The Department of Anthropology Newsletter
Fall 2011

From the Department Head
Dr. Andrew Kramer

It's been a long-time coming but I'm very pleased to share with you Anthropology's first newsletter in over a decade.

As you'll read in its pages, the department is enjoying a period of unprecedented growth with many new faces having been added to our faculty during the last several years. Our undergraduate program continues to thrive and applications for admission into our graduate programs are among the highest in the College of Arts and Sciences. In the next few paragraphs, I'll summarize the progress we've made and highlight the recent accomplishments of our students and faculty.

Anthropology students can now earn an Honors Major that involves close interaction with their instructors at the introductory levels and culminates with their production of a senior honors thesis in collaboration with their faculty advisor. Anthropology majors also have a number of unique research and volunteer opportunities with individual faculty and departmental centers including the Forensic Anthropology Center (FAC) and its Anthropological Research Facility (ARF), and the Archaeological Research Laboratory (ARL).

Students participated during this past summer in the inaugural Gulu Study and Service Abroad Program (GSSAP) in Uganda. Archaeological field schools directed by our faculty have recently been offered for our students in central Tennessee, Virginia, and on the Caribbean island of St. Kitts.

Our graduate student accomplishments brilliantly reflect the education, training and mentorship they've received from our faculty. Recently, anthropology grad students have been recognized by the University for "Professional Promise" and have been awarded for their research by the American Association of Forensic Sciences and the American Association of Physical Anthropology. Other students have received highly competitive and prestigious grants and fellowships from the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and the National Institutes of Justice (NIJ).

(Continued on page 3)

Life and social justice in the Horn of Africa

One recurring theme in the social sciences is that you don’t choose your research, your research chooses you. In the case of Dr. Tricia Redeker Hepner, that statement encapsulates her road to anthropology.

Although Hepner has always been interested in African trading and politics sparked by living in Harlem while getting her undergraduate degree at Barnard University, she never thought that she would be studying African conflict zones throughout her career.

When Hepner first visited Eritrea in 1995, she was expecting to study the post-conflict cultural revolution after a 30 year war that basically closed the country off to the rest of the world. Suddenly, the society, the land and the culture were open for study, and Hepner went with the intention of researching what was then considered the most promising post-conflict political transition on the continent.

“I wanted to understand how do people cope with the legacies of violence and trauma. What was the relationship between refugees and what was going on? So all of these different questions subsequently became the points of focus for my own work,” said Hepner. “I was introduced to them in an incredibly concentrated way, in that one summer in 1995.”

After her initial introduction, and her newfound fascination with the Horn of Africa region, Hepner decided to focus her doctoral research on Eritrea. However, she did not expect that the country would yet again be thrust into violence during her time examining the society.

In 1998, Hepner went back to Eritrea to work on her language skills, but a week or two into her trip, Ethiopia began to bomb Asmara, the capital city where Hepner was staying.

(Continued on page 2)
“I remember I was riding in a taxi cab full of other people, and I had never heard the sound of bombs fall and hit the earth in my life. I thought it was thunder, I didn’t know what it was,” said Hepner. “I was jammed in this taxi cab full of people and everyone was excited and talking all at once, and my language skills weren’t very good, but I could catch a few words here and there like ‘bomb’ or ‘airport.’ Within a couple hours, the streets were mobbed full of people waving flags that were engaged in a militant outpouring of nationalism calling for revenge and to attack Ethiopia.”

Hepner was evacuated that day by the United States embassy as Ethiopia dropped bombs on Asmara, the capital city where Hepner was meant to be researching for the summer. From then on, Eritrea has been steeped in violence, political turmoil and human rights violations. Hepner made these issues the focus of her career, and returned to the new country in 2001 to continue her dissertation work.

“That was when there was real criticism coming from the student and private presses, which was the beginning of the real fearsome authoritarian turn the government took. People were disappearing on a daily basis, people that I was interviewing for my work,” said Hepner. “I don’t think they were disappearing because I was interviewing them, but I don’t think it was a coincidence that the people I was most interested in interviewing were the same people that were the most critical of the government.”

Hepner, at times, even became an activist against the human rights violations committed by the government, especially after the political imprisonment and execution of her friend and colleague, the journalist, Joshua Yohannes. After his arrest in 2001, Hepner became very vocal, speaking out against the authoritarian turn of the Eritrean government, potentially putting her informants and even herself in a more dangerous position.

“That people that knew me, that were seen with me, were more vulnerable than I was. It was more likely that the government would imprison and harm them, not me,” said Hepner, “but I was hounded constantly by security agents, and I was picked up and put in their cars and questioned about my research, and ultimately I made the decision to leave rather rapidly because I really did feel like I was putting people at risk.”

Hepner hasn’t returned to Eritrea since her last visit in 2001 due in part to the fact that her research interests would prevent her from being granted a visa, but she has continued working with Eritreans, particularly refugees, in the United States, Europe and Ethiopia.

