Archaeological Methods
ANTH 60A
Friday 2:00–4:50PM
Department of Anthropology
Brandeis University

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Teaching Assistant: TBA

It takes very special qualities to devote one's
life to problems with no attainable solutions
and to poking around in dead people's garbage.
- Paul Bahn

This landscape is howling, if you listen.
- Penelope Lively

In this course you will learn through hands-on experience the fundamentals of archaeological field methods, including planning an excavation, surveying, 'reading' stratigraphy, identifying features, recovering artifacts, and recording all aspects of the excavation process. You will then continue to expand your archaeological skill-set in a laboratory setting as you process and analyze the finds you recovered from the field. Throughout this course, you will participate in the entirety of the archaeological process, providing exposure to the ways archaeologists recover and interpret data to reconstruct the lives of past peoples.

Course Expectations
This course is a hands-on practicum in archaeological methods that will take place at the McGrath Farm site in Concord, MA, and in the Archaeology Laboratory in Brandeis' Anthropology Department. After meeting in the Archaeology Lab for our first class, we will spend the next ten weeks conducting archaeological fieldwork at the McGrath Farm site. Each

Right: Colonel James Barrett House, farmhouse later owned by McGrath family
spend the next ten weeks conducting archaeological fieldwork at the McGrath Farm site. Each week, we will meet and travel to the site in a Brandeis University van, returning to campus at the end of class. In the event of inclement weather, we will instead meet in the Archaeology Lab; I will email the class ahead of time if the weather report looks bad, so you will need to be attentive to your email (and to the forecast!). At the beginning of the semester, you will be divided into four groups of three students; together with your group, you will excavate one or more units, documenting the process by completing excavation forms, drawing unit profiles and plans, and describing your work in a field notebook (see below). When not working in the field, your group will work together to clean, catalogue, and analyze the artifacts you find in the field, culminating in a final report, authored by you and your group members and presented to the rest of the class at the end of the semester.

This course is designated as an Experiential Learning course. This means that you will be engaged in active learning—you will work with your field team to formulate research questions, collect archaeological data, and interpret your findings in the broader context of the McGrath Farm's history. Throughout this process, you will reflect upon the evidence you collect and evaluate your excavation plan, altering your course of action in response to the archaeological materials you uncover each week. While a largely scientific endeavor, archaeology is by its very nature an exercise in discovery. How will the data you locate change your previous impressions of the McGrath Farm site? How do your past experiences affect your interpretations of your data? You and your team will analyze the archaeological material you recover and compile a research report that documents your finds, synthesizes the knowledge you gained from your fieldwork, and offers recommendations for future activity at the site. In doing so, you will develop the flexibility of approach and critical thinking skills necessary for future analytical and collaborative projects.

Course Materials

All readings for this class other than the required textbook below are available through the course website.

Required Course Textbook:


Required Field Gear:

- **Weather appropriate attire**—Archaeological fieldwork is dirty, active work conducted outdoors. On days in which we are in the field, you should come prepared to get dirty and sweaty while exposed to the elements. It will be warmer at the beginning of the semester and get colder as we approach November, so you will need a range of appropriate clothing. Given our fickle New England weather, it's always a good idea to have a contingency plan in place—dress in layers, bring an extra sweatshirt, etc. You **must** also always wear closed-toed sneakers or boots at all times; **absolutely no** sandals, flip-flops, or open-toed shoes can be worn. If you show up to class inappropriately dressed for fieldwork, you will be sent home and given an unexcused absence for the day.
- **Water bottle(s)**—While in the field, you will be conducting rigorous labor and as such, you will need to remain adequately hydrated at all times. You should bring at least two liters of water to the site each day.

- **Sunscreen**—While we are working in the field, we will be exposed to direct sunlight. Even in areas of the site that are under mixed tree cover, you will still be regularly exposed to harmful UV rays and as such, you should take steps to protect yourself from sun exposure. Most conventional wisdom states that SPF 30 is your best bet.

