ESSAY

IT'S XTRATUF®: DEVELOPING A RESOURCE NETWORK FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS IN ALASKA ARCHAEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we discuss the creation of the Alaska Archaeology Graduate Community (AAGC) as a first step towards addressing challenges and highlighting the potential of graduate student research in Alaska. Graduate students are often at the forefront of learning about new modes of conducting community-centered research in archaeology. However, at the same time, we often lack the means and curricular resources to fully enact what we see as "good archaeology" in our own budding projects. We also recognize that community-centered archaeology in Alaska poses challenges beyond those shared with the "Lower 48." We see the need for a more organized and accessible graduate support network that goes beyond personal connections and brings the community we experience in the field to our academic sphere. We are thus in the process of developing the AAGC. We envision that the AAGC will rest on the principles of community-based research: fostering collaboration; sharing knowledge, stories, and experiences; and offering support when we are back at our respective institutions, regardless of location. A website will serve as a point of contact, both providing resources and inviting participation from graduate students working in Alaska. Most importantly, we hope to encourage graduate students to feel excited and prepared for archaeology in Alaska.

INTRODUCTION

In November 2023, the authors attended the Collaborative Archaeology in the Alaskan Arctic (CAAA) Workshop in Seattle, organized by Hollis Miller and Sven Haakanson Jr. This workshop was the inspiration for this special issue of the AJA. To discuss a potential contribution—one that would assess and account for the unique position of graduate students—the three co-authors later convened for an initial planning session via video call from our respective homes in New York (Althoff), Boston (Beach), and Tucson (LaZar). Early conversations quickly diverged into hours sharing stories of our experiences as graduate students working in Alaska. It was through these conversations—storytelling—that we came to realize we collectively felt isolated from our place of work and the Alaska

archaeology community when we returned to our home institutions. These video calls gave us a respite, creating a space where we were able to commiserate together, but also laugh, encourage, and care for one another. We discussed grant applications, resources, and connections and were able to provide feedback and cautionary tales as we embarked on very different research paths.

These interactions felt deeply reminiscent of the relationships we build and cultivate in the field, both with other researchers and with community members. Having felt the impact of these conversations, we decided to use this article to discuss the value of establishing a more formal graduate community for archaeology students working in Alaska. By outlining the challenges we face and potential ways to alleviate them through mutual support, we hope to both educate on the situation faced by graduate students and provide orientation and support to fellow students. Thus, we are founding the Alaska Archaeology Graduate Community (AAGC), a collaborative graduate student resource network.

In conversations and activities at the CAAA workshop, we teased apart what collaborative and community-based archaeology means and how ethically "good" projects—using the term as it was framed during the workshop—can be manifest in Arctic archaeology. Community-centered research involves all aspects and stages of a project, but it appears that being in the field and working locally with a community is most strongly associated with the idea of "collaboration" (Cipolla and Quinn 2016; Cipolla et al. 2019; Silliman 2008). Some scholarship even specifically examines the community we experience and rely on in the field (e.g., Hodder 2000; Holtorf 2006; Norum et al. 2021). Comparatively, collaboration is less visible in academic spheres, though increasingly publications from collaborative projects are authored by community members and academics together, evidencing continued collaboration outside of fieldwork (e.g., Knecht and Jones 2019; Krazinski et al. 2024; Lim et al. 2021; Sebastian Dring et al. 2019). A key tension we choose to highlight is that in many collaborative projects the sense of community is prominent in fieldwork, but recedes in academic settings—especially when it comes to graduate student work.

While in this article we do not offer our own definition of "good archaeology," we want to acknowledge that publications from all over the world have underlined the foundational need for community-centered and collaborative research in archaeology (e.g., Atalay 2012; Atalay and McCleary 2022; Colwell 2016; Guilfoyle and Hogg 2015; Moshenska and Dhanjal 2011; Schmidt and Pikirayi 2016; Wylie 2014). We have learned and continue to learn from the expertise and experiences shared by the other contributors to this volume, many of whom have influenced our thinking throughout our academic journeys already. The process of writing this paper deepened our thinking about different communities in our practice. We see community-centered archaeology as the ideal of any research—graduate or not—undertaken in Alaska; however, there are challenges of doing collaborative and community-based research as graduate students which can impact the degree to which it is possible. In a sense, it is XTRATUF® [1] and our hope is that through the AAGC we can begin to tackle some of the challenges through peer collaboration.