Today, Hepner’s work focuses on the lived experience of Eritrean refugees. The first step in immigration from Eritrea is becoming a refugee across the border in Ethiopia, and that is where Hepner’s research begins.

“People leave Eritrea and go to Ethiopia, the place of first asylum, and from there, they have a couple of different options,” said Hepner. “They can wait in the refugee camps and maybe be resettled in the US. That’s one area I’m interested in, the experience of being in a refugee camp, not just how they’re treated by humanitarian organizations and the resettlement procedures, but the politics that drove people out of Eritrea to reconstitute themselves in a camp.”

Hepner is also researching the comparative experiences of those living as refugees in the United States and German as well as why they chose to seek asylum in North America versus Europe. Many refugees chose to seek asylum in Europe because of familial networks that create a safer atmosphere, however, many European nations do not take part in refugee resettlement programs, creating many more obstacles governing resettlement. Another major issue haunting Eritrean refugees is the control the Eritrean government holds over their expatriot communities. The diaspora is subjected to taxes levied by the Eritrean government that, if left unpaid, can lead to the institutionalized exploitation of family members still in the country.

Although Hepner never expected her first trip to Eritrea to inform the rest of her academic career, she still understands and accepts that her field of study, however unpleasant, is necessary for the advancement of human rights and social justice.

“I thought I was going to be charting the development of this exemplary new African country,” explained Hepner, “and instead I ended up studying the poster child for human rights abuses and cyclical violence. I didn’t choose those topics, they chose me.”
Our former students are now making direct impacts on the field and training future generations of anthropologists themselves as faculty members and researchers at Clemson U., Texas Tech U., Texas State U., U. South Florida, U. Michigan (Dearborn), U. Wisconsin (La Crosse), U. North Florida, Boston U., Cal State Sacramento, College of Charleston, Lincoln Memorial U., and the Max Planck Institute of Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, Germany.

This Fall, our professorial faculty will rise to 15, the largest number of tenured and tenure-track faculty we have ever had. As recently as a half-dozen years ago we had 12, only a quarter of whom were women. Today, 40% of our professors are female and the ethnic diversity represented among our faculty reflects our community and discipline better than in any other time in our history. We have expanded and augmented our traditional research strengths in biological anthropology (particularly forensic anthropology) and the archaeology of the southeastern U.S. while developing a new focus in cultural anthropology called Disasters, Displacement and Human Rights (DDHR).

Recently, our faculty scored major successes in being awarded external grants in support of their research from the National Endowment of the Humanities, the NSF, the NIJ and Wenner-Gren and our professors remain very active in publishing the results of their research in major journals and with top academic presses (8 books have been published by 6 of our professors in the last four years!).

I also want to acknowledge the extreme generosity of our former department head Bill Bass, and Jimmy and Dee Haslam whose gifts have greatly enhanced our internationally-renowned forensic anthropology program. The William M. Bass Forensic Anthropology Building, housing a processing laboratory, classroom and offices will open its doors this Fall at the ARF, a much needed infrastructure addition for the FAC. In addition, the first Haslam Forensic Anthropology Postdoctoral Fellow will join us this Fall to help us further the research mission of the FAC.

To our alumni and friends, I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter* and catching-up on the Department of Anthropology’s faculty, staff and students. We don’t intend to wait another 10 years before sending you the next one. We plan to stay in touch and we hope you do too!

* A special thanks to my daughter Miriam (B.S. in Science Writing with a minor in Anthropology, UTK, 2011) who wrote and designed this newsletter!
Bertin Louis Jr.

**Education**  
Ph.D. 2008, Washington University in St. Louis  
M.A. 2000, Graduate Faculty, The New School for Social Research  
B.A. 1993, Syracuse University

**Research Interests**  
I am an assistant professor of Anthropology and Africana Studies. My primary research interests focus on understanding the growth of Protestant forms of Christianity among Haitians in diasporic contexts (the Bahamas and the United States) and Haiti. My dissertation research analyzed an interesting cultural issue which arose from research about Haitian Protestantism practiced by Haitian migrants living in Nassau, Bahamas. Specifically, many Haitian Protestants use the symbolic boundaries of “Protestant” (Pwotestan) and “Christian” (Kretyen) to differentiate among members of their diasporic religious community. In other words, they see “Protestant” and “Christian” as two different identities; not the same. In the context of a transnational social field that includes the Bahamas, Haiti and the United States, the identity of Kretyen also forms a growing critique of Haitian society which is as follows: the amelioration of Haiti’s current socioeconomic crisis lies in the overall transformation of Haiti into a Protestant Christian nation. I am currently working on a book manuscript based on my dissertation research.

