

# The Oklahoma Public Archaeology Network (OKPAN)

## Leveraging University Resources to Serve Historically Excluded Communities

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### ABSTRACT

As the venues for professional training and education, universities have always shaped the future of the archaeological discipline—for better but also, in important ways, for worse. Historically, university structures promoted practitioner homogeneity and social inequity and, at the largest research-intensive universities, even managed to turn “service” into a dirty word. However, using the same structures that perpetuated damaging practices in the past, universities can just as readily transform archaeology into the inclusive, community-engaged discipline it should always have been—while serving communities in ways that matter to them. This article explains and illustrates how and why we have tried to do this through the founding and operation of the Oklahoma Public Archaeology Network (OKPAN) at the University of Oklahoma. OKPAN seeks to improve relationships among diverse Oklahoma communities by framing archaeology as a tool that can serve communities’ interests while creating pathways within universities for members of historically excluded groups to join and help further transform the discipline.

**Keywords:** public archaeology, community archaeology, collaborative archaeology, archaeological education, archaeology as service

Como lugares de formación y educación profesional, las universidades siempre han moldeado el futuro de la disciplina arqueológica, tanto para mejorar como también de manera importante para peor. Históricamente, las estructuras universitarias promovieron la homogeneidad entre los practicantes y la desigualdad social, y en las universidades de mayor investigación, incluso lograron convertir al “servicio” en una palabra sucia. Sin embargo, utilizando las mismas estructuras que perpetuaron prácticas dañinas en el pasado, las universidades pueden transformar igualmente la arqueología en una disciplina inclusiva y comprometida al servicio de las comunidades. Este artículo explica e ilustra cómo y por qué hemos tratado de hacer esto a través de la fundación y operación de la Red Pública de Arqueología de Oklahoma (OKPAN) en la Universidad de Oklahoma. OKPAN busca mejorar las relaciones entre las diversas comunidades de Oklahoma y considera la arqueología una herramienta que puede servir los intereses de las comunidades, mientras tanto, también crea vías dentro de las universidades para que los miembros de grupos históricamente excluidos puedan unirse y ayudar a transformar aún más la disciplina.

**Palabras clave:** arqueología pública, arqueología comunitaria, arqueología colaborativa, educación arqueológica, arqueología como servicio

In 2016, several of the coauthors of this article founded the Oklahoma Public Archaeology Network (OKPAN) at the University of Oklahoma (OU), the state’s flagship university. We borrowed the structure of our name from the Florida Public Archaeology Network (FPAN) and found programming inspiration in FPAN’s many stellar offerings, along with those sponsored by other organizations doing public-facing work on behalf of archaeology. In our early years, some even preceding our formal incorporation, we organized programs that paralleled those we had seen work

elsewhere to raise public awareness of archaeology: an annual October “Oklahoma Archaeology Month (OAM),” a biennial Oklahoma Archaeology Conference (OAC), and K-12 classroom visits, to name a few (Douglas 2020; Dudley and Domeischel 2020).

However, during our first five years as an organization, several phenomena conspired to lead us to subtly revise OKPAN’s mission and approach and to articulate and formalize our current

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tagline, "Archaeology in Service of Heritage." Those phenomena included our own growing familiarity with the full breadth of Oklahoma communities; our recognition of the multidimensional power of students and university resources to serve more of those communities; an increasing appreciation that public-facing work is important, but that community-engaged public-facing work is even more powerful and rewarding (e.g., Atalay 2012; Schmidt and Kehoe 2019; Supernant et al. 2020); and in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and murder of George Floyd, which we processed as a call-to-arms to take more active measures to combat social inequality and to create opportunities in archaeology for those previously excluded from it.

Today, OKPAN seeks to create conversations among all Oklahoma stakeholders who care about the past (which is to say, nearly everyone), and we do so with an eye toward healing social divisions and creating points of entry to archaeology for those historically excluded from it. We create and execute our programs in collaboration with the communities we serve, and we aim to serve first and foremost those communities most marginalized by society and archaeology. In so doing, we situate archaeology as a tool—nothing more, nothing less—that, when used responsibly, can serve heritage and a society fractured along far too many planes. To do this, we intentionally engage university structures that have traditionally perpetuated educational and social inequality to help achieve just the opposite.

In the sections that follow, we first elaborate on OKPAN's genesis and evolution, structure, and core programs. Next, we explain why universities can be ideal places to leverage modest resources and student power to better serve heritage, students themselves, and society. Finally, we present two case studies that illustrate our service philosophy and methodologies: a high school internship program (*Voices of Oklahoma*) and the production of an online magazine (*The Community Archaeologist*). We do this to show that students, who themselves are not traditionally part of archaeology's (or universities') power structures, can be equipped with university resources to serve as the drivers of both impactful archaeological programming and social change. As this article unfolds, we include links to audio clips through which members of our network share in their own words what this has meant for them.

## OKPAN'S HISTORY AND STRUCTURE

In 2012, coauthor Bonnie Pitblado accepted the Robert E. and Virginia Bell Endowed Chair of Anthropological Archaeology at the University of Oklahoma. Pitblado liked that the position called for someone who works in the deep Paleoindigenous past (*sensu Steeves 2021*), but she was even more intrigued by not only its call for a faculty member who would work to heal a fractured relationship between professional and avocational archaeologists in the state but also the endowment funding it provided to do it. Having worked closely with avocationals in Colorado, Utah, and Idaho (e.g., Pitblado 2014a, 2014b), Pitblado felt she had a handle on what to do, what not to do, and how to start doing it.

