

A Survey of Archaeologists' Reasons for Choosing University Programs

Prepared by

Doug Rocks-Macqueen

drocks13@unm.edu

<http://dougсарchaeology.wordpress.com>



&

Paolo Ciuchini

paolo.ciuchini@archaeojobs.com

<http://www.archaeojobs.com/>



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Introduction and Methodology

In the fall of 2011, a project was undertaken to create a website that lists all of the archaeology degree granting programs around the world, www.archaeologycourses.org. This list of universities/degree granting institutes would be presented as a map and be searchable by several attributes of the programs.

A list of 700+ universities that offer archaeology degrees was created but it was unknown what sort of searchable attributes would be of use to potential students. As such a survey was designed to determine what factors were most influential in the decision by current and past students to choose a specific university for their archaeology degree/s. The results would then indicate what information should be obtained about each program to help future students in their search for programs.

The survey was sent out at the beginning of December 2011 to several archaeology websites and email listservs. A total of 757 responses were gathered over a week and half. Of these 701 responded to questions about BA/BSc programs and 598 to questions about MA/MSc programs, while 340 responded to questions about PhD programs. Quantitative data was gathered on specific pre-determined reasons for attending a program. Moreover, participants were allowed to provide additional qualitative information if they so choose.

Discussion

The results of this survey provide a valuable insight into the main factors that influence the choice of a specific university by prospective archaeology students. The geographical location of the university was/is deemed important by a substantial majority (71%) of archaeologists when they are looking for a BA/BSc, by half (48%) of when it comes to choose/chose of an MA/MSc program, and by 4 out of 10 (37%) in relation to a PhD program.

Somewhat more surprising is that only 35% of archaeology BA/BSc students consider(ed) low fees and living expenses an aspect they took/would take into account, and the relevant percentages are even lower for MA/MScs (25%) and PhDs (18%). It appears likely, however, that the ongoing reduction in household income and student grants with growth of studying fees in many countries will increase the prominence of this factor in the foreseeable future. The same can be said in relation to the importance attached to scholarship/funding schemes offered by a university. The availability of these funding opportunities is considered particularly important by only 13% of prospective BA/BScs. Probably due to the growing need for financial independence of older students, the ratio rises to 26% among prospective MA/MSc students and to 39% among would-be PhDs.¹

¹ It should be noted that no data was collected on when these degrees were obtained, to decrease the length of the survey, which means these results are not time based but include results for all archaeologists. Results do not capture past or recent but general trends.

More valued by all three groups is the reputation of a university or archaeology department/school, seen as a decisive element by 39% of those who have/are getting their BA/BScs, 44% of MA/MScs, and 1 in 2 (50%) of PhDs. Like for the availability of scholarships, even the importance attached to the reputation of research staff and/or the desire to work with a particular staff member grows with the level of education: the relevant percentage rises from 23% for BA/BScs to 53% for MA/MScs, climbing to 68% for PhDs.

Virtually constant across the three categories is the ratio (35-35%) of prospective archaeology students who pay particular attention to specific courses/classes/models offered. Smaller groups of would-be archaeology students deem important other factors, such as the possibility to acquire particular skills as part of the degree program (10% for BA/BScs, 21% for MA/MScs and 17% for PhDs), the program duration (4%, 14%, and 8%, respectively), as well as the fact that a partner/relative attends/attended the university (6%, 5% and 3%).

Qualitative data pointed to several aspects not considered in the quantitative section of the survey. One of the more numerous mentions was that of acceptance into a program. That is that many students were only accepted into a single program thus making the choice for them. Many other observations/pieces of advice were given in this data that unfortunately cannot be reviewed in this short summary. It is recommended that prospective students read this section to gather good advice about what choices to make when looking at university programs.

Quantitative Results

(degree, count of responses, % out of total responses)

Location- Program was/is close to my home/ in a city/country I want(ed) to live in

BA/BSc	497	71%
MA/MSc	286	48%
PhD	126	37%

Cost- Low fees and living expenses was/is inexpensive

BA/BSc	244	35%
MA/MSc	152	25%
PhD	61	18%

Name recognition- the university or department or program is well known

BA/BSc	270	39%
MA/MSc	261	44%
PhD	171	50%

Length of program- how long it takes to complete program

BA/BSc	31	4%
MA/MSc	83	14%
PhD	28	8%

Relationship- boy/girl friend or relatives attended the university

BA/BSc	41	6%
MA/MSc	27	5%
PhD	10	3%

Teaching Staff- the teaching staff was good AND/OR there was a particular member of staff I wanted to work with

BA/BSc	163	23%
MA/MSc	315	53%
PhD	232	68%

Cost- I received a scholarship/funding to attend this university

BA/BSc	93	13%
MA/MSc	153	26%
PhD	131	39%

Skills offered- there was a particular skill offered at the program- GIS, forensics, computer applications, osteoarchaeology, etc.