In addition to research about Haitian Protestantism, I have also informed students and the general public about Haitian history and culture since the earthquake in Haiti on January 12th, 2010. As part of my efforts I have appeared on television and the radio in Knoxville, Tennessee (WATE-6 News at 5:30, Tennessee This Week, The George Korda Radio Show, The Hubert Smith Radio Show and UT Today). I also created the FOCUS ON HAITI website for the Association of Black Anthropologists, which serves as the main Haiti informational website for the American Anthropological Association, and wrote an essay analyzing Pat Robertson’s comments and the views of some Haitian Protestants called “Haiti’s Pact with the Devil? Some Haitians (Haitian Protestants) Believe This, Too” on the Social Science Research Council’s THE IMMANENT FRAME blog.

Dawnie Wolfe Steadman

**Education**  
Ph.D. 1997, University of Chicago  
M.A. 1992, University of Chicago  
B.A. 1989, University of Arizona

**Research Interests**  
Joining the faculty in the fall of 2011 to succeed Dr. Richard Jantz as the director of the Forensic Anthropology Center, Dr. Steadman specializes in forensic anthropology and bioarchaeology. She is a board-certified Diplomate of the American Board of Forensic Anthropology since 2005.

Dr. Steadman has worked with human rights investigations in Argentina, Cyprus and Spain and her research emphasizes the cross-disciplinary nature of forensic science today.

**Selected Publications**  


Marisa Ensor

Education
LL.M. 2007. Master’s of Law in International Human Rights Law. School of Law, University of Essex, UK.

Research Interests
Forced and voluntary migration, humanitarian disasters, human rights, childhood, gender, education in emergencies, humanitarian assistance, international development, peoples and cultures of Latin America, North and East Africa.

I am a socio-cultural and applied anthropologist with a broad interest in humanitarian issues. My research examines the socio-cultural and human rights dimensions of disaster-, conflict-, and development-induced displacement with a focus on childhood and gender. I have active field research programs in both Latin America and North/East Africa, as well as with diaspora communities from these regions in the USA and Southern Europe. In particular, I have been engaged in ongoing research on the impact of various crises in Latin America for over a decade, using a combination of ethnographic fieldwork and legal analysis to the study of the vulnerability and resilience of local communities. Ongoing projects include a study of the right to education and the role of educational interventions as tools for protection in emergencies in Latin America and the Caribbean.

My more recent African-based research further illustrates my focus on anthropological and human rights analyses of the experiences of displaced and marginalized populations. In particular, I have just completed a study of the laws, policies, and practices governing access to social services and citizenship in Egypt, and their socio-cultural implications for African refugee and migrant communities in this country. This project constitutes one element of a larger long-term investigation of processes of uprootedness, reintegration and nation building in Sudan and East Africa.

Amy Mundorff

Education
Ph.D. 2009, Archaeology, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, Canada
M.A. 1999, Anthropology, California State University, Chico
B.A. 1991, Anthropology, Syracuse University, Syracuse

Research Interests

Selected Publications

Q&A with a recent graduate: Courtney Cox

What brought you to UT?

I grew up in Knoxville, and both of my parents graduated from UT. There wasn’t another school appealing enough to draw me away from Tennessee.

Why did you pick Anthropology as your major?

I’m still not sure why I chose Anthropology initially, but nothing else has seemed quite as interesting since I started taking Anthropology classes.

How was it working in the field school with Dr. Anderson?

It was great to work with Dr. Anderson in the field! The project was challenging and enlightening, and it is always fun to see professors in the field, away from lectures and exams.

If you could give one piece of advice to a new anthropology student, what would it be?

New Anthropology students (or interested students) should make every effort to get involved in the department. The Undergraduate Anthropology Association is a great way to meet other undergraduates, keep in touch with the department, and learn more about the field. Check out the website (http://web.utk.edu/~utanthro/) or email the club (utanthro@utk.edu) for more info.

What are your future plans?

This summer I am working with the Center for the Study of the First Americans at the Debra L. Friedkin site in Texas. Next year I will be applying to graduate programs--fingers crossed!

Is there anything else you would like to add?

I would like to thank everyone in the Anthropology department for truly enhancing my undergraduate experience. The professors, staff, students, courses, labs, and events all ensured that I could look forward to coming to campus everyday, because there is always something exciting going on.

“Narrow” is not a term that can be applied to graduate student, Julia Hanebrink’s research.

Although many of her projects are geographically located in Uganda, a country about the size of Oregon, they vary in scope and size.

Before coming to UT last year, Hanebrink’s work was focusing primarily on biomedical and indigenous systems of healthcare in Uganda as a part of a long running study started in 2008. She investigated how various forms of practitioners view the work others in similar fields are doing. Hanebrink was also working with community members to understand how they navigate the different systems available to them.

In addition, she has recently begun researching human rights issues in the northern region.

Since the cease fire ended the Ugandan civil war in 2006, Hanebrink started looking into psychological and physical means for child soldiers to begin their reintegration into the societies they left behind after abduction.