- **Bug spray**—We will be excavating in fields, underbrush, and moderately forested areas. These areas are havens for insects, including mosquitoes and ticks. These species can carry dangerous, potentially fatal, diseases; it is imperative that you protect yourself from these threats. Aim for a bug spray containing up to 40% Deet content (avoid anything higher than 40% and definitely do not use 100% Deet formulas).

- **Notebook/clipboard**—In addition to completing excavation forms and drawing profiles and plans of your excavation units, you will also be expected to keep a running written narrative in which you document the decisions your group made and the reasoning behind them. This is an integral part of any excavation documentation; when it comes time to write a report of your work, it will be much easier to remember the logic behind your work if you take the time to write it down. The field notebook will also be a component of your field notes grade (see below).

### Course Grading

Course grades will be determined by six main components; (1) preparedness and class participation; (2) preliminary research report; (3) take-home midterm exam; (4) field notes; (5) final group report; and (6) final group presentation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparedness and class participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preliminary research report</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take-home midterm exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final group report</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final group presentation</td>
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### PREPAREDNESS AND CLASS PARTICIPATION

This course is based on hands-on group experience and as such, your attendance and engaged participation at each class meeting is crucial. This includes completing assigned readings prior to class, meeting on-time to travel to the site, participating to discussions of course materials, and working respectfully with other members of the class to accomplish our collective goals. The fact that we only meet fourteen times further underscores the importance of your attendance. While in the field, we are responsible for the safety of ourselves and each other, so you are expected to show up to class dressed appropriately with all of the necessary tools/gear that you will need for the week (see above). The first time you fail to attend class or to attend adequately prepared, you may write a three-page analysis of the week’s assigned readings or
suffer a 1/3 of a letter grade penalty to your final grade. Future infractions will automatically result in a 1/3 of a letter grade penalty to your final grade. In rare instances, excused absences may be granted, but you should not expect this to be the case.

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH REPORT
You will prepare a 2–3 page research report that will be due at the start of class on [DATE]. This report will outline what we know about the history of the McGrath Farm site based on documentary records concerning the Colonel Barrett Farm site, Concord’s past, and the history of New England in general. You will aim to address the following questions: who lived at the McGrath Farm site? What do we know about them? How has the landscape of the McGrath Farm site changed over time? How do the various activities conducted at the McGrath Farm site (e.g., pre-contact settlement, 19th- and 20th-century agriculture, railroad transportation) fit within the broader history of the region? You should begin research on this report during the first week of class as it will require that you track down relevant materials to bring to bear in your analysis.

TAKE-HOME MIDTERM EXAM
The midterm exam will cover material from course readings, class discussions, and fieldwork practices covered during the first half of the class. The exam will be distributed on [DATE] at 2PM. You will have until the start of class on [DATE] to complete the exam. You will be permitted to consult your readings and notes from the class, but you are not permitted under any circumstances to work with other members of the class. We will discuss the midterm more fully at the end of September.

FIELD NOTES
Taking thorough notes during archaeological work is perhaps the most important task in the field. Copious notes will allow you, and others in the future, to study, if not reconstruct, the excavation after it has been completed. Field notes may consist of text, maps, sketches, field forms, and any other format that documents your work. Field notes are an essential tool for tracking data needed to write accurate and detailed reports. You should keep your own field notes in a notebook that is separate from any other work related to this course or others. Other items such as excavation forms and maps will be shared among students in each group. A digital copy of all of your field notes will be due at the start of class on [DATE]. Notes will be graded on clarity, thoroughness, detail, and organization.

FINAL GROUP REPORT
You and your group members will compile a report describing the process of excavating your assigned units, processing the resulting artifacts, and analyzing the data you recovered. This report should be formatted in accordance with standard archaeological reports, meaning you should provide background material about the site’s history, your excavation goals, the methodology your team used, your findings from the field, your analysis conducted in the lab, and your final interpretations and
conclusions. Included in your report should be a catalog of artifacts recovered from the field, as well as photographs, drawings, and maps created in the field. The report should be approximately 12 pages in length, though this is merely a guideline. The report will be graded on quality, not quantity, and is based on content, adherence to guidelines, clarity of presentation, flow, structure, and logic of thesis, arguments, and conclusions. Because this is a group paper, other students depend on your effort for their grades. Be sure you are being good group member, pulling your weight in the research and writing process. A draft of the final group report is due at the start of class on [DATE]. The final draft of your final report is due on [DATE] (our final exam block).

