

Archaeology as a Career

Archaeology

What:

Archaeology is the scientific study of past human societies and their cultures. Archaeologists dig in places where clues of human activities in the past are preserved. They study this evidence thoroughly and then write books and articles about their discoveries so that everyone can learn about the past from those studies.

Skills and Talents:

Archaeologists are detectives who intricately piece together clues about the past. As in a criminal investigation, you never know what clues might be important, so the archaeologist needs to look at, record, and study everything. In addition to developing precise digging skills, archaeologists learn to use surveying instruments to map sites, photographic equipment to photograph excavations and artifacts, and much other specialized equipment to study soils and geology or to extract special kinds of samples (for example, preserved plant and animal remains, pollen, and so on).

In the lab, archaeologists study the artifacts and other remains found during the excavation. Microscopes, various mechanical and electronic measuring devices, photographic equipment, and even instruments for detecting chemical residues on artifacts or trace elements in bones are sometimes used. Archaeologists also make extensive use of computers to keep track of artifact inventories, to run statistical studies, to make maps, and to write and print reports.

Educational Requirements:

Archaeologists need to have at least an degree, usually in anthropology. For archaeologists who are employed by colleges or universities, where they teach in addition to conducting research, the Ph.D. degree is essential. However, many archaeologists are employed outside colleges and universities. The National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and many state agencies hire archaeologists. In addition, there are private consulting companies, and professionally trained archaeologists are hired for this work.

Special Attractions:

Archaeology provides an opportunity to combine outdoor work, often in remote or scenic area, with scientific study and teaching. Archaeologists have the exciting opportunity to make new discoveries about the past and get paid for it.

Anthropology

What:

Anthropology is the comparative study of human behavior and culture. Anthropologists investigate the origins and development of humans, the way they lived in the past, and the similarities and differences among the societies in which humans live today.

Skills and Talents:

Anthropologists who study contemporary human societies usually do fieldwork among specific groups of people. By observing and participating in daily activities as well as special events, anthropologists learn how societies are organized and why people behave the way they do. Although most anthropologists are employed at colleges and universities, where they teach and conduct research, other anthropologists have careers with government agencies, business and international relations organizations, and private consulting and research firms.

Anthropology is an excellent study for those wanting to work with other people in industry, business, or commerce. Many leaders in personnel management have backgrounds in anthropology.

Educational Requirements:

A professional career in anthropology usually requires a graduate degree; academic positions require the Ph.D. Archaeology, physical anthropology, cultural anthropology, and linguistics are all part of anthropology.

Special Attractions:

Anthropologists work among groups of people, observing and participating in activities and events that can help us learn more about human behavior. Fieldwork may be conducted in far-off, exotic parts of the world or right here in our own society. Wherever they may work, anthropologists are attracted to the challenge of understanding the diversity of human behaviors and experiences.

For guidance on whom to contact for more information about anthropology or archaeology, please contact:

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