

Anthropology News



EVOLUTIONARY ANTHROPOLOGY SOCIETY

Evolutionary Anthropology at the University of Auckland

Siobhán M Mattison

North American students may wish to consider venturing to the Antipodes to pursue a PhD in evolutionary anthropology. There are many outstanding universities in that part of the world, with increasingly attractive research and educational opportunities as these universities seek to expand their international presence. The University of Auckland (UoA) in New Zealand, with top-notch staff, excellent facilities, and attractive tuition rates and scholarships, is the first of several Antipodean programs to be profiled in this column.

PhD programs in the Antipodes are structured similarly to those of the UK system: A PhD normally is sought with a Masters in hand and is anticipated to take about 3-4 years to complete. An entering PhD student has a reasonably well-developed research question prior to admission that is further refined in consultation with one or two main supervisors in the first several months of study. Students are on probationary status during the first year until the proposal is successfully completed. The thesis is examined by external referees, including an oral exam, who assess its merits relative to international standards. Students who lack necessary coursework or research experience prior to entry can gain these through special one-year post-graduate certificates designed to feed into the PhD track. Fees for international students at the University of Auckland are kept at the domestic rate, which means relatively inexpensive tuition if the PhD is funded out-of-pocket.

The University of Auckland's department of anthropology includes many faculty with interests in evolutionary anthropology: Bruce Floyd (regional area, Taiwan) studies the developmental and epigenetic origins of biological outcomes; Judith Littleton has interests in evolutionary medicine and human skeletal remains; ethnoprimateologist Nicholas Malone (Indonesia) studies the interactions between non-human primates and local communities; and Siobhán Mattison (China and Taiwan) is the resident human behavioral ecologist and evolutionary demographer. Several staff in archaeology also contribute to the curriculum in evolutionary anthropology: Simon Holdoway studies the relationships between people and environments in Australia and the development of agriculture in the Fayum in Egypt; Peter Sheppard analyzes Lapita pottery to provide evidence of the initial peopling of the Pacific; Melinda Allen (Polynesia) uses evolutionary approaches to investigate the dynamics of human-environment interactions; Thegn Ladefoged studies agricultural economies, societal collapse on Easter Island (Rapa Nui), and the processes of territoriality and warfare; and Ethan Cochrane uses phylogenetic methods to reconstruct relationships among human populations as reflected in the archaeological record.

Additional linkages within the Faculties of Arts and Sciences provide further opportunities for collaborative study. In psychology, Russell Gray and Quentin Atkinson apply cultural phylogenetic methods to studying the evolution of complex behaviors, from the peopling of the Pacific, to general linguistic evolution, to the evolution of political complexity and religion. The UoA, while researching cultures from across the globe, has a strong regional (Asia-Pacific) emphasis, providing unparalleled opportunities for its study.

The UoA department of anthropology offers a PhD and MA in anthropology, as well as BA Honors degrees and post-graduate diplomas in year-long post-graduate programs. Facilities for research at UoA include a fully operational osteology laboratory and state-of-the-art equipment for analysis of archaeological remains and the analysis of stable isotopes. The UoA anthropology department also has strong relationships with Auckland Museum, which contains the world's most "extensive Maori and Pacific Island collection". The department hosts a weekly seminar that features current work from local and international anthropology experts.

Fees for post-graduate education are relatively low at the UoA and scholarships are available (competitively awarded) for the top incoming students. Faculty grants often provide partial support to students at the PhD level, as do internal teaching and research assistantships. Graduate student Jen Huebert echoes, "PhDs here are reasonably priced [and] the faculty and other candidates are great ... we have some great technology ... and people who know how to use [it]." Graduates of the UoA program have gone on to obtain positions in academic teaching, local and international governmental agencies, museum research, and the cultural

heritage management industry.

Finally, I'd be remiss not to point out the attractiveness of Auckland itself as a place to situate yourself for several years of study. The largest Pacific Island city in the world, Auckland is culturally diverse. Recently ranked the third most liveable city in the world, it is a wonderful place to call home. The city is lively and eclectic, catering to outdoor enthusiasts, skaters and surfers, as well as to coffee- and bar-house patrons, and to omnipresent cruiseliner pleasure seekers.

If you wish to consider applying to the PhD program in the department of anthropology, start [here](#). For more specific inquiries, questions can be directed to the PhD advisor, currently Kirsten Zemke (k.zemke@auckland.ac.nz).

*Comments on and contributions to this column are welcome. Please send to **Siobhán Mattison** (sm.mattison@auckland.ac.nz). Columns are archived at www.evanthsoc.org.*



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