Certainly, one of the first things "to do" was to learn more about the professional–avocational relationship in Oklahoma before plowing forward with efforts to repair its alleged rift. Toward that end, then OU anthropology graduate student Holly Andrew

conducted an ethnographic study of the Oklahoma Anthropological Society (OAS), the statewide organization that has been home to the state's professionals and avocationals since 1936. She did this at the request of the OAS leadership and conducted her work collaboratively with OAS members using surveys and focus groups to elicit professional and avocational members' thoughts. This led to her 2015 master's thesis, "Engaging and Empowering Citizens in the Archaeological Process: A Case Study Involving the Oklahoma Anthropological Society" (Andrew 2015).

Andrew's research revealed that distrust and hard feelings had infiltrated the organization's professional and avocational archaeologist members, seriously hampering the organization's ability to staff leadership positions and offer public-facing programs. Members also made it clear, however, that they valued their history and their traditional offerings (e.g., chapter-based speaker series) and wanted to find a path forward. One of Andrew's (2015) suggestions for doing so was that OAS engage in formal strategic planning to help members understand their past and intentionally shape a sustainable future. They did so, and not surprisingly, the exercise brought long-simmering tensions to the surface. This culminated in a power struggle among OAS members with different visions for the organization, but eventually it led to organizational stability.

Observing this unfold as members of OAS themselves, Pitblado and Andrew concluded that if they were going to improve relationships among professionals and avocationals in Oklahoma, they needed to do so outside the confines of the group. They had also begun to see that the fractures between communities in Oklahoma comprised more than those between professionals and avocationals. This led Andrew and her fellow graduate student Meghan Dudley to suggest experimenting with a new means for Oklahoma citizens interested in archaeology to interact with and learn from one another. That suggestion led to the founding of OKPAN, with a starter mission of "bridging all of Oklahoma's communities with an interest in the past by promoting education, understanding, and outreach." Pitblado, Andrew, and Dudley debated whether to position the organization within the university or as an independent nonprofit outside of OU, ultimately—and, as we would come to learn, fortunately—settling on the former.

In our early days, OKPAN staff—mostly OU graduate and undergraduate students but with an ever-expanding network of community partners—and a diverse advisory board representing about a dozen different Oklahoma communities, focused on a few core initiatives. We created programming, most of it inspired by the work of other public archaeology organizations, that we thought could introduce new opportunities for all Oklahomans interested in archaeology to interact with one another around the broader concept of heritage. Those Oklahomans included, but were no longer limited to, members of OAS (Figure 1, Audio 1).<sup>1</sup>

For example, we initiated a biennial statewide archaeology conference like those long held yearly or every other year in Colorado, Arizona, Texas, and other states (Figure 2). The Oklahoma Archaeology Conference (OAC) has so far convened three times, and each time has featured traditional oral presentations and posters as well as a "Tribal Collaboration Forum," for which members of Oklahoma's sovereign tribal nations set the agenda and serve as principal panelists. OAC assessment feedback



**FIGURE 1.** Ray McAllister (avocational archaeologist, president of the Oklahoma Anthropological Society, and retired engineer). Photo by Sharon McAllister. Click [here](#) to hear Ray discuss his experience with OKPAN, or see [Note 1](#) for a transcription.

indicates that the forum is a highlight for conference attendees, who have themselves been a robust mix of professionals, avocationals, students, and tribal members. We invite the latter to attend OAC free of cost, as a small gesture that recognizes the harm that archaeology has done to Indigenous people in the past and can continue to do today (Sassaman 2021).

We also launched a state-wide “Oklahoma Archaeology Month” (OAM), something many other states have used to raise awareness of archaeology among their citizens. Each year, we request that the Oklahoma governor sign a proclamation that October is OAM, and we share the document (e.g., Figure 3) using our Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram accounts. We also sponsor the creation and dissemination of an archaeology month poster. Initially, we partnered to create the poster with the Oklahoma Archeological Survey, the State Historic Preservation Office, and a member of a different local or descendant community each year (e.g., in 2018, Muscogee artist Jon Tiger, and in 2019, Caddo ceramicist Chase Earles). For the past two years, we have continued to partner with local communities, but we have changed the way we do so to increase our impact in those communities and to tip the balance of poster-production power to nonarchaeologists. We will elaborate on this in the Voices case study.

Final examples of OKPAN’s initial programming include thrice-yearly “Archaeological Skills Workshops” and K-12 outreach through classroom visits and teacher education (Figure 4, Audio 2).<sup>2</sup> Taught by archaeologists, graduate students, and community members with specialized expertise, the workshops introduce anyone interested (although primarily adults) to discrete skills such as using a total station, understanding NAGPRA, and managing collections. These workshops have broad appeal, with a recent one on lithic analysis drawing registration from Oklahoma CRM professionals, avocationals, and students at Oklahoma secondary schools and universities (Figure 5, Audio 3).<sup>3</sup> We accomplish our K-12 education principally by partnering with Project Archaeology and using their curriculum, Project Archaeology: Investigating Shelter (Letts and Moe 2009). Doing so led to a current partnership among OKPAN, the three entities supporting Project Archaeology (the Bureau of Land Management, Southern Utah University, and the Institute of Heritage Education), and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (Figure 6, Audio 4).<sup>4</sup>

These programs continue today, and we consider them core OKPAN offerings that create space for learning and conversations about heritage and the role archaeology can play in revealing it. All were initially sustained by a relatively small group of graduate



**FIGURE 2.** Poster session at the Second Biennial Oklahoma Archaeology Conference, Norman, Oklahoma (2018). Photo by Travis Caperton.

and undergraduate students and our advisory board, with most costs covered by Pitblado's endowment. However, when 2020 forced us all into a virtual world, we used that time to reflect upon what we were doing, and why, and how, and for whom. In keeping with insights from other scholars (e.g., Atalay 2012), we realized that the more community-engaged the programming is from inception to execution, the better it serves the people of Oklahoma. We also began to recognize ways that we could tailor our programming to use it to recruit archaeology students from historically excluded backgrounds. Finally, we began to grasp the power of our student-centered methodologies. We pledged that, going forward, we would redouble our efforts to co-create our programming with as many diverse community groups as possible and to do so with the express goal of recruiting and training a more diverse group of future archaeologists.