In this paper, we explicitly draw from our personal experiences to demonstrate how lessons we learn from community-centered archaeology can transcend and strengthen community in the academic sphere of graduate work. We understand community archaeology as a set of practices and goals that apply to working with nonarchaeological communities as well as taking place within our archaeological community, in the field and when we return to our home institutions. Providing a more formalized kind of community among graduate students working in Alaska appears to us as a necessary step to reduce the challenges we all recognize and/or experience ourselves, including both those relating to doing "good" archaeology as well as more pragmatic hurdles. It can be tempting to focus on the challenges of this type of work and succumb to the feeling of isolation when back at our home institutions. Instead, we hope that by sharing experiences and guidance, by problem-solving challenges as a community, and by focusing attention on the rewarding aspects of working in Alaska, we can enact change and encourage and support other graduate students either already pursuing archaeological research or those considering it.

PERSONAL STATEMENTS

In line with the holistic spirit of the CAAA workshop, this section offers personal introductions to each of the authors, including how we came to be graduate students working in Alaska. Our personal reflections relate to themes and challenges that we seek to engage with through the creation of AAGC. We discuss the formal and informal networks that were instrumental in introducing us to Alaska archaeology and for sharing knowledge that makes our

research possible. We feel it is important to specifically highlight the *ad hoc* nature in which we were brought into such communities to evidence the need for a more formalized resource for graduate students to pursue work in Alaska. We believe positioning ourselves in this way will also help to display the variety of paths graduate students may take and serve as contextual illustrations of both challenges and strengths of graduate work in Alaska.

MIRANDA LAZAR

I am currently a PhD candidate at the University of Arizona (U of A) researching the impacts of long-term climatic changes on Unangax̂ and marine animal relationships in the Aleutian Islands. Prior to starting graduate school in 2019, I had never been to Alaska nor anticipated that Alaska archaeology would be central to my research. During my first semester, my advisor, Mary Stiner, approached me with the opportunity to work on a collection from Anaktuvuk Pass for my masters thesis. She also connected me with two of her previous students, François Lanoë and Joshua Reuther, who are Alaska archaeologists. That following summer, I went to Alaska for the first time to work on one of their excavations and visit the University of Alaska Museum of the North (UAMN) in Fairbanks to collect data for my thesis research. At first, I felt extremely out of my comfort zone, especially traveling to a new place during the pandemic. Yet, by the end of the field season I felt that I had developed a strong sense of place. It was this experience that changed the trajectory of my graduate career.

After that first summer, I began collaborating with UAF faculty on a project analyzing avifaunal collections from the Aleutian Islands with the intention of developing the research into my dissertation. While I had learned a lot during my first field season in Alaska, I lacked foundational knowledge about Aleutian archaeology and ecology that was needed in order to develop a strong research project. My home institution did not offer any classes, in anthropology or related departments, that covered Alaska (or the Arctic more broadly). Thus, when my collaborators proposed the opportunity for me to live in Fairbanks for a year and take classes at UAF, I took it. The time I spent in Fairbanks was instrumental in shaping my knowledge not just about the archaeology and ecology of the state but also what it meant to be doing "good" research with Alaska Native communities. Taking classes that emphasized place-based learning in the Arctic allowed me to challenge previous ways I conceptualized relationships between people and animals, instead reframing the relationships according to local ontologies. Living in Fairbanks also had a profound personal impact on me, as I developed a close-knit community of friends and colleagues who became, and have remained, key role models and support systems.

While I am fortunate to have had these experiences and work with an excellent community of researchers, there have been many challenges, especially when trying to build relationships with communities. The Aleutians are difficult to travel to; flights are costly and often get canceled or delayed due to bad weather. The majority of people in the Aleutians today make a living in the fishing industry and are usually gone or busy during the summer months. However, summers are the only times that I have been able to travel to Alaska as my graduate funding ties me to Arizona during the school year. My dissertation isn't community-based, but I had hoped to engage with community members through youth outreach and foster connections that might lead to future collaboration. Yet, most of my efforts to build relationships with collaborators and Native corporations have occurred over email and Zoom due to these challenges, leaving me feeling constantly behind in developing trust with the community. Additionally, as a settler scholar, I have struggled (and made many mistakes) in trying to balance Western science with traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). My research is very interdisciplinary in nature and I often get stuck on the best way to incorporate TEK, ecological data, and archaeology into one project that meets both the communities' and academic needs and expectations without the project becoming unmanageable.

AMANDA ALTHOFF

When I began my undergraduate studies in archaeology at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland in fall 2016, I did not envision future work in Alaska. It was Professor Rick Knecht who introduced us students to the Nunalleq project, a collaboration between the Quinhagak community and international researchers. My friend Elli and I were captivated not only by the well-preserved artifacts, but also by the way the local community was involved in every step of the project. Rick invited volunteers to help him process finds at the lab before they would all return to Quinhagak. Elli and I were in pleasant disbelief that we would be allowed near such precious belongings, and certain that half the class would try to secure a spot in the

small lab. As it turned out, we were the only ones. After nearly two years volunteering—cleaning and cataloging artifacts while listening to stories from Nunalleq—Rick invited us to come to Alaska for the field season of 2018. During my two-month-long stay, I was particularly struck by the difference between how the local Elders spoke about animals and the way some archaeologists had written about faunal remains. I decided to write my undergraduate dissertation on the topic. This path highlights the way that chance and the generosity of both academics and community members allowed me to participate in archaeology in Alaska.