“We didn’t see a whole lot that was taking care of the psychosocial needs of the kids,” said Hanebrink. “We started to look at what was available and it turned out there wasn’t much at least formally.”

Working with Christian Brothers University in Memphis, and continuing with UT, Hanebrink began a pilot project testing how art therapy helps traumatized victims suffering after the war in Northern Uganda formally ended. She saw many avenues in place to physically care for those children left isolated after the war, but there were far fewer options in place to help mentally rehabilitate those child soldiers.
of remaining below the surface. This was an obvious side effect of the therapy but it was initially overlooked. Three months later, after they were re-tested, their trauma scores went down."

Although Hanebrink is still affiliated with the art therapy program, this summer, Hanebrink will expand her biomedical work into Northern Uganda to understand the seemingly vast differences in perceptions of healthcare between regions.

This June, she brought a diverse group of undergraduates from all different academic backgrounds to aid in this newest venture. Hanebrink’s varied research goals lend themselves to using a cross disciplinary approach to her work.

“I don’t like bringing all anthropologists,” said Hanebrink. “If you get too many anthropologists in a room, it gets a little crazy. I like to bring a diverse background to my research teams because I think we are all able to bring our own interests to the table and it really enriches the research.”
In the wake of disaster, risk and uncertainty reign. People wonder about the long- and short-term effects on their health. The extent of environmental damage can take years to determine. For Gregory Button, it’s all in a day’s work.

Button, an assistant professor of anthropology, has devoted three decades to researching disaster response and crisis communication, and uncertainty has captured his attention.

Button is currently writing a book on scientific uncertainty in the wake of a disaster, due to be published in spring 2010, which will present a series of case studies and findings from a large theoretical study of the role uncertainty plays in major disasters.

“First, there’s the disaster, then there’s the disaster,” Button explains, noting that disaster response always happens in the context of human culture, social organization, and political and economic domains. “Those are the areas important for social scientists to study,” he contends.

The Nature of Uncertainty

Risk has been heavily researched, while uncertainty has been largely ignored, Button continues. In the academic literature, risk discourse is seen as a way to lessen uncertainty. However, despite the preoccupation with risk, researchers haven’t adequately defined and explored uncertainty, because it doesn’t lend itself to a rational approach. “However, we have to understand uncertainty to make sense of it and mitigate it,” he asserts.

The two terms are notoriously slippery, Button explains. The term “risk” has multidimensional uses and is defined differently in different disciplines; the precise definition of “risk” depends to a great degree on who is using the term.

“Risk” is commonly defined in the dictionary as “the chance of injury, damage, or loss.” “Uncertainty” is frequently defined as “lack of certainty, doubt.”

“To many, uncertainty implies an element of risk,” Button says. “The term has fewer meanings than the term “risk” in academic discourse but is still somewhat elusive, because less scrutiny has been paid to uncertainty in rational discourse. The concept is itself ambiguous, and part of my work is to attempt to make it less so, especially with regard to risk.”

Decades of Disaster Response

After receiving a bachelor’s degree in anthropology, Button became an environmental reporter specializing in disaster and environmental health. He returned to academe and received his master’s and doctorate in anthropology. In addition to his academic study of uncertainty, Button is also recognized as a national expert on disaster response. He is certified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in crisis communication training.

Button consults and teaches courses on disaster recovery, the political economics of disasters, crisis communications, environmental justice, and other disaster-related topics. He was a co-organizer of an innovative panel that convened at the American Anthropological Association annual meeting in 2008 to launch an op-ed column in CounterPunch, an online news outlet that aims to shape public debate on national issues.
CSI: Miami and CSI: New York are among the hottest shows on television these days, and forensics is fast becoming the profession of choice among the preteen set. If you develop an appetite for these shows, you quickly assume that DNA is the Rosetta Stone—to every crime, to every forensics mystery—and if the forensics specialist can just get a DNA sample, the pieces of the puzzle practically fall into place.

For one DNA expert at UT Knoxville, however, DNA asks more questions than it answers; and that’s the way she likes it. Graciela Cabana is not a forensics specialist, although working on the same campus with the world-famous Anthropological Research Facility—popularly known as the Body Farm—means that forensic work is part of her job description. She’s an assistant professor in the anthropology department and she uses DNA, often ancient DNA, to study human evolution, patterns of migration among humans, the impact of genetic knowledge on group identity, and, occasionally, recent cadavers. Quest recently spoke with her about her research.

Q: Tell me a little about your background.

A: I grew up in Northern California, in the Bay area. I went to Berkeley, majoring in political science with a minor in French. Like a lot of people, I didn’t know what I’d do when I graduated. Before graduation, however, I had to take a course in a natural science, and a friend suggested an introductory course in physical anthropology. One week into the course, I was hooked. It was one of the few times in my undergraduate career that I was excited about a course—I actually wanted to read the textbook.

