not where you see yourself heading in the future, the experience and understanding of what conservation requires will put you ahead. Less traditional volunteer opportunities are also useful. Policy has a major impact on how, when, where, and why archaeologists get to work. Public engagement and outreach are also very necessary skills for archaeologists. Get involved with your community, and seek out any preservation or outreach opportunities they may provide. And don’t think you need to stick to just underwater archaeology, terrestrial archaeology provides plenty of room to learn methods, theories, techniques, and skills. Show your future employer you care about the field, pay it forward and volunteer!

Q 2: “Do you feel that university curricula accurately prepare students for jobs in your various sectors? Are there some universities whose programs are better aligned to meeting professional requirements of underwater archaeologists? Further, many students indicated skills such as 3D imaging to be “very important,” while employers found these specializations to be less important for hiring purposes. What kinds of employment opportunities are available for students who wish to pursue more specialized interests in the field? Finally, what are some examples of other markets graduates may be able to tap into with their degrees?”

Answer: Universities can prepare you for the job market, but it’s up to individual students to find their way into a niche – regardless of the university with which they are affiliated. Think broadly about the job opportunities for underwater archaeologists, and always take initiative. It’s pretty unlikely that you’re going to graduate from a university and find yourself in your dream job right away. Look at what jobs are available now, and feel free to assume these are the same sorts of jobs that will be available when you graduate. If the job description doesn’t exactly match what it is you want to do, that’s fine! It’s better to get your foot in the door and broaden your experience. Other job markets that graduates might have access to include heritage legislation, tourism, drafting, contract writing, and data processing. Once you have found yourself in a job position, take initiative to be involved in things that interest you. Go the extra mile. Make the position you are in the one you want it to be. And remember, patience is key.

Q 3: “No museums formally participated in the ACUA Jobs Market Survey. As a result, employers generally listed skills related to curation and museum studies as somewhat important/not relevant for specific knowledge and experience of new employees. Can those of you on the panel with museum experience provide a brief summary of those skills that you do find important in new employees (whether or not you are in charge of hiring)?”

Answer: Conservation and collection management. Again, it’s always useful to seek out volunteer opportunities or internships to gain experience and get your foot in the door. [Author’s note: If you’re pursuing conservation, a background in chemistry probably won’t hurt you, either. Remember – think broad and diversify!]

Q 4: “Almost 72% of students concluded that archaeology experience, i.e. excavation, was “very important,” while only 14% of employers thought that it was “very important”. Why the discrepancy? Are most jobs in underwater archaeology related to survey and report writing? Or, do employers feel like this experience is something better learned on the job and other skills are more important for initial hiring?”

Answer: Because there is such a broad range of job possibilities for graduates in maritime history and archaeology, and because archaeological endeavors tend to involve a multitude of interdisciplinary tasks, it is generally better for students to leave the door open for a more varied skill set. This makes the world of gainful employment far more accessible. Bringing diversified and innovative capabilities to any project not only makes you more marketable, but it keeps the entire field fresh and in forward motion. Keep in mind archaeologists work in teams – you don’t have to be an expert in everything you do to have a seat at the table.

In instances where a job does want you to be highly specialized in a skill, (i.e., rebreathers and technical diving) it is very likely you will receive this training on the job. Employers often want you to be trained to company standards, regardless of whether or not you have had simi-
lar training elsewhere. You will probably even be issued specific equipment for completing the task, so don’t worry about spending exorbitant amounts of money on highly specialized equipment. While being highly proficient in a specific skill set will not hurt you, it may cost you money and time that you could have saved.

Q 5: “Are there any different skills not addressed in the ACUA Jobs Market Survey that you would like to see in new hires? Are these skills that you believe universities should be incorporating into their curricula for underwater archaeology students?”

Answer: Interpersonal skills were repeatedly emphasized throughout the panel discussion. Flexibility, teamwork, collegiality, and persistence were all specifically identified. Other skills included writing, solid field principles in terrestrial archaeology, and remote sensing. Special attention was brought to the importance of formulating a good cover letter, effectively writing and formatting a CV, proper email etiquette, and public speaking.

When you submit a job application, your cover letter serves many of the same functions as a writing sample for getting into grad school. Similarly, your CV often gives an employer the first impressions of a candidate. If you want to stand out, your CV should stand out – preferably in a good way. Refer to our section “A Few Tips for Drafting and Promoting Your CV” for more information on how to stand out as a candidate on paper.

The importance of composing a solid email was echoed many times throughout the discussion. Be mindful of how you compose your email! Manners matter, and poor manners will not go unnoticed. Think of your first email almost as a formal letter: head it properly, make sure the body is concise, polite, and free of technical errors, and conclude it with an appropriate salutation and your contact information. Sometimes you don’t know who’s reading these things, or who the recipient is talking to. Also, good manners are always a virtue.