Now, almost nine years after that introductory class at the point of writing, I am a PhD student at Columbia University. My doctoral project grew out of my undergraduate thesis, and I am still thinking primarily about expanding current archaeological discourses on human-animal relations in the past. I focus on insect depictions from Central Yup'ik and Inupiaq contexts. My work is aimed at engaging with local stories and taxonomic conceptions to recontextualize pieces that are in museum collections across the United States and abroad. One particular challenge in this project is the fact that many pieces collected in the 19th century have dubious provenience, if any. Being far removed from Alaska stifles the ability to be in conversation with many different communities who may have an interest in these pieces. Without Arctic archaeologists working at my institution, I had to build this project by myself, and there are many shortcomings owed to my lack of experience, connections, and relations.

ISABEL BEACH

I am currently a third-year PhD student at Boston University (BU), learning paleoethnobotanical methods and researching human-plant relationships among the ancestral Dena'ina on the Kenai Peninsula in Southcentral Alaska. I sought out BU specifically because Catherine West, my advisor, does work based in Alaska and because there is another graduate student whose research also centers on Alaska plants. The presence of other Alaska-focused archaeologists at BU has fundamentally shaped my graduate research, and I have thoroughly benefited from their advice and guidance. I initially came to Alaska archaeology through the vibrant living traditions of Alaska Native communities. Having been born and raised in Alaska (though not Indigenous myself), Alaska Native culture was not a relic of the past but rather a testament to the continued lifeways of the first peoples of this place. I found that the image the world had of ancestral Alaskans was one that was overly simplistic and belied the rich traditions descendant communities practice to this day.

During the summer of 2019, through the recommendation of my childhood babysitter, an Alutiiq art historian and museum consultant, I applied to join the Nunalleq Project. I spent the summer doing field and lab work on this collaborative project, which additionally formed the bulk of my undergraduate thesis and solidified my commitment to community-based archaeology in Alaska. I highlight here the personal connection that brought me to the project as it emphasizes the sort of by-chance, word of mouth interactions that tend to facilitate one's introduction into Alaska archaeology. After completing my undergraduate studies in the spring of 2020, I worked briefly for Cook Inlet Tribal Council before pandemic-related layoffs. My brief time there further emphasized that Alaska Native traditions are part of a living way of life, not relegated to the past as archaeology often implies. I subsequently worked for the State of Alaska on land ownership issues, including Native allotment reconveyances that exemplified tensions between state law and those here long before its creation. I was trained on legal statutes such as the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), a law that directs how Alaska handles aboriginal land claims distinct from the reservation system that applies to much of the Lower 48. As a graduate student, I now find that these legal statutes crucially frame the way archaeology is conducted in Alaska.

I still find myself questioning the role of archaeology in a place like Alaska, where descendant communities know their stories and histories. It is vastly different from the idea of archaeology that implies that there are no people left to tell their stories, so we have to understand these unknowable groups through their belongings. Archaeology in Alaska, as in many places, must also consider living heritage, not only past relics, but I truly do think that archaeology can supplement other ways of knowing when it is done in a collaborative manner. Archaeological details can add to established community knowledge (though in no way does it supplant other ways of knowing), and in turn community knowledge is vital to making archaeological interpretations. Again, I am reminded of the sparsely detailed depictions of Alaska Natives prior to colonization, a result of early anthropology and archaeology that I think can and must be rectified. Yet, to do this work that is rooted in place and community, I, like many others, have to

leave Alaska to do my studies. Given that this is a fact of graduate school life, I am committed to finding ways to facilitate connections and knowledge-sharing between Alaska-centered archaeologists while we are back at our respective institutions.

WHY CHOOSE ALASKA FOR GRADUATE RESEARCH?

The state of Alaska is over 650,000 square miles. As the largest state in the nation, with an archaeological history as old as the first peopling of North America (e.g., Goebel et al. 2008; Surovell et al. 2022; Wygal 2018), there is simply a lot of archaeological work to be done—be it academic, rescue, or contract (or some combination thereof). Strikingly, 229 of the 574 federally recognized tribes are located in Alaska (cf. Hu Pegues 2021:4), and cultural preservation and revitalization are of utmost importance for many of these communities. While community opinions on archaeology are far from unanimous, there are many communities that want or are open to archaeological research being conducted. Climate change also impacts the archaeological demands in the state (cf. Hollesen et al. 2018). Many archaeological sites are currently threatened by climate change (e.g., through sea level rise and permafrost thawing), and some communities that previously opted not to pursue archaeological interventions have determined that such material (and often cultural) losses permit rescue excavations (Hillerdal et al. 2019; Hollesen et al. 2018; Jensen 2017; Jones et al. 2008). Further, development projects within the state often require compliance with federal, state, and local heritage laws through the use of cultural resources management contracts and monitors. Such projects are likely to increase in the face of climate change as it is fundamentally transforming the lands and waters of the Arctic.