BA/BSc	67	10%
MA/MSc	128	21%
PhD	58	17%

Course/classes/models offered- they offered subjects that I was interested in- Roman Archaeology, Heritage Management, Underwater Archaeology, etc.

BA/BSc	255	36%
MA	209	35%
PhD	121	36%

Qualitative Results

Participants were given the option to leave comments if they so choose. Here follows the list of comments made by the participants. Some of the information has been removed so as to make people unidentifiable. If two university names are present one is removed- it is assumed that the mention of one name will not make the author identifiable but two may present enough information for someone to deduce who the author is.

General Comments

- "With my MA program school I was accepted to three schools - I chose this one because I liked the area (southeastern Idaho) and the program looked interesting.
- With my PhD school (where I completed my MA) I like the idea that they did not require two languages for completion (only one; statistics sufficed for another). It was among 6 schools applied to the only one that accepted me so it wasn't a hard choice.
- Where you go to school often sets your networks in place for where you're likely to work after you graduate. In some areas emigration of anthropological mentorship is discouraged in the usual public and private institutions by overwhelmingly favoring hiring of "local" schools of thought" as produced by the local educational institutions. I'm speaking specifically of (removed) which has an incestuous relationship with the University of (removed) especially as far as finding employment with state agencies. Had I understood that was more significant a factor than I did I would have chosen a different MA program. So a choice of "future networking establishment" above would have got a check mark from me if I knew then what I do now.
- when I got rubbish A levels they still offered me a place
- What also influenced my decision to stay at the same University for my MA and PhD is that some "top" schools require you to retake core classes over and above normal course work.
- University education was not exactly encouraged by my school and home relocation disrupted my first try at A levels- First choice of UCCAS selected universities rejected second application so was stuck with a set of A levels recommended as 'useful for local industries' but not in subjects I was any good at. My eventual undergraduate University was one of the few that accepted points from a General Studies A level (1 year course)and that was the only reason I got in. Outcome- Upper second BA Honours- then MA at second university and to date 22 years working in Archaeology on the way getting a place to read for a PhD but never having any funding to take it up. Moral- don't listen to school careers advisors who just want to put school leavers into the local shops/factories...
- This may not be relevant as I was an undergraduate from 1979 - 1982 (with a full maintenance grant from the local authority) and did my PhD with a variety of sources of funding (British Council Town Trust Fellowship and self-funding) between 1984 and 1991. Those were the days when research took priority over the insane priorities of accountants managers and other ill-informed and academically illiterate administrators and managers. Both degrees were taken at the same university.
- There were 2 requirements of my university that made it possible for me to get a job in archaeology immediately after graduation. The first was a field school that taught survey and

excavation skills. The second was a requirement to get a job in archaeology for one term. Both experiences were invaluable.

- there are not very much places here in Ukraine to get an archaeological education so the choice is rather limited.
- The university I attended for my PhD has a department of archaeology.
- The Uni I went to offered/offers distance education and there is no archaeology degree at my local uni. This was the major factor for me as I could not move away to go to Uni due to work and home reasons.
- The prerequisites to be accepted to the program at my chosen university were realistic/pertinent to the program; other program required unrealistic prerequisites that I found questionable as to why they were needed.
- The overwhelming reason was development of dialogue with PhD supervisor
- The MSc programme I took was the only one offered specifically as an MSc in the world at the time.
- The Leicester distance learning program offered a more challenging course than the local university and allowed me to work during my studies.
- take home lesson - do not choose just on location and cost! major error!
- School was located in a desert!
- Reputation for placing PhD grads in jobs!
- Recommended as one of the best universities for archaeology.
- Quit because of money.
- Only a BA (Hons) then started working in archaeology..
- One major factor not mentioned above is acceptance. When one does not get their first choice the decision process changes.
- Note: My graduate program offered both applied and thesis tracks for graduate curriculum. Although the applied/CRM focus was key I still chose the thesis track because of personal/practical scheduling matters (silly for me to leave my job for a summer to complete an internship) and my colleagues' stated opinions regarding the need to demonstrate competency in professional research standards (earning your stripes and paying your dues). My local professional network also came into play: at least six of my direct colleagues received MAs through my program prior to my acceptance. Two additional colleagues/friends were active in the program when I started school.
- Note: MA not relevant as attended a 4 year BA (hons) programme.
- none.
- Night classes available for MA courses.
- My University is the best in my country.
- My part time PhD fees were paid by my uni archaeological unit at the then very reduced staff rate
- My MA and PhD were at the same University and I wanted to continue to work with my advisor.
- Mostly multiple of the above options but I picked the dominant one for this survey.

