

FROM THE CHAIR'S DESK



While Summer is traditionally a time of rest and relaxation, issue three of **Anthroknight News** finds our faculty, staff, and students as busy as ever.

Read about recent research, teaching, and service accomplishments demonstrating once again anthropology's relevance in our complex ever-changing world.

Looking ahead to fall, we will be celebrating 20 years as an independent department. It's amazing to see how far we've come in two decades!

Go Knights! Charge On!
Dr. Ty Matejowsky

SAVE THE DATE:



Join us as we celebrate 20 years of the UCF Department of Anthropology! In honor of this milestone anniversary, we will be hosting a special Open House on October 16. More details about the event will be shared soon, stay tuned to our social media for updates!



FACULTY PROFILE: DR. SARAH FREIDLINE

Dr. Sarah Freidline is a biological anthropologist whose research explores how modern humans evolved. As a paleoanthropologist, she studies craniofacial growth and skull evolution in fossil hominins, including *Homo sapiens*, Neanderthals, and other members of the genus *Homo*.

She earned her Ph.D. in 2012 through joint work with The Graduate Center, CUNY, and the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, where she later continued as a postdoctoral researcher. Dr. Freidline joined UCF in 2021 and directs a virtual anthropology lab focused on the digital study of human and fossil skeletal variation.

Her research combines 3D imaging, micro-CT scanning, and virtual reconstruction to examine how skull shape, internal bone structure, and dental development change during growth. Through international collaborations, she works with fossil collections across multiple continents to better understand variation in early human populations and the emergence of modern human anatomy.

Dr. Freidline's work has been published in leading journals such as *Nature* and *Nature Communications*. In addition to her research, she is dedicated to teaching and mentoring students, providing hands-on experience with digital methods in human evolution.

To learn more about Dr. Freidline's research and lab, visit her faculty page: <https://sciences.ucf.edu/anthropology/person/sarah-freidline/>



THE MANY PATHS OF ANTHROPOLOGY FEATURING: DR. ALEX RIVAS



Anthropology equips students with skills that extend beyond traditional academic settings. By exploring human behavior, cultures, and complex systems, anthropologists are well-prepared to address real-world issues in various fields.

Dr. Alex Rivas's path showcases how an anthropology background can lead to unexpected, impactful roles. A UCF double graduate (B.A. 2010, M.A. 2014), he earned his Ph.D. in Anthropology at Washington University in St. Louis, focusing on Maya archaeology.

Currently, as Design Research Manager at AdventHealth, he leads initiatives to improve healthcare experiences through human-centered research, developing services and systems that better serve patients and communities.

Alex's foray into design research is deeply rooted in his anthropology background. Through extensive fieldwork and research management across Latin America and the U.S., he refined his observational and analytical skills, which continue to shape his work. His research adventures took him to Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, Bolivia, and Uzbekistan, where he investigated how people interact with their surroundings.

Alex has led research initiatives for federal agencies, a *Fortune 100* bank, startups, tech giants, and healthcare organizations. Whether conducting interviews or collaborating on enhancing healthcare services, he consistently applies core anthropological skills, showcasing that anthropology is not just academic; it's a catalyst for meaningful change. Anthropology paves the way for careers in various fields, emphasizing human experience in innovation and decision-making.

FACULTY NEWS

COMING THIS FALL: DR. LAURA CIRILLO



Please join us in welcoming **Dr. Laura Cirillo** to the UCF Department of Anthropology!

Dr. Cirillo is a forensic anthropologist specializing in human identification, dental anthropology, and biological anthropology. Her research uses skeletal and dental evidence to better understand identity, age estimation, and variation across populations. In addition to her research, she brings extensive applied experience in forensic casework, including work supporting the identification of U.S. service members.

We are excited to welcome Dr. Cirillo to the department and look forward to the knowledge and experience she will bring to our students, classrooms, and research community.

This fall, **Dr. Cirillo will teach ANG 6740C - Advanced Forensic Anthropology**, giving students the opportunity to learn from her firsthand experience in the field. **Enrollment is open through August 23**, so don't miss your chance to register! For registration information and important enrollment dates, visit the **UCF Graduate Registration** page at <https://graduate.ucf.edu/registration/>.

Want to learn more? Stay tuned for our **fall newsletter**, where we'll feature Dr. Cirillo in our **Faculty Profile** and introduce her to the Anthropology community.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

EMILY PILATO'S JOURNEY FROM UCF TO INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION



When Emily Pilato earned her M.A. in Anthropology from UCF in 2017, she already knew she wanted a career centered on education, curiosity, and people.

Shortly after graduation, she remained connected to the department as an adjunct instructor while also working in the nonprofit sector, co-authoring research with **Dr. Matejowsky** and conducting fieldwork for the *Florida Folklife Project*.