At the same time, another important pivot occurred structurally. We had been experimenting with a variety of ways to run our programs and OKPAN itself through varied systems of directors and responsibilities. Ultimately, however, we realized that we could best harness the creativity and energy of students—and best leverage our financial resources—by establishing a hierarchical approach to leadership, with graduate students in team lead positions and all students (graduate, undergraduate, and, increasingly, high school) serving as team members of as many

initiatives as they choose. This structure is working well, because it empowers the leads and their teams to dream and build big, unhampered by conventional thinking about what students can and cannot accomplish. Leads learn to lead, and they also learn how to be good teammates to other leads.

From the always critical funding perspective, this model also allows Pitblado to direct endowment funds in ways that support the maximum number of students and programs possible. All core OKPAN team members begin as either an intern earning credit or a volunteer donating the equivalent of one OU credit's worth of time (45 hours). This allows new students to learn whether OKPAN is for them and to explore teams they might like to join. At that point, the "currencies" vary from student to student, depending on their needs and what, structurally, university policy allows. Some students need additional credit and move on to an advanced internship, whereas others prefer paid hourly positions. Many graduate students are already employed as graduate teaching or research assistants and are restricted by OU policy from working additional hours. Those students engage in passion projects and receive scholarships to advance their own research. One student serves in a dedicated graduate assistantship as the director of operations, charged with ensuring that all programs are marketed and otherwise supported. In this way, we can make a modest amount of endowment funding—currently around \$80,000

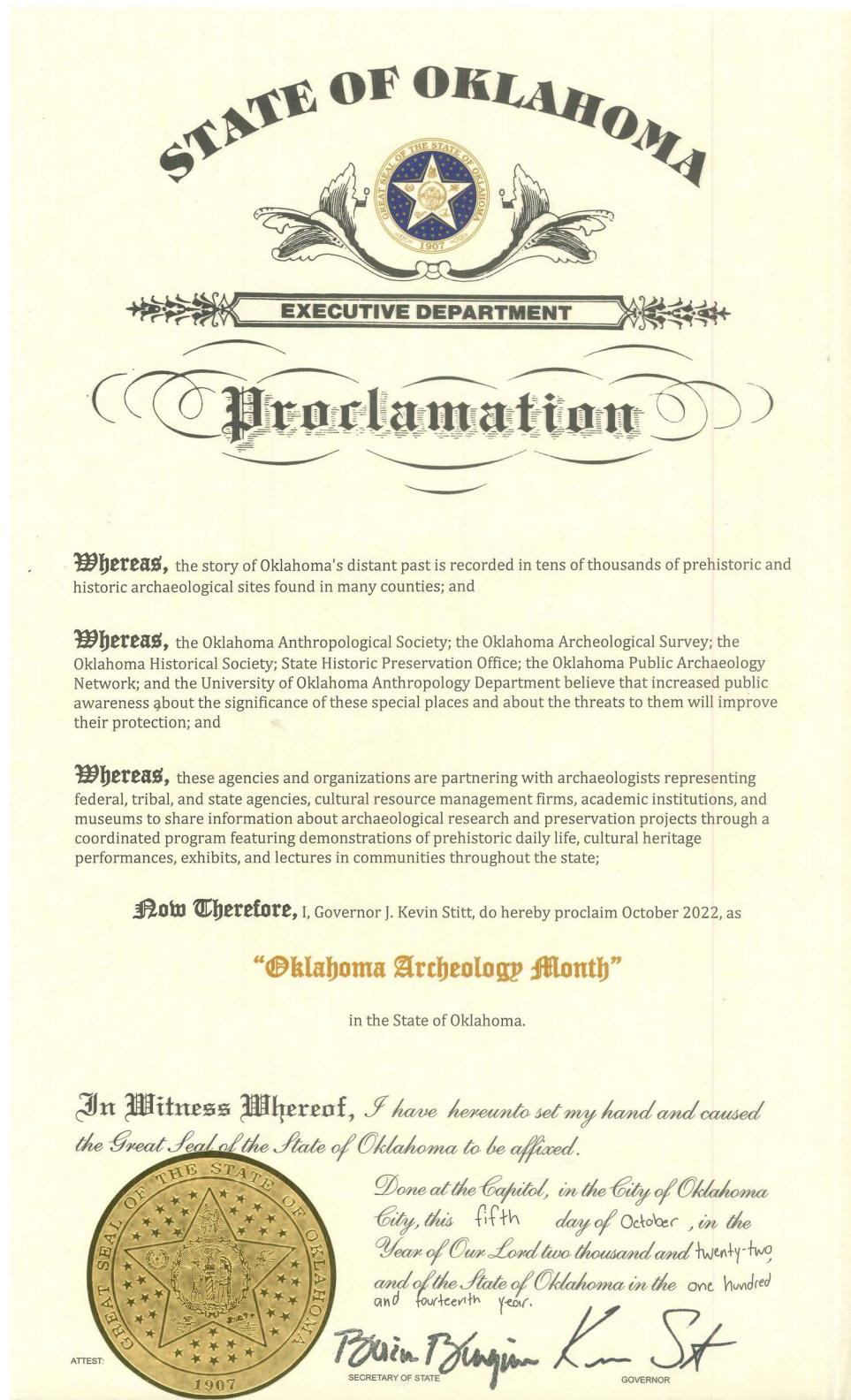


FIGURE 3. Governor Kevin Stitt's 2022 proclamation of October as "Oklahoma Archaeology Month."