- MISTAKE - I applied to the University of Kansas to study primitive and prehistoric art. The Anthropology Department had a staff member well-known in this field. Unfortunately the catalog I consulted was three years out of date and when I arrived the faculty member was long gone and selling sandals in Berkley (this was the late 1960s). Since I was already there and had taken some archaeological courses and a field school while in college (majoring in art history) I opted for the archaeology sub-discipline. I have no regrets and I have been a practicing prehistoric archaeologist for over 40 years. but my graduate beginnings were unusual to say the least.
- may want to add as option: didn't get in my preferred school...
- MA and PhD responses are the same because I was enrolled in a joint MA/PhD program at a single institution.
- Looking back is different than trying to remember what I was thinking at the time. My fading memory is that it was a lot about opportunities to explore the unknown. Your questions make it sound like decisions were mostly rational and conservative - like staying in the comfort zone of your personal back yard.
- Just to clarify that at the time the uni I chose had a reputation for turning out exceptionally good 'field ready' archaeologists well equipped to go straight into a working environment
- It was the first one that accepted my application!
- It was so long ago I can't really remember.
- I was working there at the time and it was most convenient way to study part time.
- I was 17 I wanted to live in London and I didn't care what it took to get there. I'd have studied anything even archaeology.
- I wanted to get away from the East Coast and see the American Southwest
- I think the idea of elite schools as output for academic jobs is very misleading. I would say purely job placement after Ph.D. Many many people I go to school with are not interested in academic jobs upon Ph.D. completion. I'm at the University of Arizona which is one of the top 5 anthropology program in the US. People do not simply come here for academic positions they come here for top tier education which will help them in the private job market as well as the academic one.
- I studied all of my degrees at Sheffield University and there was the added perspective of 'going north' to experience a different cultural life and landscape which I felt would broaden me as an individual.
- It was mainly the course which attracted me and the staff but having visited the department and the city I found both to be very friendly supportive and embracing. Both department and city provided me with a strong community to become a part of which influenced my choice to stay at this institution for MA/PhD though by then it was more the individuals concerned I wanted to study with. I still live there am raising a family there and enjoy the city even though I commute to work elsewhere!"
- I started with a part time Diploma. Liked the staff felt the atmosphere was good and wanted to continue on.
- I only was accepted at one PhD program so the decision was simplified

- I looked for a program that emphasized doing archeology as a part of environmental conservation. Other schools I applied to emphasized academic theoretical ivory tower approaches. There was a retrenchment in the late 70's away from applied research.
- I live on an island. That determined my BA choice- the school was on the island and I could continue work and caring for my family. The school I selected for MA and Ph.D. was on another island but I had a fellowship that paid for my "commute" on a weekly basis (over on Monday home on Friday). I could still care for my family home and work on the weekends. The faculty/and my committee were exceptional and crucial in my decision.
- i knew i wanted to be an archaeologist and this was the only way to do it
- I kind of stumbled into my degree first of all and then as a postgraduate had a clear relationship with supervisors and other professors whom I wanted to continue to work with.
- I have a degree at Sapienza university in Rome obtained in (removed) when only few universities proposed a complete curriculum in archaeology. My opinion is out of date. I got also a PhD in archaeology at (removed) University (France) an Academy with a good reputation
- I do not have a bachelor's degree because I transferred out of a pre-med zoology program after my second undergraduate year. Liked the biology but didn't want to be a medical person wanted to switch to something like American Indian archaeology not represented at (removed) at the time I (an (removed) native)was enrolled there. Learned from my sociology prof. (he had an MA from U. Chicago) that there were archaeological program at the University of Chicago applied & was accepted for a 3-year MA program in Anthropology (this was when the rather experimental program of U. Chicago Chancellor Robert Maynard Hutchins was in effect hence nobody cared--once I'd passed a bunch of multiple-choice exams on general knowledge of sciences & humanities--that I did not have a BA or BS) with specialization in prehistoric archaeology. Encountered Robert J. Braidwood in the required year-long intro. course for all new Anthro. majors at Chicago ("The Human Career") whose account of his research on agropastoral origins in what he called "the Hilly Flanks of the Fertile Crescent" (SW Asia region) was so appealing that I signed on as one of his grad students.
- I didn't start a BA program with an interest in archaeology. That came along the way.
- Please ignore the partial response I sent in a few seconds ago hit the submit button before finishing. "
- I did not apply to other university at either BA or MA levels. I picked Univ. Kansas and stayed there.
- I did my master's by distance learning from Leicester University which allowed me to continue to work rather than relocate to a campus somewhere. As a result I did not have to take out loans. YAAYYYYYYYYYY!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
- I developed interest in archaeology immediately i finished secondary school.
- I chose the college for my Masters/PhD because it was the closest university to my RESEARCH AREA. It had nothing to do with being close to where I lived or wanted to live. When they kicked me out with a "terminal M.A." I returned to my research area and continued doing my research. That is where my Ph.D. college department director found me and invited me to finish my PhD at his university.

