Four Years of Four Fields: A True Story

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I entered the Department of Anthropology at Arizona in September 1969 and left after 45 years in May 2014. This story is a brief reflection on the first four years—1969 to 1973—when I was a graduate student. Its usefulness, if any, lies in reminding all of us of the rapid changes and expansion of academic Anthropology.

I arrived at Arizona with about nine seasons of fieldwork—mostly in North Carolina and one at the Mayan site of Palenque—an MA degree, and two years of teaching the full complement of basic Anthropology at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. I now add that I had the same B.A. degree—from North Carolina---as Lewis Binford and Michael Jordan.

In 1969, as in previous years, all entering graduate students were required within several years of their arrival to take a four-field, written comprehensive exam before advancing to the Ph.D. program. Course work, therefore, was selected to prepare for an exam in each of the four fields, which were then labeled archaeology, cultural, linguistics, and physical; there were no core courses. The exam consisted of two hours of questions from each field spread over two days. Everyone took the same exam sitting around the table in the conference room, unless you were typing your answers, in which case you were assigned a vacant office. One could pass or fail the exam at different levels. A high pass eliminated the thesis requirement; a pass with a thesis requirement was the most common path to advancement to the Ph.D. program. Failure, even in only one field, necessitated retaking the entire exam, and only one retake was allowed.

The "comps" were a major hurdle for all, a stumbling block for some; a significant number of very smart people were forced to exit the program. It dictated course selection and enhanced graduate student cohesion but had the negative effect of extending the time in grad school more than any other single requirement. It was altered in subsequent years and finally abandoned in favor of a bat-

tery of eight required core courses.

I did not take the dreaded four-field comprehensive exam. When I arrived advanced students had the option to petition the faculty for an exemption. I had taken a similar four-field exam at North Carolina--Chapel Hill and had written and defended an original-research thesis and had a graduate minor in linguistics. With my fieldwork and teaching experience I felt my petition was strong, and, indeed, it was successful. Waiting on the decision, however, contributed to a rather frenetic beginning.

That first semester was filled with intellectual excitement and much hard work. Excitement came in the form of Bill Longacre's seminar "Archaeology as Anthropology" with about ten graduate students with experience worldwide. Paul Martin's "Paleoenvironment and Man" required seven Sunday field trips, ten small papers, and an ability to identify 100 woody plants. I took Ned Spicer's "Social Organization" and audited Art Jelinek's "Old World Prehistory."

Equally demanding were the duties of a half-time teaching assistant in the introductory courses. In those days, a quarter-time TA taught three sections, and a half-time TA taught six. Furthermore, my sections were split between Hermann Bleibtreu's day lecture in the Main Auditorium and Pat Culbert's smaller Tuesday night lecture. Thus, I attended both lectures and held discussion sections on Thursday night and Friday. By Friday night I was deadman walking, but mostly motionless, unable to join the grads that gathered to drink at the Green Dolphin.

I took a lighter class load in the spring, after having been exempted from the comps, but cannot recall what they were, except for one night seminar. It was on theoretical ecology with Paul Martin and Robert MacArthur, who alerted me to the unattainable mathematical requirements of going further in that field.

Firmly grounded in culture history and the excavation precision of eastern archaeology, I came to Arizona to get the famous Southwest experience and a broader view of archaeology. I had every intention of returning to the Southeast and spending my archaeological career digging in the red clay of the Carolinas. I rather quickly became a convert to the "New Archaeology" and after a summer at Grasshopper, abandoned the Southeast for the Southwest. This is not the place to contrast the archaeological record of these two regions or the numbers and kinds of insects and poisonous snakes. Suffice it to say,

Arizona has no chiggers. The 1970 summer at Grasshopper completed my conversion to the "New Archaeology," to Southwest prehistory, and to the Arizona field school tradition of high-elevation research on Apache land. Only later did I get to know Apache people.

The 1970--1971 academic year is a bit hazy. I took Keith Basso's "Southwest Ethnography" class in the fall and was Longacre's TA for both fall and spring Southwest classes. I returned to Grasshopper as assistant director in the summer of 1971 to begin defining a dissertation problem.

During the 1971-1972 academic year, Longacre was a visiting professor at Yale, and I used his books and office—the one overlooking the main stairs leading to the second floor—to prepare for the preliminary exam required of all Ph.D. candidates. The prelims had both a written and an oral component administered by three faculty for the major and two for the minor. The candidate selected a region and a theoretical emphasis for each. My archaeology major consisted of Ray Thompson, Jeff Dean, and Gwinn Vivian representing the Southwest. My cultural minor was also Southwest represented by Keith Basso and Richard Thompson. I have no idea what theoretical areas I chose for the exam. The written portion of the exam took two days—four hours for the major on the first day and two hours each for the major and minor on the second day. I dimly recall that Don Graybill took his prelims at the same time, and clearly remember that I wrote mine in an office in the Museum basement; it might have been Ed Ferdon's. I passed both the written and oral portions of the prelims and began to focus exclusively on dissertation research during the 1972 season at Grasshopper. That spring, while Mike Schiffer and I were TAs for Bill Rathje, I came up with the four strategies of behavioral archaeology in the back of room 216. Schiffer, sitting next to me, liked it a lot.

The 1972-1973 academic year was another busy one. Longacre was gone again, this time as a fellow at the Stanford Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences. I probably taught one of his classes in the fall as I worked on my dissertation in the corner office of the cube room. In the spring semester Schiffer and I taught Longacre's graduate seminar "Archaeology as Anthropology;" grad students could teach grad students back in the old days. Tom McGuire was in that seminar and played a critical role in the early conceptualiza-

tion of an emerging "behavioral archaeology." I also taught the archaeology half of the introductory course with Steve Zegura. (The four fields were divided into two courses at the introductory level; Anth 1a was physical and archaeology, and Anth 1b was cultural and linguistics. Anth 1a could be taught by one or two faculty depending on availability, but Anth 1b was always taught by one person.) I was also preparing to be the acting field director of the 1973 field school, which meant assisting Ray Thompson in negotiating the lease and the permit with the chairman of the White Mountain Apache Tribal Council. Schiffer was also busy teaching one of Rathje's undergraduate classes.

The major happening of spring 1973 was the collaboration of Schiffer and me in fleshing out the framework for "behavioral archaeology" as we worked on our separate dissertations. With the daylight hours filled with teaching and students, most of our joint work had to take place at night, usually capped off by a cheese Danish from a little bakery on 6th Street, now long gone.

Back in the day, a new Ph.D. had a number in the long line of Arizona graduates—Charlie Di Peso having been number 1 in 1953 because of his position in the alphabet before Joe Ben Wheat. Twenty years later several of us in the cube room were vying for the coveted number 100. Because I had to finish before the field school began, I had to settle for number 96; Schiffer took the enviable number 99; and Graybill got the prized 100. Graybill took a faculty position at the University of Georgia, Schiffer went to the Arkansas Archaeological Survey at Fayetteville, and I remained to be undergraduate adviser and teach the introductory class in cultural and linguistics in the Main Auditorium. Eventually, I hopped on the tenure track, got tenure, was promoted to full professor in 1986, and retired at the end of May 2014. Forty five years of Arizona Anthropology produced many other stories whose telling awaits another day.

NOTE: *This recollection is based solely on personal memory because all relevant files remain packed in the boxes of my departure. I gratefully acknowledge the comments of Mark Harlan, Michael Schiffer, and Stephanie Whittlesey, all three of whom passed the four-field, written comprehensive examination.*