**FIGURE 4.** Randy Utt, MEd, NBCT (gifted and talented education coordinator, James L. Dennis Elementary School, Oklahoma City). Photo by Dr. Dale A. Utt. Click [here](#) to hear Randy discuss her experience with OKPAN, or see [Note 2](#) for a transcription.

per year—go a long way, and we are always doing at least “double duty” by supporting and empowering students who create and run high-impact, community-engaged, public programming that benefits Oklahoma citizens broadly.

## WHY CENTER UNIVERSITIES AND STUDENTS?

Certainly, there are many ways to operate and structure an organization like OKPAN. The Florida Public Archaeology Network is funded by a line item in the state budget and employs numerous full-time professional public archaeologists to administer an array of public programs. Texas and Utah, which host TXPAN and UPAN, respectively, likewise do so within the public realm. In TXPAN’s case, this is through a base at Texas State University, and in UPAN’s, through the Utah Office of Cultural and Community Engagement. Still others, such as Washington, DC-based [Archaeology in the Community](#), operate in the private sphere as 501(c)(3) corporations. In all these cases, professional archaeologists and educators are the primary drivers of programming, with phenomenal success.

As mentioned previously, when we founded OKPAN, we debated whether to do so within or outside of the University of Oklahoma, given that each option offered a distinct array of costs and benefits. We chose the within-the-university model, and in hindsight, we are glad that we did. As we have noted, universities have historically been part of the problem when it comes to the structures that reinforce social inequality. This is true in general and with respect to archaeology specifically (Steeves 2015; Thomas and Clarke 2023). People from historically disenfranchised backgrounds have traditionally been poorly represented on university faculties, particularly their upper ranks. When students cannot see themselves in their teachers, they are less likely to follow in their footsteps. Moreover, research-intensive universities such as OU still



**FIGURE 5.** Gerald Franklin, MA (avocational archaeologist, collections assistant at the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, and retired rancher, career soldier in the US Army, and software engineer, Norman, Oklahoma). Photo by Frankie Franklin. Click [here](#) to hear Gerald discuss his experience with OKPAN, or see [Note 3](#) for a transcription.

disproportionately reward those who excel in the “publication” domain of their threefold position description (teaching and service are the devalued other two). This establishes a publish-first mentality and forces those who want to put substantial effort into their teaching and service commitments to do so knowing that they will likely forego material rewards as a result. That creates a feedback loop in the largest and most powerful universities that is hard to break.

However, it can be broken, and it can even be reversed, so that university structures operate to reinforce positive change, both within universities and in society more broadly. Or at any rate, that is what we think we are learning through our experiences with OKPAN. The breaking of the feedback loop starts with the willingness of someone within the university community to direct modest resources to, in this case, an archaeological outreach network. For OKPAN, that funding comes from an endowment to OU bestowed by a private donor who understood that everyone benefits when archaeologists actively support avocationals and other members of the public captivated by what archaeologists do.

Thus, rather than directing all the endowment proceeds to traditional archaeological fieldwork, the funds are leveraged



**FIGURE 6.** Members of the Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation Department. Narration by Deanna Byrd, MS, RPA (NAGPRA liaison-coordinator, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Historic Preservation Department; member, NAGPRA Committee of Practice & Steering Committee) and Kim Hinson, MA, RPA (Tribal archaeologist, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Historic Preservation Department; member, OKPAN Advisory Board). Photograph courtesy of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Tribal Historic Preservation Department. Click [here](#) to hear Kim and Deanna discuss their experience with OKPAN, or see [Note 4](#) for a transcription.

within existing university structures to support an entire network of students who can enrich their own understanding of and experience with archaeology, teach more junior students (in addition to each other and faculty members) things they would not otherwise learn, gain critical leadership skills, and participate in community-engaged archaeological efforts with the potential to reach every citizen in the state of Oklahoma. Not only is this valuable for the students—who need safe spaces to learn how to network, teach, lead, follow, mentor, write, speak, translate, succeed, and fail—but it provides resources to a group that is itself traditionally disenfranchised within archaeology and the academy. Students have long served as poorly paid field laborers and lab assistants for faculty members who leave their names off publications and in other ways—both large and small—take advantage of their power. OKPAN redresses that pattern by compensating students fairly and through multiple currencies that include (among others) cash, paid travel to conferences, and publication opportunities.

Fortunately, in the 2020s, more and more members of the academy do recognize their own privilege, and they work in their various university domains to create opportunities for students who have traditionally been underrepresented on campuses. OU, for example, sponsors organizations such as the Black Student Association, American Indian Student Association, Hispanic American Student Association, Gender Equality Center, and Accessibility and Disability Resource Center, all of which create supportive environments for students. There are other organizations like this at OU, and most universities are home to similar support structures. All of this means that archaeologists wanting to help diversify the discipline need not reinvent the wheel to do so; they can reach out to organizations already serving the populations our discipline needs to do its best work.

The largest PhD-granting institutions offer the richest landscapes for implementing OKPAN’s students-teaching-students model. OKPAN’s core group consists, as we have said, of students ranging from the most advanced PhD candidates to more junior PhD and MA students to undergraduates to—through our Voices internships (discussed later)—high school students. Each student, and each new cohort, brings their unique knowledge, experience, and personal network to the table. It does not take long for a state the size of Oklahoma to have a network that extends to and through most Oklahoma communities. Once this happens, the feedback loop that has traditionally excluded students from marginalized backgrounds from both the academy and archaeology can be reversed to offer those same students a pathway in.