- I choose my MA program mainly based on one professor at that department who did work that I too was interested in pursuing.
- Grad school choice: It was the school recommended by my advisors as a good fit.
- For your first degree really it is ease of access location and familiarity with the city that is most significant. However as you become more aware of the discipline of archaeology it is the staff and the departments reputation that takes precedence.
- "For the B.A. my father demanded I live at home until I passed my 21st birthday (age of majority then) and I could commute to Barnard.
- For the Ph.D. I wasn't accepted at U. Penn or U. Chicago leaving Harvard as one that accepted me.
- For my PhD - there was a strong representation of women at all academic levels--not just adjunct professors but full professors and the chair.
- For my MA it was one of the few schools on the west coast that had a historical archaeology program.
- For my MA being able to do it part-time was the most critical issue. For my PhD getting a big enough scholarship was the most critical. Both issues relate to flexibility and income around family demands.
- For my MA and PhD it was not so much that I wanted to live where the university is but that I wanted to do research in that region and faculty had networks and research sites in that region and the university museum had collections from that region. And they offered me a scholarship to get me there then an assistantship to keep me there.
- For my BA it was a question of a high quality archaeology program AND in-state tuition. I didn't WANT to live near home (an hour drive away) but that was what I could afford at that time."
- "First degree: archaeology because I couldn't think of anything else to do university because the course looked the most interesting.
- MA / PhD Right supervisor
- Finally chose my undergrad university after visiting it (had expected to go somewhere else but didn't like it after seeing it in the flesh).
- Don't know what Muu means but when I ticked location it was because the course was distance learning - which I needed at the time.
- Being a new parent and new home owner I was severely limited in where I could apply being bound to a 100 mile radius. Yes I travel 200 miles round trip just to attend class :-S
- Behavior/attitude of staff at open days and interviews - in both cases.
- Baccalaureate degree not in in Anthropology/Archaeology or related discipline.
- Attended the University of Life.
- Failed miserably - but am still learning.
- Actually trained as a mechanical engineer - and thus had something of real value to sell the world and earn a living at.
- Given no real choice by my parents neither of whom I am sure had even heard of Roman AHM&UA. But then these things probably weren't invented in the 1950 by expensive self perpetuating academics.

- Keith Hunt
- As I included my undergraduate archeology professor gave me advice on what graduate schools had good program. Those are the ones I applied to.
- article in national geographic march 1971 about Bill Solheim and Southeast Asian archaeology made the University of Hawaii look like a good place to study anthropology and Southeast Asia
- Also was the only course offering a place through clearing due to my poor A-Level results. The university was prepared to take lower grades balanced by previous experience.
- Also influenced my Ph.D. program choice: it was recommended to me by someone I knew who had completed an M.A. in an associated program at that university and who knew my interests well.
- All my life I've taken classes that interest me - from auto mechanics to Spanish to Art History to quilting. I enjoy research and learning...
- A factor in my selection of a particular grad school over another was the chosen school's realization that the GRE on which I scored well was/is a fairly meaningless measure when it comes to assessing prospective students in their CRM program.

