

The Course

This course will introduce you to the fundamentals of field techniques in historical archaeology, their methodological motivation, and the substantive issues in early Chesapeake social history that can be addressed by archaeological evidence. You will learn basic archaeological excavation, sampling, and recording techniques required to execute successfully multi-disciplinary field research. We will explore the relationships among field techniques, the data they produce, analytical methods, and the archaeologist's ability to make and evaluate inferences about history.

Analytical approaches covered include the use of ceramics in chronological inference, the analysis of faunal remains for dietary reconstruction, the utility of geoarchaeological and dendrochronological methods in the reconstruction of land-use history, and the use of architecture and artifact spatial patterns to make inferences about the social use of space. The social, economic, and ecological dynamics of early Chesapeake society provide our historical focus. On-site instruction, lectures, and discussion sessions at Monticello will be complemented by field trips to related sites.

Historical Background

Two broad historical trends, one economic, the other demographic, set the stage for our research at Monticello and the Field School. By the second quarter of the eighteenth century, slavery-based plantations growing tobacco for export had begun to spread rapidly into the Piedmont Region, where Monticello is located, from the Coastal Plain to the east. For the remainder of the century, the Piedmont was the most economically dynamic region of Virginia.

As the eighteenth century drew to a close, plantation owners responded to shifting local and trans-Atlantic markets by diversifying their sources of income to include new agricultural crops, more complex and intensive methods of cultivation, and even forays into manufacturing. Hoe-based tobacco monoculture was supplemented with, or in some cases replaced by, a more diversified agricultural regime based around the plow cultivation of wheat.

Fundamental demographic shifts paralleled these economic developments. Slave immigration from older plantations in the Coastal Plain, importation of enslaved people directly from Africa, and natural increase all contributed to rapid growth in the region's slave population. By the end of the 18th century the slave population was comprised almost entirely of native-born people.

Our research at Monticello aims to trace the conflicting strategies pursued by plantation owners like Thomas Jefferson and enslaved people as they attempted to cope with these shifting historical circumstances and to better their own and their families' life chances in Colonial and Antebellum Chesapeake.

How did the co-evolving economic and social strategies employed by slave-owning elites and enslaved laborers shift with the movement of settlement into the Piedmont? How were these strategies in turn affected by economic diversification at Monticello and on other plantations near the end of the eighteenth century? What were the ecological and social consequences? How did enslaved people resist them or turn them to their own advantage? What opportunities and constraints did economic diversification and the growth of kinship networks offer enslaved people in their attempts to better their lives?

Our research questions also focus on change over time in the social strategies that Jefferson and his family devised to facilitate social interaction with other elites. Over the course of his lifetime, Jefferson's travels, reading, and letter writing expanded the geographical scale of the social networks in which he participated and the elite design vocabularies to which he was exposed. How did this affect his attempts to use architectural and ornamental landscape designs to signal social status and cultural norms in ways that could be understood with increasingly diverse friends and foes? Before the Revolution these included Chesapeake elites, British colonial administrators, and American-born elites from other colonies in British North America. After the Revolution it included administrators and aristocrats from other European nation states.

These are some of the questions that we hope to be able to answer over the next few years, drawing on results from our current archaeological research at Monticello as well as comparative analysis of data from other plantations in the Chesapeake and other early-modern slave societies of the Atlantic World. This course offers you the opportunity to be a part of the research process – both in the field and in the lab.

The Site

In 2025, our fieldwork focuses on stratigraphic excavation that we hope will advance our understanding of change over time in Jefferson's designs for the ornamental landscape that surrounded his mountaintop mansion, the ways in which these designs were executed by enslaved workers, and their effects on the social interaction of Monticello's residents, enslaved and free, with one another and with visiting elites.

We will be excavating five-foot quadrats on and adjacent to the East Lawn in front of the mansion. We know from previous research that the current topography, including the level East Lawn and the gentle slopes that surround it, is a giant artifact constructed by enslaved workers. There were at least two episodes of design and earth moving, one in 1768 and a second roughly 30 years later. These are linked to the design and construction of the first and second versions of the mansion. We know from coring that in some places the resulting fill deposits are over 5 feet deep.