The final reason that universities make such strong settings for anchoring a network such as OKPAN’s is that they house so many human and other resources. It is easy to be frustrated by bureaucracies that create barriers to communication and in which siloed work too often persists. It is easy, too, to become cynical when university structures protect the few bad actors that are part of any large group of people. However, those complex bureaucracies and even protections can also be rallied to support archaeological heritage networks (and for that matter, similar networks that uplift other disciplines). Is there a need for someone who knows how to publish an online magazine? A graphic designer? A bunch of swag with an organizational logo? Spaces that can be reserved for free for public lectures and workshops? Vehicles to transport students to off-campus events? Most universities can oblige. Certainly, OKPAN routinely taps these and many other OU assets. Navigating the bureaucratic hurdles that stand between us and getting something (anything!) done is often challenging, but it can almost always be done.

One other teaching-related resource that OU and many other universities offer, and that has proved to be a key element of OKPAN's success, is service learning—a form of curriculum that embraces community-engaged, hands-on coursework. OU values service learning and offers frequent workshops for faculty members who want to create and teach such classes. Students who take these classes earn a "service-learning" designation on their transcript, which serves them well when they apply to graduate school or join the workforce. Pitblado used this mechanism to create a Community Archaeology class that has seeded small-scale community-engaged projects. Each student, or team of students, engages an Oklahoma community as a partner to develop and execute a heritage-related project. Sometimes the project ends when the semester ends, but other times it continues and transitions to a full-blown OKPAN-sponsored initiative, with the students becoming part of the OKPAN team—a win for all involved.

In the remainder of this article, we highlight two programs that illustrate our student-centered, community-engaged approach. The first one traces its origins to the pandemic lockdown and our internal reckoning over how to make real change in the discipline of archaeology. The other is one of our longest-running initiatives, and we explain how we shifted it from a principally public-facing effort to a more fundamentally community-engaged undertaking.

## VOICES OF OKLAHOMA

The Voices of Oklahoma (Voices) program began as a discussion of how OKPAN could better engage high school and middle school students who come from communities historically underrepresented in archaeology. Oklahoma offers no shortage of such communities, with 39 federally recognized tribes and significant representation of Black, Latinx, Asian, LGBTQ+, disabled, and other people with unique, intersectional, and often fraught histories in the state. These are the populations that archaeology has also traditionally failed to serve, and to change that, the discipline needs practitioners from those backgrounds. At OKPAN, as should be becoming clear, we believe that those in positions of privilege—including members of the faculty as well as students—can and should work to (a) make underserved students aware that archaeology is a viable and valuable career option and (b) provide training for those who express an interest in the field. Voices aims to do both.

We piloted Voices of Greenwood in 2021, the 100th anniversary of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, the largest massacre of African Americans in US history. The tragedy unfolded in Tulsa's once-affluent Greenwood District ("Black Wall Street"), and the district's population today continues to be predominantly Black, although no longer predominantly affluent. We therefore engaged with Tulsa-area high school students entering their junior and senior years, offering them a summer internship opportunity that would teach them additional history about the Tulsa Race Massacre (until only recently suppressed as a topic for discussion in Oklahoma public schools and, even now, challenging for K-12 teachers, who are wary of state legislation that prohibits teaching "critical race theory") and instruction about archaeology and career options in this discipline. As a repeated focal point, we used the fieldwork being conducted by archaeologists who seek to restore the

identities of massacre victims in unmarked graves (e.g., Franklin et al. 2020; Gannon 2020).

The program comprised three phases: student recruitment, curriculum writing, and finally, the summer internship itself. In lieu of a traditional paper or other abstract final product, we tasked the interns with using their new knowledge of their community's history and of archaeology to create that year's Oklahoma Archaeology Month poster. In addition, each student received two OU internship credits—expressly intended to create a tangible link to higher education that promotes attendance after graduation—and a financial stipend. Most of the expenses were covered by Pitblado's endowment, and the OU Department of Anthropology and Dodge Family College of Arts and Sciences added critical cost share, showing their commitment to the undertaking and to the support of underserved students. In addition, and in recognition of the fact that the Greenwood District is located on their Reservation and that many massacre descendants are their citizens, the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma also contributed critical funding to the effort.

Voices Team Lead Bobi Deere, an OU anthropology PhD candidate and former Tulsa Public School District school counselor, tapped her extensive local network to recruit participants. Deere asked school counselors at Tulsa high schools to nominate students who were intellectually curious, creative, and socially conscious. This led to about 30 nominations, some from the school counselors, and others from community members with whom the counselors had shared our recruitment request. Deere, intern instructor Dr. Anna Goldfield (hired after she moved to Tulsa to pursue a career in science communication; [Figure 7](#); [Audio 5](#)),<sup>5</sup> and Pitblado narrowed the pool to 10 students, who were invited to apply. All 10 completed a questionnaire and virtual interview with us, and they so impressed us that rather than accepting two to four students as planned, we accepted everyone.

In June and July 2021, Goldfield taught the class (online, because OU COVID-19 protocols prohibited in-person teaching and even field trips at that time). She was joined by OU senior Abbey Sempebwa, a past president of OU's Black Student Association (BSA), who served as an undergraduate Voices teaching assistant and mentor to the high school-aged participants. Goldfield and a series of guest speakers, many from the Greenwood community, handled the content, whereas Sempebwa provided key support for students unaccustomed to college-level material and instruction. Sempebwa also introduced the students to BSA and other OU resources that could support them should they decide to matriculate at OU after graduation.