FROM ORLANDO TO JAPAN



In 2019, Emily moved to Japan through the JET Program, where she spent three years teaching English and community-based research skills at a high school in Yamanashi Prefecture. Living abroad—and learning Japanese—deepened her appreciation for intercultural communication and reinforced the value of anthropology beyond the classroom.

NOW MAKING AN IMPACT IN TACOMA, WA

Today, Emily serves as Assistant Director of International Programs at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington, where she coordinates international student programming and leads the university's Pacific Rim Study Abroad Program, taking students across Asia for an immersive semester-long experience.

For Emily, anthropology remains at the heart of her work.

"I've been able to use my anthropological and ethnographic training from UCF to support college students grappling with cultural difference, intercultural communication, and cross-cultural research."

Whether helping students navigate unfamiliar cultures or encouraging them to question their assumptions, Emily says one of the most rewarding parts of her career is watching students build meaningful connections with people around the world.



A DISTINGUISHED KNIGHT

Emily was inducted into the UCF Order of Pegasus, Class of 2017, becoming the first Anthropology M.A. student to receive this prestigious honor at the University of Central Florida.

Read more about Emily's recognition in the original UCF College of Sciences feature:

Meet the 2017 COS Order of Pegasus Recipients

<https://sciences.ucf.edu/news/meet-2017-cos-order-pegasus-recipients/>

ADVICE FOR CURRENT STUDENTS

STAY CURIOUS

"Find a topic or question that keeps you curious! Anthropology is not for the apathetic."

Emily says a guest lecture by **Dr. Kovacevich** about studying everyday life in the Maya world stayed with her and continues to inspire how she encourages students to observe, reflect, and learn from the everyday.

LEARN A LANGUAGE

"Language and culture are so deeply intertwined that it's nearly impossible to truly understand how others think, feel, and experience their lives without sharing some of their vocabulary."

Even limited language skills can open doors, deepen understanding, and create meaningful connections across cultures.

LARA CROFT VS. ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Lara Croft is back in the spotlight. With *Amazon Prime Video's* upcoming ***Tomb Raider*** series starring Sophie Turner and a new game revisiting Lara Croft's original adventure, *Tomb Raider*, is introducing a new generation to one of popular culture's most recognizable "archaeologists." But how closely does Lara Croft's world resemble the reality of archaeology?

For many people, archaeology looks a lot like *Tomb Raider*. Since her debut in 1996, Lara Croft has become one of the most recognizable "archaeologists" in popular culture. Across video games, films, comics, and novels, she's portrayed as an intrepid explorer traveling the globe, uncovering ancient civilizations, solving elaborate puzzles, and recovering legendary artifacts.

While *Tomb Raider* has inspired countless people to become interested in archaeology, it also reflects some of the discipline's most common misconceptions. In reality, archaeology is one of the four major subfields of anthropology and focuses on understanding past human societies through the material evidence they left behind.

UCF Anthropology graduates will already recognize that archaeology is rarely a solo adventure. It is far more collaborative and scientific than popular media like *Tomb Raider* suggests. Instead, archaeologists collaborate with researchers in other fields, conservators, and local and descendant communities.

Before excavation even begins, projects require extensive research, planning, permits, and documentation. During fieldwork, every artifact, feature, and soil layer is carefully recorded because an object's location, such as its position in the ground, is often more valuable than the object itself.

Excavation is only one part of the process. After fieldwork, archaeologists spend months or even years cleaning, conserving, cataloging, analyzing, and interpreting materials before sharing their findings through publications, museum exhibits, and public outreach. Much of archaeology actually takes place in laboratories, museums, archives, and classrooms rather than at excavation sites.

Modern archaeology also emphasizes ethics and stewardship. Rather than collecting artifacts as trophies, archaeologists work to preserve cultural heritage, collaborate with local and descendant communities, and ensure research is conducted responsibly and respectfully.

Although Lara Croft's adventures are far more dramatic than real archaeological work, they capture something genuine: curiosity about the human past. That curiosity is what drives archaeology and anthropology more broadly. By studying artifacts, landscapes, languages, cultures, and human biology, anthropologists seek to better understand the diversity of human experience across time and around the world.

Lara Croft may uncover legendary artifacts, but real archaeologists uncover the stories of the people who came before us.



PREPARE FOR THE FALL SEMESTER



- Aug. 23 – Registration closes
- Aug. 24 – First day of classes
- Aug. 28 – Add/Drop deadline

View the complete calendar at:
calendar.ucf.edu/2026/fall

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AND CONNECT WITH US ONLINE,
SCAN THE QR CODE!**