Our work this summer has two foci. The first is excavation of these deeply stratified deposits to identify and date the different earthmoving episodes that created the current topography. This work offers an opportunity to develop skills in describing, recording, excavating, and analyzing archaeological layers and their interfaces. We aim to understand both how these layers were deposited and how they were subsequently modified. A second focus is extensive spatial sampling of near-surface deposits enabling us to map patterns the densities of different artifact classes discarded from the mansion. This work emphasizes the design of spatial sampling plans that will allow us to produce reliable density maps and in turn contribute to our larger efforts to make inference about how space inside the house were used.

Reading

Reading, updated copies of the Syllabus, and Course Description will be found on GitHub: <https://github.com/TJF-Monticello/Monticello-UVA-FieldSchool-2025>

In addition, you will receive printed copies of the Monticello Department of Archaeology's *Lab Procedures Manual* and *Field Procedures Manual*. **We expect you to come to class having done the reading assigned for that day. You can expect a pop-quiz on the reading assignment at least once a week.**

Daily Schedule

Our class day begins at 8:30 a.m. and ends at 4:30 p.m. We'll assemble at 8:30 at the Monticello Visitor's Center. Most lectures will take start at 8:30 at the VC in Classroom 7. We will then take the shuttle bus up to the site. On days when there is no morning lecture, you should be at the shuttle stop at 8:30. There is a thirty-minute break at noon for lunch at the site. You are responsible for packing your own lunch.

Once we begin to recover artifacts from our excavations, we will rotate excavation teams through the lab, where you will learn the basics of artifact processing -- washing, labeling, curation, and keeping track of critical archaeological context information for each object. You'll learn about the classification and measurement protocols and software we use to catalog artifacts and field records into our database (see www.daacs.org). You'll have a chance to hone your artifact identification skills with the artifacts you are processing, as well as examples from our extensive study collection.

Field School Staff

Fraser D. Neiman	Director	fneiman@monticello.org
Crystal O'Connor	Archaeological Field Research Manager	coconnor@monticello.org
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DAACS Lab

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Guest Lecturers

Aureana Woods	Oral Historian, <i>Getting Word</i> Oral History Project, Monticello (slavery, oral history, descendant engagement).
Dan Druckenbrod	Professor, Geography and Environmental Science, Rider University (dendrochronology and dendroecology).
Dan Hayes	Geoarchaeologist (geoarchaeology).
Kandace Hollenbach	Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Tennessee (paleoethnobotany).

Requirements and Evaluation

Class Participation. We expect you to attend all field sessions, lectures, and discussions. Readings are to be completed before coming to the session at which they are scheduled to be discussed. You should try to digest and evaluate what you have read and be prepared to share your understanding of the reading and any questions you have about it in class. Contributions to class discussion will determine 10% of your grade.

Quality Field and Lab Work. Your performance will also be evaluated based on the quality of your field and lab work. This includes quality of the field records you generate, including map and section drawings. You are responsible for learning completely and executing accurately our recording protocols, as described in the *Field Procedures Manual* and *Laboratory Procedures Manual*. You will be creating archival field and lab records.

Given the destructive character of archaeological excavation, the observations you make can never be repeated and the records you create are the only records there will ever be. We therefore take our obligations for completeness, accuracy, and standardization in excavation and recording very seriously. We expect you to do the same. Study the field and lab manuals carefully.

You will meet regularly with our teaching staff to review objectives for field, lab, and analytical skills, your progress toward meeting them, as well as your understanding of material covered in the readings and lectures. These aspects of your performance will determine 40% of your grade.

Quizzes. Two quizzes, one at the end of the second week and one at the end of the fourth week will give you some intermediate feedback on your progress and determine 20% of your grade.

Final Exam. The results of a 2-hour written examination, covering lectures, readings, and

both field and lab skills will determine 30% of your grade.