Sometimes, job candidates might have the opportunity to meet potential employers before applying for a job, which can be great for the candidate - it really helps if a hiring manager can put a face to a name. If you’re generally timid speaking to strangers, push yourself. Talking about something that you’re interested in gives you an opportunity to comfortably communicate about something, and shows a potential employer that you have passion. If you’re the opposite and prone to bragging: perhaps tone it down a notch – actions speak louder than words. All of the rules of written etiquette apply when you meet someone face-to-face. Mind your manners, your language, and be nice. Keep in mind: often, archaeological projects necessitate teams working together in close quarters for long periods of time. It is important for future employers to know that you are someone they can work with in close quarters.

Q 6: “Though employers seemed to indicate a need for a broader range of job qualifications, some skills were consistently marked as being considered “more important” than others. Included among these were report writing and public speaking. For students who have very little work experience and are coming into jobs out of graduate school, report writing and public speaking may not have played a large role in their education. What are some ways that students can earn some more experience in these categories?”

Answer: Participation in conferences is an excellent way for students to enhance their public speaking skills and to gain opportunities for published papers. A student who’s inexperienced in public speaking might find it useful to hone their skills at smaller, regional conferences before feeling comfortable addressing large audiences. Once you’ve given a paper at a conference, you can submit it to be published in the conference proceedings, thus adding a new publication to your resume. But conference participation is not the only way to heighten your paper writing and public speaking abilities.

Getting involved with projects at your university might land you an opportunity to co-author an academic paper. Or, you might be able to submit your own work to a journal for review and publication. Contributing to newsletters, albeit quite different than report writing, is yet another way for students to produce published materials. Volunteering to speak at a local group or association, symposium, or in front of a classroom is a worthwhile endeavor to bring archaeology to the public, build your CV, and build confidence.

Q 7: “With technological advances, do you see any changes in the field of underwater archaeology, and can you comment on the trajectory of the field? Do you anticipate any changes in desired job skills, or markets, as the field progresses? What can students do to stay ahead of the hiring curve?”

Answer: The best thing to do is to be aware of technological advances as they happen. That way, you will know what sort of resources and options are available, how they are beneficial, and you have a better chance at gaining first-hand experiences with cutting-edge technologies. Currently, GIS, remote sensing, drones, aerial imaging, and 3D modeling are all very important skills to have at least some knowledge of, if not experience with. However, it is important to maintain a broad perspective when it comes to understanding the usefulness of technological skills. Social media experience, website design, and app production can position you to aid in public and touristic archaeology projects. Big data visualization is also a rapidly developing field. Not only can big data visualization help synthesize broader patterns of culture as an intellectual pursuit, it can aid in informing and directing public policy.

We are always looking to showcase new research! If you are out in the field, or on cutting-edge new research, we want to hear about it!
2017 ACUA Photo Competition Winners

Congratulations to the winners of the ACUA 2017 Photo and Video Competition, and a warm thank you to all of the participants that made our contest a lively success. 2017 saw the most entries ever with 74 submittals! We can’t wait to see what images 2018 brings. The 2017 photo competition will remain posted on the ACUA website (www.acuaonline.org) for everyone to enjoy!

Category A: Color Archaeological Site
1st Samuel Haskell - Emerald Bay Photogrammetry, Lake Tahoe, California, 2016
2nd Jason Boroughs – Ancestors, Mount Vernon
3rd Hunter Whitehead - A Navy F8F Bearcat: Lost at Sea, Pensacola, Florida (People’s Choice)

Category B: Color Archaeological Field Work in Progress
1st Michael Murray and Joshua Marano - Underwater Laser Scanning of "Mandalay" Bow Section in Biscayne National Park at Night, Florida
2nd Lindsay Kiel - Measuring for STU Setup, River Street Archaeological Project, Boise, Idaho (People’s Choice)
3rd Jason Boroughs – Those Unknown II, Mount Vernon

Category C: Color Archaeological Lab Work in Progress
1st Austin George – Using the Munsell Soil Chart, Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project, Niles Michigan (People’s Choice)

Category D: Color Artifact
1st Kerry Gonzalez - "A Night with Venus, A Lifetime with Mercury" An Examination of a 19th Century Medicine Bottle From a Civil War-Era Burial, Prince Hall Lodge Site, Virginia (People’s Choice)
2nd Terry Brock – Mr. Madison’s Wine, Montpellier
3rd Sierra Medellin - Cutting Edge, Mount Vernon

Category E: Black & White Image
1st John Cardinal – Lock Fragment, Fort Michilimackinac, Mackinaw City, Michigan, and part of Mackinac State Historic Parks (People’s Choice)

Category F: Color Archaeological Portrait
1st Katie Clevenger - Preparing for a Cold Water Dive, Atlanta wreck site, Lake Michigan, Wisconsin (People’s Choice)
2nd Mark Kostro - Alexa Screening, Martin’s Hundred, James City County, Virginia
3rd (tied) Mary Petrich-Guy - Macy, Castle Coop Interior. James Castle House Archaeology Project in Boise, Idaho
3rd (tied) John Cardinal – Alex examining an Artifact, Fort Michilimackinac, Mackinaw City, Michigan, part of Mackinac State Historic Parks.