I talked with my anthropology professor, and he outlined a career path for me. I got into graduate school at the University of Michigan, and that’s where my real education began.

Q: Did you get your Ph.D. at Michigan?

A: Yes. I wrote my dissertation on ancient DNA, working on 4,000-year-old Chinchorro mummies from Chile. These mummies are the oldest known intentional mummies in the world. The Chinchorro people mummified their dead from about 4,000 to about 7,000 years ago, so some of these mummies are a couple of millennia older than Egyptian mummies.

There’s a longstanding question in prehistoric anthropology about changes in culture over time: Were the changes caused by immigrants replacing the local inhabitants or did the local inhabitants emulate the cultural practices of other people with whom they came in contact? I developed a simulation model to try to get an answer to this question. I discovered that the question is much more complex than I had originally thought. I developed tools that will aid future research to distinguish among various biological processes—including migration—that may account for cultural change.

Q: The DNA you used in your dissertation study was 4,000 years old. How far back in time can you go and still get viable DNA?

A: It depends upon the conditions, of course, but pretty far back. Animals preserved in peat or ice occasionally have intact DNA. A recent article in Nature magazine reported that German scientists have roughly mapped out the genome of a Neanderthal specimen that is nearly 40,000 years old, and scientists have worked out most of the genome of woolly mammoths of a similar age. Some researchers claim to have gotten DNA out of 20-million-year-old magnolia leaves buried in clay at the bottom of lakes, and from even earlier-aged insects caught in amber—just like the insects that helped replicate the velociraptors and other dinosaurs in Jurassic Park.

(Continued on Page 12)
Disasters, Displacement and Human Rights (DDHR) is a research and training focus developed by anthropology faculty and graduate students at the University of Tennessee. The focus also cultivates important links across the different sub-disciplines of anthropology and with faculty and students in other departments and colleges.

The central aim of DDHR is to provide a forum for scholarly research and applied anthropological work on contemporary global and local problems associated with unnatural disasters, forced migration, warfare and armed conflict and the cultural, political, economic, and legal dimensions of these issues as conceptualized and addressed through the norms and discourses of “rights.”

DDHR accommodates a wide range of interests and expertise, and builds innovative bridges between UT’s cultural anthropology program and the department’s celebrated strengths in forensics and archaeology. Faculty and students who participate in DDHR work on issues such as forced migration, internal displacement, refugees, and resettlement; genocide and ethnic cleansing; cultural, political, ethnic, gender, and religious identities and issues of freedom and discrimination; legal movements for retributive and restorative justice; conflict resolution and peace-building; the political-economy of natural resource extraction and pollution; public health; and the social causes and impacts of unnatural disasters. DDHR applies and innovates upon the methods and theories of critical cultural anthropology and other social scientific and humanities disciplines.

Examples of specific research in DDHR include Dr. Gregory Button’s current research on the long-term effects of the Exxon-Valdez Oil Spill, political discourse and social formation in the wake of the TVA Ash Spill, Hurricane Katrina victims’ human rights abuses, and an ethnographic account of the evolution of disaster policy. Dr. Button teaches undergraduate and graduate courses on disasters, environmental health, involuntary displacement, political economy, and applied anthropology.

Dr. Tricia Redeker Hepner’s research focuses on recent refugees from the Northeast African country of Eritrea as they seek asylum in North America, Europe, and other states in Africa. Working closely with Eritrean communities, international human rights organizations, and legal experts, she is analyzing how the process of seeking asylum transforms Eritrean political and legal consciousness, and how this might impact the development of transnational movements for human rights among Eritrean refugees. Her research also critically examines new developments in policies and laws governing forced migration in North America and the European Union. Dr. Hepner teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in political and legal anthropology, human rights, anthropological method and theory, and Africanist anthropology.

Dr. Marisa O. Ensor’s research examines the socio-cultural and human rights dimensions of conflict-, disaster-, and development-induced displacement with a focus on youth, childhood, and gender. Her current work analyzes the dynamics of transitional justice and post-conflict reconstruction across the Sudan-Uganda border, with a focus on the protection and participation of youth. This project constitutes one element of a broader longitudinal investigation of processes of uprootedness, reintegration and nation-building in Egypt, Sudan and East Africa. Dr. Ensor teaches graduate and undergraduate courses on the anthropology of violence, human rights, displaced youth, education in emergencies, and international development.

(Continued on Page 14)
Jan Simek is one of the most influential people in the University of Tennessee system, yet today students walking around campus probably don't realize it. Most, although they've seen it spelled out on many emails probably don't know how to pronounce his name.

Since Simek came to UT he has held many of the top administrative positions available to a professor working in the system. He has served as the head of the department of anthropology, UT’s interim vice chancellor, chancellor and system president in recent years.