Comments made about BA/BSc

- was already at the university after transferring to archaeology after doing forensic science and knew the university well.
- was a small college
- undergrad degree in different field
- They took me
- They kindly offered me a place in Clearing
- solid liberal arts school
- Science based
- recruited for athletics knew had great academics too
- recommended by high school counselor
- Parents' decision
- overall academic quality of institution
- opportunity
- Nobody from HS going there
- Nice countryside
- mucked up my A levels and they offered me a clearance place.
- lots of archaeology around
- It was the best undergrad program that I could find
- It was as far from home as I could get and it was in the north of England where I longed to be back.
- in an area where the connection to Native American groups is highly visible and compelling
- I was a transfer student. This was one of two schools I was accepted in to. The other school was very similar in size and environment as the college I was transferring from so I selected the college that was very different from the one I was transferring from.

- I started to do a different course and changed to do archaeology after an elective module that was great
- I didn't originally intend to archaeology and chose location because it had a good reputation for genetics
- High Quality liberal arts education
- Happenstance - just happened to have an Archaeology Dept. in the University I was already enrolled in.
- Got place through UCAS clearing the university accepted me with slightly lower grades
- Got in through the UK clearing system having changed my mind about studying Chemistry (good choice now I'm a professor of archaeology)
- Football
- Far from home right size for me (small) and excellent all-round reputation
- Family tradition -bit outdated these days!
- family tradition
- Escape from home.
- Relationship with PennDOT meant that you got a lot of good CRM experience and they had high rates of post graduation hire/graduate school
- no grades
- It had no graduate program
- home state -auto acceptance

Comments made about MA/MSc

- Went direct from BA to PHD programme
- Wanted a university in a certain area of the country and it was the only one in that region to accept me.
- They took me
- strong program with financial support
- same program as below
- Return to academia after several years working.
- online
- Location over seas
- Knew several people who had studied there and recommended it
- It was at the same university I did my BA where all my friends were.
- I was familiar with it because it was the same program where I did my B.A.
- I completed my undergraduate course at this university.
- General excellence
- full scholarship and TA position offered
- Distance Learning
- Developed a CRM specialization to complement the MA
- continuation of BA in the same place although I had moved to another city
- Center for SW Archaeology

- accident
- Worked for the University no tuition cost
- Unprecedented opportunity to work with an outstanding faculty and an MA that needed doing (1920s EH Morris collection).
- Underwater Archaeology
- They sent me a free college catalogue when many other schools charged for them (before internet).
- science based
- same university where I was already going
- politically active program
- opportunity for CRM
- only university to accept me
- offered an opportunity to live/work in a new location
- Of the universities I applied to they were the only one to accept me.
- Of all of the program I applied to I was only admitted to this one
- It was the only one that accepted me.
- Employer funded = cheapest.
- Distance
- was looking for terminal MA program (vs PhD)
- was able to keep full time job while attending classes
- warm climate
- there are a limited number of universities in my state that actually offer graduate program.
- Strong 4 field and theory
- recommended by undergraduate archeology professor/mentor
- Program focus in applied archaeology/CRM. Existing CRM professional (13+ years) at time of entry.
- One of 3 schools that I was accepted to
- Offered evening classes so I could continue to work full-time
- Offered dual degree: MBA and MA in Anthropology
- meet government stands to pursue independent research opportunities
- location was warm
- I got paid to work on projects.
- Hawaii was not close to home but I liked the location and it was closer to SE Asia and Asian languages taught there
- Consistent myopia
- Attended the university for my BA
- Prosecution of the BA in the same University
- indigenous studies decolonizing approach
- I got in!
- Historical Archaeology Program

Comments made about PhD

- Where I earned my MA.
- They took me
- They invited me into their program.
- Prior Faculty Contact
- opportunity
- It was a continuation of my MPhil.
- Already there. broke up with partner a year before
- Theory, 4 field anthropology
- Not many PhD program in anthropology/archaeology in late 1950s
- I was already there for my MA so knew the department from then
- I received my MA from the same department.
- I had already established research relationships at this department
- full scholarship and TA position offered
- Can do it my time... no rush
- at the time it was one of the highest rated in my field
- Assemblage upon which my PhD was based was located at this particular university
- already enrolled in MA program did not need to repeat coursework plus relationships established during MA
- accepted grad students in January
- the Ph.D. program allowed me to attend part time while maintaining a full time job in another field.
- Same as MA
- it was the only university that focused on European archaeology
- One of few PhD schools that I was accepted to
- location was *far* from my parents and brothers homes
- Fieldwork in the Near East (northern Iraq)
- dissertation project
- undergraduate at same school
- Supervisor and subject topic
- Same school got M.A. from easy to keep going
- One of best-known for my field and has a museum attached
- availability of teaching assistant positions research flexibility
- same program as MA
- A continuation of the MA program