The pilot project was a success, graduating all 10 students and yielding a student-co-created [2021 OAM poster](#). In fact, OKPAN staff was so impressed that we offered paid hourly positions to two students, both of whom accepted and began working remotely from Tulsa. One of those two students ([Figure 8](#); [Audio 6](#))<sup>6</sup> has since matriculated at OU, declared a major in anthropology, and in summer 2022, completed a community-engaged archaeological field school at Concord Plantation in Natchez, Mississippi (e.g., Flippo 2022). The other student began a premed program as a fully funded Robertson Scholar "dual citizen" at the University of North Carolina and Duke University. Teaching assistant Sempebwa now works as OKPAN's inclusivity coordinator while she pursues a master's degree through Harvard University's online museum studies program.



**FIGURE 7.** Anna Goldfield, PhD (producer for *Brains On!*, American Public Media/Minnesota Public Radio, and cofounder and cohost of *The Dirt* podcast). Photo by Aron Woldeslassie. Click [here](#) to hear Anna discuss her experience with OKPAN, or see [Note 5](#) for a transcription.

In summer 2022, OKPAN sponsored its second cohort of interns, this time working with the Osage Nation. Voices team lead Bobi Deere co-taught the internship with Osage artist and educator Candice Byrd (Figure 9, Audio 7),<sup>7</sup> whom we hired to share her wealth of traditional knowledge with the students. We recruited for Voices of the Osage through school counselor recommendations, although given a smaller pool of nominees, we found ourselves with just two interns. Much of the internship followed the online format of summer 2021, but we also incorporated field trips to a traditional Osage ceremonial dance and to OU's Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History. The internship culminated in the production of an [intern-co-created](#)

[poster](#) and the hiring of one of the students to join the OKPAN staff. In addition, the interns presented a poster about their experience at the 89th Annual Plains Anthropological Conference in Oklahoma City in October 2022, and they presented it again at the Sam Noble Museum of Oklahoma Natural History's OAM event to an audience of 200 visitors.

The OKPAN Voices initiative is proving to be a powerful tool for reaching and serving members of communities that have not traditionally pursued careers as archaeologists. During both summers, OKPAN team members fostered long-term connections with students and have worked hard to create support scaffolding



**FIGURE 8.** Aaron Patton (OU undergraduate and Voices of Oklahoma graduate). Photo by Joseph Dulin. Click [here](#) to hear Aaron discuss his experience with OKPAN, or see [Note 6](#) for a transcription.

to nurture their interest in archaeology and anthropology. Our 2021 interns now mentor our 2022 interns, and we plan to continue to weave together a strong cohort of internship graduates who can support one another as they transition to college. At the very least, these students will go on to serve as ambassadors for archaeology and anthropology. At best, we hope to welcome some of them to our profession, where they can help diversify the archaeological workforce.

### The Community Archaeologist (TCA)

The Community Archaeologist (TCA; formerly OKPAN Quarterly [OQ]) is a digital magazine that highlights the heritage and history of Oklahoma's many communities. At its inception, we envisioned it primarily as a tool for OKPAN to report the outcomes of our own initiatives (e.g., Supplemental Text 1) and the accomplishments of community partners (e.g., Supplemental Text 2) to a public audience. However, as OKPAN evolved, we recognized the magazine's potential to feature more accessible, educational content that increases readers' awareness of Oklahoma's past while also engaging more community members as authors. In TCA, we foster an approach to content creation that encourages contributions from professional archaeologists, students, traditional knowledge holders, and members of allied



**FIGURE 9.** Candice Byrd, MA (artist, educator, storyteller, and Quapaw/Osage/Cherokee citizen). Photo by Evan Goetz. Click [here](#) to hear Candice discuss her experience with OKPAN, or see [Note 7](#) for a transcription.

disciplines. This facilitates our ability to elevate diverse voices and to center issues important to disenfranchised communities, particularly members of Oklahoma's tribes and others traditionally excluded from the knowledge dissemination process.

Our initial years of publication produced some strong content but also presented many challenges, chief among them our inability to consistently solicit and process material quickly enough to maintain the quarterly structure promised in our publication's name. Still, with the ability to closely monitor our online readership through data analytics, it was clear that readers—again, primarily members of the public—valued what we were doing. Therefore, during our pandemic reevaluation of OKPAN's mission and programs, we decided to revamp OQ in ways that would allow us to produce even more diverse content and to do so in a more manageable, sustainable, and community-engaged fashion. Anthropology PhD students Delaney Cooley and Horvey Palacios assumed leadership of the OKPAN Quarterly overhaul, producing a comprehensive strategic plan that is guiding the way forward.

The strategic plan identifies three goals for the magazine: establishing multivocality from concept to content creation; highlighting issues of concern to Oklahoma communities, particularly those traditionally excluded from archaeological discourse; and prioritizing student opportunities to develop skills in publication, writing, reviewing, and design. We codified these changes in the new name, *The Community Archaeologist*, and we reduced the publication schedule from four to two issues per year to make the time frame more manageable. The issues (fall and spring) align with the academic calendar of the students who contribute stories and oversee all aspects of production, and they will feature more

structured content categories. These categories include a "Community Spotlight" feature, a flagship essay, and short pieces such as op-eds, multivocal discussions, and pop-culture reviews of fictional efforts to engage archaeology (e.g., Supplemental Text 3). The audience continues to be the general public, so we can use its e-pages to share the joys of archaeology and heritage while instilling and reinforcing an ethic of service in the students who write, edit, design, and produce the publication. With the alleged documentary *Ancient Apocalypse* having recently occupied Netflix's Top Ten list, this outreach feels more urgent than ever.

As pandemic conditions waned and it again became possible to meet with colleagues in person, OKPAN also actively sought more partners for TCA. One of the critical advantages of our OU home is ready access to its hundreds of talented faculty members and staff. We met with colleagues from myriad units, among them the Native American Studies Department, the Native Nations Center, OU-based *World Literature Today*, and OU Marketing and Communications. We have recruited people from these and other entities to serve on a dedicated TCA advisory council (separate from OKPAN's broader advisory board). We are also considering partnering with OU's Gaylord School of Journalism to cultivate a cadre of strong

writers who can work in partnership with the anthropology students who have traditionally authored most of the stories.

