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# NAGPRA Process and Progress at Ball State University

Christine Thompson, Ball State University  
S. Homes Hogue, Ball State University  
Caitlin Murray, Ball State University  
Kevin C. Nolan, Ball State University  
Sneha Chavali, University of Wisconsin

## ABSTRACT

Ball State's Department of Anthropology and the Applied Anthropology Laboratories (AAL) has focused on NAGPRA since 2010, with five National NAGPRA grants awarded. This poster presents how our NAGPRA process provides students with opportunities to enhance skills in curation procedures, skeletal analysis, documentation, and communication with Tribes. NAGPRA has enabled us to build stronger relationships with tribal partners as we work together to achieve goals for consultation and repatriation.

## WHY NAGPRA MATTERS

Recognizing tribal sovereignty is at the heart of our NAGPRA process. All of our NAGPRA collections are culturally unidentified (CUI); there are 55 tribes who could lay claims to one or more of our NAGPRA collections. We are learning to take the time to connect with tribal members whenever and wherever we can, building trust and forming relationships with as many tribes as possible.

NAGPRA is discussed and integrated into multiple Anthropology courses at Ball State. Students learn the basics of tribal sovereignty, how and why NAGPRA came to be, why it is important today, and how Ball State is implementing NAGPRA. This knowledge is important to our students' future careers, whether as an archaeologist, cultural anthropologist, or biological anthropologist.

## THE NAGPRA PROCESS at BALL STATE UNIVERSITY (2010-Present)

### SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

In 2010, BSU Department of Anthropology began a systematic inventory of human skeletal remains stored in the departmental curation facility. In addition to the standard analysis, all materials were re-bagged, cataloged, and stored in acid-free boxes. All burial information was digitized and distributed to National NAGPRA to update the original 1992 inventory as needed. This work was to facilitate the consultation process and no further research was conducted.

Three NAGPRA Consultation & Documentation grants (2012-2015) provided opportunities to further document and rehabilitate a large portion of our associated funerary objects that were affiliated with our culturally unidentified (CUI) human remains. This included 283 minimum number of individuals (MNI) and 4,832 potentially associated funerary objects (AFO) across 32 collections. Eight tribes with possible geographic claims to one or more of these collections were the focus of our initial grant. Subsequent NAGPRA grants received support and provided funding for consultation with additional tribes. As our NAGPRA program grew with additional grants, we further developed necessary infrastructure to accommodate the needs of the program. For example, in 2012 we established a separate NAGPRA office to house activities related to the re-sorting of co-mingled remains and funerary objects and to ensure privacy and respectful treatment of the human remains. In 2014, we accomplished our first repatriation to the Eastern Band of Cherokee, and with the support of other tribes that had possible competing claims.

Our most recent NAGPRA Consultation & Documentation grant was awarded in September 2018. This grant will facilitate discussions amongst Tribes to discuss efficient strategies for the disposition and repatriation of Indiana CUI Collections.

### CHALLENGES

The NAGPRA consultation process is not without challenges and we faced several that led to much more time being spent on the process than anticipated. For example, some materials listed in the original NAGPRA inventory could not be located while other materials had no accession or site numbers. Unfortunately donated materials had little information on provenience or site location associated with them. Some materials had been co-mingled and had to be sorted.

Because most of the collections at Ball State University had not yet been affiliated with any federally recognized tribe, we began with an incomplete list of the numerous tribes that had cultural and legal ties to the State of Indiana. Over time we learned to ask groups with whom we were in contact what other tribes should be included in our activities. As a result, our list of tribal partners with possible claims to our CUI collections grew from eight in 2010 to 55 Tribes in 2018.

Although our tribal partners are familiar with one another and work on projects together, it is not the case they will always agree on key issues, including how human remains are cared for while in the curation facility. Some tribes want them covered in red cloth, others want to smudge remains with sage while reviewing them. So far, these different approaches have been accommodated with the support of the tribes, however, we learned it is important to ask questions and then allow for their guidance on best practices.

As part of our NAGPRA documentation process and inventory, several "new" NAGPRA collections were discovered. These newly discovered collections were processed, included in all tribal consultations, and will be reported to National NAGPRA. An important lesson we learned was to not trust old labels or inventories, that might be incomplete or incorrect.

### NAGPRA AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

Our work with NAGPRA has encouraged faculty, staff and students to focus more on community engagement through participation in community presentations, research conferences, and other events. These activities help us to further build relationships with our tribal partners. Collaborative activities include giving presentations at the Ohio History Connection Tribal Nations Conferences and the Community Engaged Scholarship in Indian Country conference to bringing students to attend the Miami Annual Winter Gatherings in Miami, OK. We are also working with our counterparts at Indiana University and the Indiana State Museum to develop a state-wide approach to NAGPRA.

One of the best outcomes of facilitating this important work, is that it has provided us with new, non-NAGPRA-related research opportunities with tribal partners. Our most recent grant award, a 2018 NEH Public Humanities Project "A New View of the Battle of the Wabash" involves many of our NAGPRA tribal partners. Someday, we will complete the consultation and repatriation process. However, it is our hope that the new relationships we are forging together with tribal partners will endure.



## STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

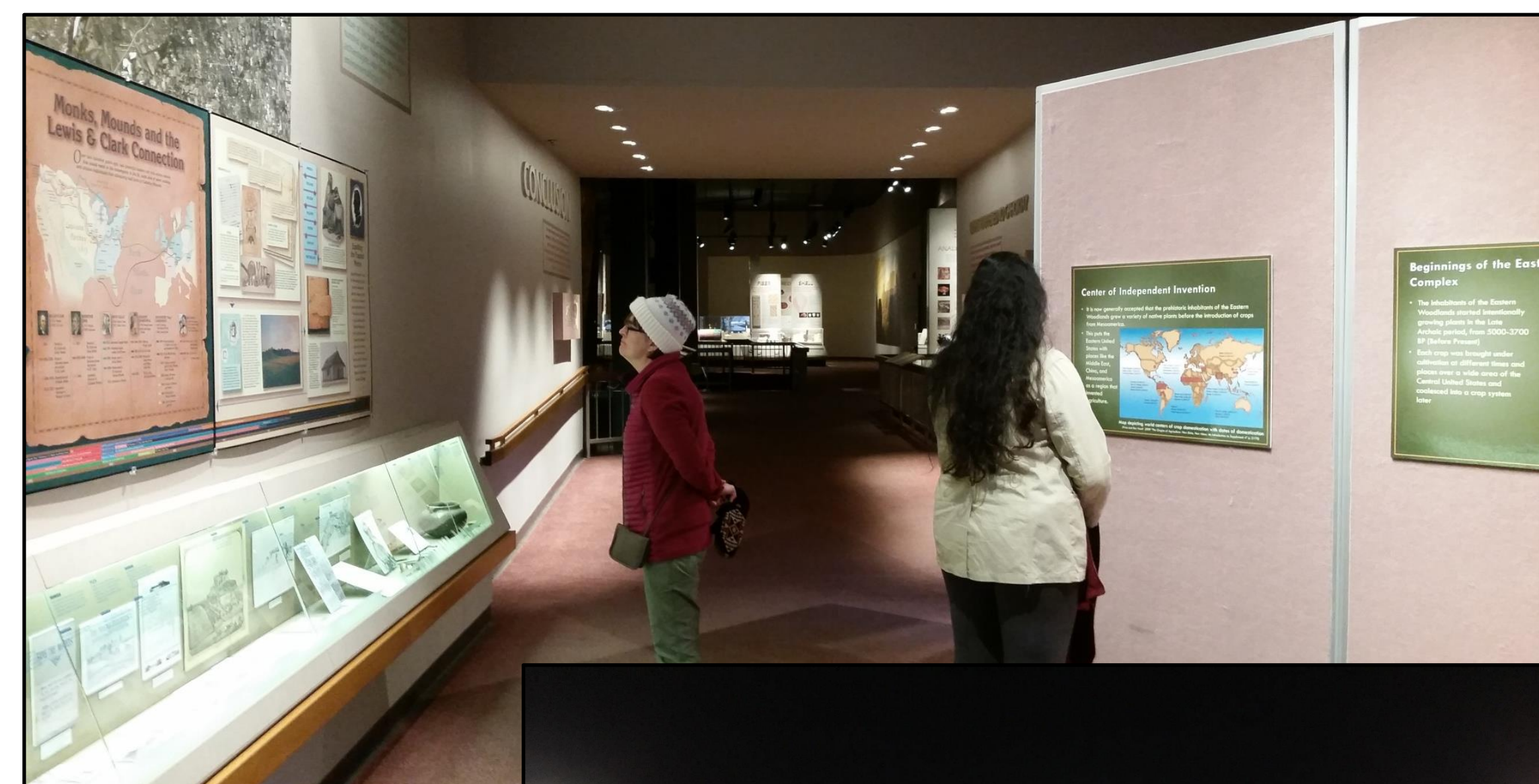
This project has provided multiple opportunities for undergraduate and graduate student involvement. Students receive information about NAGPRA in courses offered in the Department of Anthropology and through active learning in the Applied Anthropology Labs.

Twenty students have assisted in various ways with documenting the NAGPRA collection, rehabilitating the collections as needed, and preparing for and participating in tribal consultations. In addition to gaining detailed knowledge of the NAGPRA process and its requirements, students have enhanced their skills in standard curation procedures, skeletal analysis, proper collections documentation, and oral and written communication.

As students work with collections and participate in consultations with tribes, they are developing professional skills. They have presented on their work locally and at regional conferences. Many express an interest in continuing with professional collections management. NAGPRA has provided essential tools they need to navigate the realities of 21<sup>st</sup> century North American anthropology and archaeology.

## References

National NAGPRA  
<http://www.nps.gov/nagpra>



Graduate Assistant Sneha Chavali (center) at National Preservation Institute NAGPRA Training with trainers Jan Bernstein & Megon Noble.