Before taking on those positions, Simek came to UT out of graduate school for what he only thought would be a few years at most. After some time at UT, Simek was offered a faculty position at Berkeley, however, he didn't accept.

“I stayed because I was promised that my research life wouldn’t suffer at all,” Simek said. “I’ve had every resource and opportunity I could possibly want provided to me at this university. I’ve been able to work in France and fund myself through National Science Foundation grants. One of the best parts about staying here was that I, as a young person, could build a comfortable life for myself.”

Today, Simek is focusing on field work and comfortably works outside of administrative circles. During the years he spent in offices away from his first love, archaeology, Simek missed his time in the field.

An expert in cave art archaeology, Simek is now working on new projects focusing on vast systems of east Tennesseean caves. Of the over 9,000 caves in Tennessee, 1,000 of them have been explored. According to his calculations, his group and others have found art in 51, burials in nearly 200 and evidence of previous exploration in about 400.

Simek has seen a marked change in the style of the art in the Tennesseean caves over time. He explains that the cave art from earlier periods was descriptive of the natural surroundings, however, caves dated later in the Mississippian Period are decorated with more symbolic art that could be related to religion or spirituality.

“Anthropologists and archaeologists have always viewed their subjects with something less than the same respect they view themselves,” explained Simek. “The notion that prehistoric people were capable of the same intellectualism in and about their world as we are has not been the guiding principle of interpreting what we find. We examine a small piece of deep pool of intellectual and spiritual knowledge when we try to interpret cave art.”

Although attempting to understand the creative mind of an early modern human is no easy job, there are other issues associated with Simek's work that create complications when out on digs. Cave exploration in Tennessee harbors risks beyond the obvious physical insecurities inherently involved with spelunking.

“We need to enlist the help of state park officials whenever we go out to explore the caves,” Simek said. “Rock art has been reduced to rubble by people searching for ‘Indian gold’ numerous times in many caves in the area.”

Despite the risks and difficulties associated with cave archaeology, Simek is still happy that he followed his childhood dream.

“I could never imagine myself doing anything else,” explained Simek. “This has been my dream since I was three years old.”
Others claim to have revived 250-million-year-old bacteria from salt deposits. These dates are controversial; contamination is always an issue. Neanderthal bones, for example, have often been handled extensively and have modern DNA stuck to them. The short answer to your question is that we don't know what the outer limits of DNA survival are.

Q: Have you looked at your own DNA?

A: Oh, yes. My family is from Argentina, which has a strong Italian heritage, and my family has Italian roots. So whenever I thought about my Argentine ancestry, I'd picture myself in a Tuscan café drinking cappuccinos.

My dad's mom grew up in a convent, however, and we didn't know anything about her side of the family. There's a particular genetic test you can run through the maternal side, looking at genetic markers on mitochondria. Children receive nuclear DNA from both parents, but their mitochondrial DNA comes only from the mother. When I ran the mitochondrial DNA test on my father—my grandmother had passed away by then—it showed that my grandmother had indigenous genes. Before I sampled my family's DNA, I knew the tests might uncover indigenous genes, and I assumed such a discovery wouldn't be a big deal for me. But it was. Knowing I had indigenous ancestry changed my attitude about being Argentine. It made me feel more rooted in the country and its history. When I realized how these genetic results had affected me, I became curious about how genetic ancestry tests affect others. A colleague at the University of Oregon and I conducted a pilot study with 16 Argentineans. We did family trees for the pilot group, and we found that families related most strongly to the most recent immigrants. Interestingly, the people who lacked indigenous genes seemed to feel more like interlopers and not quite as much Argentine. Does this mean that people who have an indigenous heritage have stronger ties to Argentina? Eventually, I hope to have an answer to this question.

Q: What else are you working on?

A: I'm working on a variety of demographic questions in South America. I'm looking at population movements for all periods—the recent past, 1,000 years ago, and 10,000 years ago. Most anthropologists think that people have been in South America for about 15,000 years. There are a few sites in the Americas, however, that are controversial and may be older—Monte Verde in Chile, for example. Some claim that Monte Verde has been occupied for 35,000 to 40,000 years, but most don't accept those figures. We'll see. Maybe someone will come up with strong evidence to support a longer period of human occupation. Earlier studies looked at the diversity of groups in the Amazon and to the west of the Andes and concluded that two distinct groups migrated into South America at different times. One of the assumptions in this theory is that the environment of the Amazon is not conducive to large population densities: people coming into the region necessarily lived in small, relatively isolated groups. But we're learning more and more from archaeology, and this seems to not always have been the case. So is this two-wave scenario justified? Right now, I'm working on alternative theories to explain the data, but it's too early to report any results. I'm also looking at the relationship between skeletal bones and the underlying genetics, to see if the bones themselves give an accurate picture of the genetic makeup. Prehistorians routinely study skeletal bones. Sometimes those bones contain DNA, but many times they don't, depending on how old they are, where they've been, and what kinds of conditions they've been subjected to. Ancient DNA opens up a new avenue of research. Scientists studying skeletal morphology assume that their results mirror the underlying genetics. When my labs are finished, I'll be able to compare the genetics to the morphology to see how well they correspond.