In addition to benefiting from novel partnerships and a realignment of content, our newly named magazine will also sport a new design, created through one more partnership, this one between OKPAN and OU College of Fine Arts professor Karen Hayes-Thumann and her fall 2022 Visual Communication (Design 2633) students. Eleven two-student teams each created a new design for TCA using as fodder content that OKPAN provided from past issues of OQ. We introduced the design students to OKPAN and its mission and programs, and we worked with the group throughout the first half of the semester to help each team produce the best possible version of its unique design concept. At the end of the semester, OKPAN team members reviewed the competing designs and awarded the winning students each a \$200 prize and one student a paid position producing TCA for its spring debut (e.g., Supplemental Text 4) (Figure 10).

As we navigated our way through the restructure of *The Community Archaeologist*, it became clear just how invaluable our position within the university system was for furthering our



**FIGURE 10.** The winning redesign of *The Community Archaeologist*. From left, design professor Karen Hayes-Thumann, redesign winners Quinn Cooper and Zac Marino, and TCA's Horvey Palacios and Delaney Cooley. Photo by Bonnie Pitblado.

strategic goals. Through coffee breaks with a few key colleagues, we began to build relationships with talented faculty, staff, and students throughout the university. These people contributed not only to the revamped layout of the new magazine but also to our push to be more inclusive and multivocal in TCA's production. We also recognize that the university draws in diverse voices who are uniquely connected across the state. We hope that the partnerships we have developed at the university level will lead to more conversations with Oklahoma communities, leading to more community-engaged content in future issues, and so on in iterative fashion.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Historian Carol Mason has written that "studying Oklahoma's history is studying American history writ small" (2015:8), and we agree with her. The challenges we have faced and lessons we have learned at OKPAN are not unique to Oklahoma, nor to those working in public and community archaeology elsewhere. We think that this is likely true of the solutions as well. We founded OKPAN to bridge divides between Oklahoma communities that share archaeologists' interest in engaging with the past, and our early programs reflect that goal. In that spirit, we developed much of our core programming, most of which continues because it has done what we had hoped it would do. In 2020, however, we made changes that we think have made OKPAN stronger and that have involved "leaning in" to our university home, warty past and all.

Counterintuitively, given their position as thought leaders, for too long large universities such as OU failed to foster diversity among their faculties, their student bodies, and their archaeology students. We know of no one who thinks this is a good thing, but remedying this systemic problem has proved difficult. From our perspective, the onus of changing the practice and face of archaeology should and in fact can fall to the universities that created and reinforced the problem in the first place. But universities will not magically cure structural problems. That requires people willing to do the work, sufficient financial resources to pay for the effort, and the sheer will power and patience to get it done when university bureaucracies create hurdles that faculty members concerned with tenure and promotion are often discouraged from confronting.

Those best positioned to do this work, at least initially and most immediately, are senior faculty members who are secure in their tenured positions and who are tired of reinforcing business as usual in archaeology. The most privileged of the privileged—those who have discretionary endowments—can leverage those dollars to do double and triple duty in supporting traditionally disenfranchised communities. By funneling those dollars into university students, through mechanisms ensuring that the dollars in turn reach younger students from historically marginalized communities, endowed faculty members can foster real change in archaeology (per ideas expressed, for example, in Barton [2021], Blackmore and Rutecki [2014], Brown [2021], Smith et al. [2015], Stottman [2010], and many other articles and volumes).

Those without endowments can still create OKPAN-style programming using the myriad human and nonfinancial material

resources common on all large campuses, and with the same benefits. They might do so while also working with university development offices to cultivate donors who want to make particularly impactful gifts, to fund either faculty positions or individual programs. Deans and provosts, regardless of what they may say, also have budgets large enough to fund OKPAN-style outreach efforts. The key here is approaching them as the prospective collaborators they can be and recognizing that *their* unique currency is financial: they too must stretch limited dollars. If engaged with concrete ideas for how to leverage those dollars to accomplish more than one of their own goals, archaeologists may find upper administrators more favorably inclined to partner than conventional wisdom suggests.

In the 2020s, few archaeologists are satisfied with the status quo. Every one of us can foster changes we want to see in our discipline, but those in university professorships (a) benefited disproportionately from inequitable university structures (giving that group, one hopes, a powerful reason to pay it forward) and (b) have the structures to effect change disproportionately available to them. And all of this can be done in a way that honors and elevates heritage and nurtures relationships among the diverse people who care about it, creates unique learning opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students, and fosters an ethic of service to communities among future archaeologists. Archaeology is a tool, and a powerful one at that. Its power in the past has harmed some communities, but OKPAN is working to change that dynamic by serving Oklahoma communities and empowering them to use archaeology in ways that serve their needs. Universities created the feedback loop that has perpetuated homogeneity in archaeological practitioners, but they also provide the infrastructure to reverse its direction.

### Acknowledgments

The authors thank the OKPAN partners who graciously contributed their thoughts and, literally, voices to our article. We also thank the many OKPAN team members who actively serve Oklahoma communities every day, as well as members of the OKPAN Advisory Board, who provide us with consistently great feedback. Finally, we are grateful to the four anonymous peer reviewers who provided concrete suggestions that helped us improve the article. It takes a village!

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### Data Availability Statement

This article does not report on archaeological data.

### Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

### Supplemental Material

For supplemental material accompanying this article, visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/aap.2023.9>.

Supplemental Text 1. Project Archaeology in Oklahoma: Calling All Teachers!

Supplemental Text 2. OKPAN Community Spotlight: Chase Kahwinhut Earles.