Category G: Diversity
1st Terry Brock – Family Fun, Montpellier (People’s Choice)
2nd Lynn Harris - Centro Comunitario de Buceo, Costa Rica

Category H: Artist’s Perspective (Illustration)
1st Kristina Fricker – Elephant Effigy Candlestick, no provenance (People’s Choice)
2nd John Cardinal - Fireplace Structural Stone in Field Notes Fort Michilimackinac, Mackinaw City, Michigan, part of Mackinac State Historic Parks.
3rd Kristina Fricker – Silver Fork, from an 18th century Spanish shipwreck, Florida

Category I: Archaeological Video
1st Michael Thomin – Public Involvement at the 1559 Luna Settlement Site, Florida (People’s Choice)

Q 8: “Outside of the academic realm, what advantages are there to students with a doctoral degree, as opposed to those with an M.A./M.S.?”

Answer: A master’s level degree, on its own, will help you gain employment for an entry-level position in underwater archaeology or a related field. From there, you will need to pave your own way to supervisory roles through initiative, patience, and perseverance. Often, it is not necessary to hold a PhD to reach supervisory status. However, a PhD is often valued and preferred if you want to become a division head, or to be listed as first author on a report. Holding a PhD can also be highly beneficial when it comes to grant writing. Before pursuing a PhD, it is worthwhile to explore funding options. Can you get the University to cover the bill? Or, can you get an employer to pay for your PhD? Sometimes, the value of a PhD is so great that a company might be willing to foot the bill for your education. If you are working for a governmental agency, some states offer free or discounted college courses to state employees. A final consideration before taking the PhD route is the high level of specialization that comes along with the distinguished position. A PhD might place you in a restrictive niche. To combat this, be sure to keep your eyes open for innovative ways your skills might be able to cross over into broader and varied job markets.

Thank you again to those who were able to attend our 2017 Panel, and a special thank you to those who organized and participated in this great discussion.
ACTION NEEDED: Participation in our Email Server

Part of the role of an ACUA Graduate Student Representative is to help fellow students find jobs and to encourage student participation in conferences. In fulfilling this duty, we post every job opportunity, internship, scholarship, and call for papers that we hear about to our Facebook page (which we encourage you all to Like and Follow). However, we recognize that student life can be busy and offer little time for social media. We would like to be able to send job and internship opportunities directly to students by way of the ACUA Graduate Student list to ensure students hear about important opportunities, and are able to meet (sometimes tight) application deadlines.

When you signed up to be a part of our email list serve, we explicitly stated that we would only use the email system to broadcast our newsletter. We want to honor our word to you, and not fill your inbox with unwanted emails. If you want to OPT OUT of receiving email notifications about such job, internship, scholarship, and conference opportunities, please contact us and let us know. We will do our very best to make sure that you do not receive information you are not interested in. If you have questions, concerns, or comments about the use of our email server, we would love to hear from you. We look forward to your feedback, and hope that together we can find the best ways to serve students.

Contact: Arlice Marionneaux or Keilani Hernandez at grad-rep@acuaonline.org

New ACUA Grad Representative

Keilani Hernandez
M.A. Candidate
Historical Archaeology
University of West Florida

I am from LaBelle, Florida and received my Bachelor of Arts from the University of West Florida (UWF) in Anthropology, concentrating on archaeology with a minor in Spanish. I am currently in my second semester of pursuing a M.A. in Historical Archaeology focusing on maritime archaeology. I was fortunate enough to receive the Florida Public Archaeology Network’s 2016 assistantship and am working with one of the post-doctorate staff assessing Public Archaeology programs. I have participated in both terrestrial and maritime archaeological projects and am professionally interested in maritime archaeology and landscapes, public archaeology, and conservation techniques.

Maritime archaeology has always been a passion of mine, and I am excited to work with ACUA for the next few years. I was drawn to ACUA’s focus on diversity and ethics because I believe that these aspects are extremely important. I love how this international organization embodies a global perspective, allowing myself and others to see the connectedness of archaeology and maritime archaeology throughout the world.