Q: You just said, “When my labs are finished.” Are you building a lab now?

A: Three labs, actually. One is a standard DNA lab, one is for ancient DNA, and the third is for forensic analysis. The ancient DNA and forensic labs are clean labs, with filtered air entering them. Workers in the clean labs will wear bunny suits so they won't drag in DNA from the outside or shed their own DNA in the lab. Initially, we were going to build only two labs, but because of all the forensic work done here, we decided to build a forensic lab as well. We didn't want to do forensic work in the same lab that we'll be doing ancient DNA work. The contamination risk is too high.

Q: Do you ever watch the CSI shows on television? I've wondered how realistic they are.

A: I couldn't tell you. I don't have a TV and have never seen any of them.

Q: What do you see in your future?

A: Ancient DNA analysis is practically a virgin field, populated by a very small community. There may be 10 established labs in anthropology departments, and probably twice that many people. There are also a few people outside university anthropology departments who work with ancient DNA, I have a lifetime of study ahead. And since those of us working with ancient DNA are defining the parameters of our profession, we can do almost anything we want. There's so much to learn. I'll always have more questions than answers. That's what's so exciting about this research.
(Continued From Page 8)

But as 20 years of research into the long-term recovery from the Exxon Valdez disaster, my major takeaway is the severity of the magnitude of damage, the St. Helens volcano eruption, and public health threats involving asbestos, SARS, anthrax, and swine flu.

After 20 years of researching the long-term recovery from the Exxon Valdez disaster, my major takeaway is the severity of the magnitude of the damage, in terms of the economic, psychological, social, and political issues,” Button says. “It clearly demonstrates that a disaster of this magnitude, like that of Hurricane Katrina, takes years for full recovery.”

Button is currently following the disaster response at the Tennessee Valley Authority ash spill in Tennessee’s Roane County.

One factor that seems to play into every disaster is the role of media, Button says. Crises often create a vacuum of information, and many times inaccurate reporting fills that void, contributing to increased uncertainty.

For example, in the days following the TVA ash spill at the Kingston Steam Plant in 2008, a story disseminated by the United Mountain Defense organization said the spill was worse than the Exxon Valdez spill—a hugely inaccurate reference, given that the Exxon Valdez spill affected 1,300 miles of pristine wilderness and 24 communities, killed nearly 400,000 birds, and generated major litigation. The TVA spill, on the other hand, affects 500 acres, and while it had adverse effects on both the environment and many people, it is by no means comparable to the damage inflicted by the Exxon spill, Button asserts.

“GQ magazine listed the TVA spill as the worst environmental disaster in the country’s history,” repeating the claim of United Mountain Defense, Button reports. “This manipulation of the media is disturbing and is often done by parties on all sides. These inaccurate reports are so distorted that they take on a life of their own.”

On the other hand, Button observes, culpable parties involved in a disaster often generate doubt and uncertainty in order to cloud public opinion. In the wake of disaster, there is an inevitable period of uncertainty about the real or perceived risks and, usually, incomplete information about the nature and extent of the risk, in the days, weeks, and months that follow.

“The attempts at crisis communication by the parties implicated in the event, as well as other organizations such as the media, public agencies, and environmental and grassroots organizations, are often seen as conflicting and confusing to the victims of the event,” he says.

“In the case of the TVA ash spill, there have been conflicting reports in the media and in public meetings from TVA, the Environmental Protection Agency, environmental groups, grassroots organizations, and outside researchers which have contributed to a climate of confusion and uncertainty.”

Policies Related to Uncertainty

Understanding uncertainty as it relates to disaster response helps policymakers to respond to crises more effectively—to mitigate and understand the aftermath that lingers long after a disaster hits, Button says. Because of society’s collective short attention span, the long-term response and recovery doesn’t grab the headlines, despite the fact that communities are still reeling from the damage.

“The important thing to remember is that science doesn’t have all the answers,” Button says. “Science and technology are often involved in environmental disasters, so people instinctively turn to science for answers.”

Devastation in New Orleans from Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

For example, he explains that the correlation between the toxins identified with the TVA ash spill and the ultimate outcome on the environment and citizens’ health will take a long time to determine. Corporations too often take advantage of doubt and uncertainty to create even more uncertainty.

Further compounding the uncertainty during major crises, hundreds of agencies must interact in a timely fashion. Studying the many cultures is a rich field for anthropological research, Button says. “Tremendous awareness is needed to know how to respond to disasters,” he says. “Communications are very important, especially within pre-established networks.”