Supplemental Text 3. Digging for the Truth: A Review of Netflix's *The Dig*.

Supplemental Text 4. Spring 2023 *The Community Archaeologist*.

## NOTES

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1. Ray McAllister text for audio: I am a past member of OKPAN's advisory board and long-time participant in OKPAN programs. As the current OAS president, I have been grateful for their assistance in our OAS offerings. OKPAN has lent their time, labor, and expertise to several of our excavations, which we sponsor in partnership with the Oklahoma Archeological Survey and open to public participation. OKPAN has developed programs on flintknapping and other subjects for high school students attending the excavations, and members have mentored people excavating for the first time. OKPAN's tri-annual "Archaeological Skills Workshops" on subjects such as ceramic analysis, faunal remains identification, and blacksmithing have been very interesting and helpful to me and other OAS members. OKPAN has also organized several statewide conferences, which has helped the many culturally interested parties of our state develop working relationships with each other. I hope that OKPAN will continue to support the exploration and mutual understanding of the diverse cultures of Oklahoma for a long time to come.
2. Randy Utt, MEd, NBCT, text for audio: As an Oklahoma Public Archaeology Network (OKPAN) advisory board member, I have had the opportunity to be involved with the strategic planning and implementation of many of the major initiatives. This community of future anthropologists is committed to educating our diverse communities of student learners and professional educators in Oklahoma. OKPAN members have worked with professionals at Putnam City Schools to introduce the Project Archaeology curriculum. The staff provided hands-on learning opportunities and relevant instruction as they sought to instill pride in Oklahoma's past. This supplemental curriculum is currently integrated in our social studies units in the gifted and talented classes. OKPAN representatives have also presented at a variety of social studies conferences encouraging interest in archaeology and Project Archaeology. In addition, they offer an abundance of resources to teachers across our state through outreach opportunities.
3. Gerald Franklin, MA, text for audio: Getting and sharing archaeological knowledge is, in my mind, what OKPAN is all about. Since 2016, service from OKPAN has been a major part of my personal education and has provided an outlet for me to share my own archaeological expertise with others in the community. The winter 2019 issue of the *OKPAN Quarterly* gave me an opportunity to share my individual process for learning archaeology on my own terms. Additionally, the fall 2020 *OKPAN Quarterly*'s "Community Spotlight" feature, shared my background and current work as an avocational archaeologist with others associated with OKPAN.

The "Archaeological Skills Workshop Series" has benefited me a great deal by providing opportunities to participate in workshops as a student and as an instructor. I was fortunate to be able to take workshops such as Introduction to Zooarchaeology, Artifact Illustration, Introduction to Geoarchaeology, and a Four-Hour Field School, to name a few of the excellent and professionally taught classes available from OKPAN. I have also been fortunate to help OKPAN in their community outreach effort by instructing in three workshops; Blacksmithing Fundamentals aimed primarily

at the historical archaeologist, Flintknapping at the last OKPAN conference in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Flintknapping and Lithic Analysis attended by OU students, avocationals, and cultural resource management professionals.

4. Members of the Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation Department, text for audio: Working with OKPAN to share our community's perspective in Indigenous Archaeology and NAGPRA within the state of Oklahoma continues to be a rewarding endeavor. Our partnership has developed from the acknowledgment of mutual respect and principles, having a profound effect on those involved. OKPAN creates a space for conversation, allowing us to share and contribute to discussions on history and heritage based on our own unique cultural perspective and to have a voice in how Choctaw history and culture is interpreted. We look to continue to collaborate on projects to build curriculum, educate youth, and host cultural stewardship workshops well into the future.
5. Anna Goldfield, PhD, text for audio: I currently serve as an advisory board member for OKPAN. I joined OKPAN as an outreach consultant in 2021 as I worked to build a career in science communication. My background and training are in archaeology, and my primary goal is to educate the general public about the lives of people in the past, and the science behind how archaeologists learn about those lives. Since joining OKPAN I have had the pleasure of teaching multiple workshops on outreach and writing for public audiences. I also helped to develop the inaugural "Voices of..." program that introduces archaeology to high-school-aged students from traditionally exploited, oppressed, and marginalized backgrounds. For the first session, Voices of Greenwood, I had the privilege of teaching students from the community of Greenwood, the site of Black Wall Street and the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921. The class gave me the opportunity to demonstrate that archaeology allows us to give a voice to those in the past whose stories are not being told. Archaeology is the practice of humanizing those who lived before us, whether thousands of years in the past, or mere decades. My experience with OKPAN has been incredibly rewarding and has given me a valuable opportunity to grow as an educator.
6. Aaron Patton, text for audio: Working as a paid intern with the Oklahoma Public Archaeology Network has been a perfect conduit for engaging in community archaeology and service. In high school, OKPAN's "Voices" internship was my introduction to learning about the past through an archaeological lens and it allowed me to co-create an OAM poster-themed Black Wall Street. The Voices experience does an excellent job at connecting students to their heritage and offers meaningful archaeological experiences that inspire and impact. Moreover, now as an undergraduate anthropology student, I continue to work with OKPAN to offer other students a similar experience, tabling and building a K-12 program to educate fellow students about the discipline of archaeology and career possibilities.
7. Candice Byrd, MA, text for audio: As the community instructor for Voices of the Osages, it was important to me that the young participants were being introduced to the basics of archaeology from an Indigenous viewpoint, but more specifically an Osage/Wazhazhe worldview. In the past, the field of archaeology has been exploitative and destructive to the heritage and modern lifeways of Indigenous communities. My goal as the community instructor was to provide the lived experience and voice for these young Osage/Wazhazhe students. My goal for myself was to demonstrate that archaeology and native communities can work peacefully together in pursuit of common goals.

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