FINAL GROUP PRESENTATION

You and your group members will present the findings and analysis discussed in your final report to your classmates during our final class meeting ([DATE]). Your presentation should be 15 minutes in length and should include some sort of digital visual aid (e.g., Powerpoint, Keynote, Prezi). You will also be able to share artifacts recovered from your excavation units during this time. Your presentation should emphasize the results and interpretations you and your group formulated (the background history of the site will be familiar to all by this time). Each team member is expected to speak for an equal amount of time during the presentation; you should practice your presentation ahead of time to iron out any wrinkles and ensure that you meet the specified time range.

Final grade / percentage equivalences are the following: A = 94–100%; A- = 90–93%; B+ = 87–89%; B = 84–86%; B- = 80–83%; C+ = 77–79%; C = 74–76%; C- = 70–73%; D = 60-69%; F = <60%.
If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

**Plagiarism Policy**

You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University’s policies on academic integrity (see [http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai](http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai)). Faculty may refer any suspected instances of alleged dishonesty to the Office of Student Development and Conduct. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in sanctions including but not limited to, failing grades being issued, educational programs, and other consequences.

**Four-Credit Course (with three hours of class-time per week)**

Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS

WEEK ONE ([DATE])

Location: Classroom (Brown 224)/ Archaeology Lab (Brown 213)

Welcome and introduction
Laboratory rules
What is archaeology?
Assignment: Review syllabus

WEEK TWO ([DATE])

Location: Classroom (Brown 224)/ Archaeology Lab (Brown 213)

The questions archaeology asks (and answers)
Assignment: Stewart pgs. 1–54
MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: Concord

WEEK THREE ([DATE])

Location: McGrath Farm site

Archaeological mapping
Assignment: Stewart pgs. 85–160
Skim Beranek and Mailhot

WEEK FOUR ([DATE])

Location: McGrath Farm site

Archaeological survey (part 1)
Assignment: Stewart pgs. 205–238
Skim Beranek and Mailhot

WEEK FIVE ([DATE])

Location: McGrath Farm site

Archaeological survey (part 2)
Assignment: Preliminary research report due at start of class

WEEK SIX ([DATE])

Location: McGrath Farm site

Soils and stratigraphy
Assignment: Stewart pgs. 158–204
WEEK SEVEN ([DATE])  
**Location:** McGrath Farm site  
Field recording and documentation  
**Assignment:** Review Stewart pgs. 205–238

WEEK EIGHT ([DATE])  
**Location:** McGrath Farm site  
Archaeological excavation (part 1)  
**Assignment:** *Midterm exam due at start of class*

WEEK NINE ([DATE])  
**Location:** McGrath Farm site  
Archaeological excavation (part 2)  
**Assignment:** Stewart pgs. 239–319

WEEK TEN ([DATE])  
**Location:** McGrath Farm site  
Archaeological excavation (part 3)  
**Assignment:** Review Stewart pgs. 239–319

WEEK ELEVEN ([DATE])  
**Location:** McGrath Farm site  
Final recording, documentation, and backfilling  
**Assignment:** Compile field notes, begin work on final report  
Review census documents

WEEK TWELVE ([DATE])  
**Location:** Archaeology Lab (Brown 213)  
Artifact processing  
**Assignment:** Ewen (selections)  
Process artifacts, continue work on final report

WEEK THIRTEEN ([DATE])  
**Location:** Archaeology Lab (Brown 213)  
Artifact processing  
Cataloging, documentation, and research  
**Assignment:** Review the following websites:  
http://www.sha.org/bottle/  
https://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/histarch/gallery_types/  
*Draft of final report due at start of class*
WEEK FOURTEEN ([DATE])

Location: Classroom (Brown 224)

Group presentations

Assignment: Digitized field notes due at the start of class
Group presentations in class today

*** EXCAVATION REPORT FINAL DRAFTS DUE [DATE]***