He cites numerous examples of inadequate communications. During 9/11, a huge disconnect existed between the FBI and the Department of Justice, among the local police departments and fire departments, and other emergency responders and governmental leaders. In a school system in Michigan, each school had a different emergency protocol, which hindered the effectiveness of emergency responders. Even though people knew the problem existed, he says, personal egos prohibited any changes from being made.

“Many problems exist in the realm of uncertainty that science cannot solve,” Button concludes. “Science can’t solve cultural, social, and political problems generated by an environmental disaster, including the intricacies of risk. Definitions of risk and uncertainty as social issues deal inevitably with values and morality, and discourses about risk and uncertainty are culturally constructed. It is especially important for anthropologists to inform society on a scholastic level, to understand the nature and effect of uncertainty, and to share a body of knowledge that ultimately belongs to society.”
Dr. Bertin M. Louis, Jr. focuses on religious identity, practice, and nationalism within a transnational framework, as Haitians move from Haiti to the Bahamas to the U.S. Dr. Louis also studies Haitian-Bahamians with regard to issues of nationalism and citizenship in the Bahamas. His future research will address the impact of the January 12th, 2010 earthquake in Haiti and the significance of religion in both internal and external explanations of the disaster.

He has also appeared in numerous public venues discussing the impact of the earthquake in Haiti. Dr. Louis teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in Africana Studies and Cultural Anthropology which cover race and ethnicity, gender, globalization, human rights, identity formation, migration, transnationalism and religious practice.

Dr. Amy Z. Mundorff’s research focuses on the scientific process and management aspects of identifying the deceased in mass fatality events, including disasters and gross violations of human rights. Within this focus, she is concentrating on two new non-destructive techniques for locating clandestine graves, fracture patterns from plane crashes, and disaster victim identification (DVI) management. She recently secured a grant from the National Institute of Justice to examine differing DNA yield rates from skeletal elements. As the forensic anthropologist for the New York City Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (1999-2004), Dr. Mundorff took a leading role in establishing and implementing the identification process for the victims of the 9/11 attacks, the crash of American Airlines Flight 587, and the Staten Island Ferry crash. She serves as a Scientific Advisor on Human Identification Case Review for the Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala (Forensic Anthropology Foundation) and on the Anthropology Subgroup of the Forensic Pathology Working Group of the INTERPOL Standing Committee on Disaster Victim Identification. Dr. Mundorff teaches graduate and undergraduate courses on Human Origins, Forensic Anthropology, Osteology, and Forensic Science and Human Rights.

Affiliated faculty research and teaching interests include the rights dimensions of the rise of new religious media in Africa; the concept of social suffering in war-torn Northern Uganda; and religion and conflict in Nigeria (Dr. Rosalind Hackett); international human rights law, religious freedom, and the role of non-governmental organizations (Robert Blitt, Esq.); and genetic identity, intersections between behavior, morphology and genetics, large-scale population movements and human demography (Dr. Graciela Cabana).

Examples of current graduate student research in DDHR include Master’s and Doctoral theses on topics like urban and encamped refugees in Ethiopia and resettlement to the United States; genocide in the Balkans and the use of forensic evidence at the International Criminal Court; DNA analysis and disappeared migrants in borderland regions; the politics and public health dimensions of the TVA Ash Spill; the met and unmet needs of Hurricane Katrina evacuees; and community activism surrounding Superfund sites.

Recently Published Books by Anthropology Faculty


Gregory Button (2010) *Disaster Culture: Knowledge and Uncertainty in the Wake of Human and Environmental Catastrophe*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.


Graduate student **Bobby Braly** was recognized at the Chancellor’s Honors Awards for Professional Promise, April 11, 2011.

Graduate student **Ann Ramsey** received an Award for Excellence in Teaching general biology labs presented by the Division of Biology.

Dr. **De Ann Pendry** received a Peacemaker Award from the Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance for her work with Hispanic and other immigrant groups.

Prof. **Tricia Redeker Hepner** received a $24,600 grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Inc., for her project entitled “Generation Asylum: New Eritrean Refugees, Human Rights, and the Politics of Forced Migration”

Prof. **Ben Auerbach** received a one-year award ($15,186) from the National Science Foundation: “Pelvic Shape and Differential Mortality: Obstetric Variation Among Indigenous North American Populations” (Co-P.I.’s: UTK Ph.D’s Adam Sylvester & Katie King)

Prof. **Tricia Redeker Hepner** is the founding editor of a new journal, Review of African Conflict and Peacebuilding

Profs. **Mike Logan and Gerald Schroedl** won annual awards from the Tennessee Association of Museums for their exhibition, “Discovering American Indian Art,” displayed in the McClung Museum.

**Bridget Algee-Hewitt** (UTK Ph.D. to be awarded 2011) will join us this Fall as the first Haslam Forensic Anthropology Postdoctoral Fellow for a two-year (renewable) term.

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