Careers, as elsewhere, are located variably within the private, public, and academic sectors, though it is worth noting that these are currently undergoing rapid changes. In Alaska, universities, museums, cultural resource management (CRM) and historic preservation firms, Alaska Native corporations, the National Park Service, as well as agencies such as the U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) are among those that employ archaeologists. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) 2023 report, the state of Alaska has the highest concentration of archaeology-related jobs if you take its size into account.[2] The hourly mean wage of archaeologists in Alaska is among the highest in the nation and lies well above the national mean of $33.55 per hour. Alaska is in fourth place with $40.54 per hour (mean) in comparison to number one, Michigan ($44.18) and with a wide gap before number five, California ($36.99). This amounts to a mean annual wage of around $84,320. Especially in the context of nonmetropolitan employment, Alaska is the highest paying place to work as an archaeologist, while Anchorage ranks fourth in the top-paying metropolitan areas nationwide (BLS 2023). However, it should be noted that living costs remain high in Alaska and necessitate a higher income, and some agencies have recently experienced far-ranging budget cuts and layoffs (Colvin et al. 2025; Samuels et al. 2025; Samuels and Boots 2025). This notwithstanding, archaeologists are sought after within a diversity of contexts.

Interdisciplinary research teams composed of archaeologists, biologists, climate scientists, etc., are becoming more commonplace (see also Funk et al. 2023; Misarti et al. 2009; Rowe et al. 2024), allowing for new ideas and ways of interpreting the archaeological record. This development is especially appealing for graduate students who can fully utilize and benefit from these broader research perspectives. By integrating different areas of study, research approaches become more holistic and can better target the specific needs of a given community—as the challenges communities face often span multiple fields and are context-dependent. This is important for early career researchers because it pushes us to think about our own research in ways that extend beyond our archaeological training, while also bolstering our skill sets.

Most importantly, there is significance in conducting archaeological work in Alaska in the non-negotiable presence of Alaska Native communities who contribute strong voices and guidance in heritage-related work. We cannot conceptualize our respective research projects as investigations of an untethered, long-gone past, but instead see them as part of a long history of Native life in Alaska that we are privileged to learn more about and to which we hope to contribute further considerations. By recognizing this and challenging orthodox archaeological approaches, we, as graduate students, are at a point in our career where we are open to learning about and implementing innovative community-based approaches and different knowledge systems in our research. Collaborative work in Alaska, and discussions recognizing different knowledge systems in a variety of fields, appears to us more pronounced than in

the Lower 48, and thus various and evolving approaches to research are a tangible reality.

The results of community-based research in Alaska speak for themselves. For example, others have pointed out how orally transmitted knowledge has provided important insights into climate change where climatic data was lacking (Marino and Schweitzer 2016) or directly helped identify the context of certain archaeological sites, as was the case with the Nunalleq site (Hillerdal et al. 2019; Knecht and Jones 2019). Hillerdal et al. (2019:4) posit "community archaeology as crucial to the future of Alaska archaeology" and outline the way the Nunalleq project has uplifted both the local community and the quality of research conducted at the site. Projects such as this, along with work conducted in nonacademic settings in conjunction with tribal consultation, engagement, and presence, have contributed to a locally grounded archaeological practice with meaningful impacts both on our shared knowledge and community well-being.

Very real challenges remain, and a considerable amount of work still needs to be done in prioritizing long-term community health and the shifting of power relations in the heritage sector. However, the above considerations are meant to highlight how changes related to collaboration in archaeology have created a platform from which culturally meaningful and grounded work may be conducted with increasing encouragement rather than resistance. As graduate students, all three of us were fortunate to work on projects that had these considerations at heart and were taught from the beginning about the ethics, importance, concerns, and the amount of work "our" generation would have to take on. Thus, we feel strongly that Alaska is an incredibly rewarding place to be allowed to work as archaeologists.

Lastly, on a more personal note, we want to emphasize the positive experiences we have all had working across different institutions and projects. It is not to be taken for granted to be received with the level of support and kindness that we collectively have experienced. LaZar was welcomed into the UAF community and treated as if she was one of their own graduate students during her time as a visiting student. Althoff's experience as a visiting researcher at the museums in Sitka, Juneau, Anchorage, and Fairbanks was one marked by generosity, inclusion, and community by museum staff and community members alike. The Quinhagak community welcomed Beach and Althoff as members of the Nunalleq Project, a project that, beyond cultivating an inclusive environment in and of itself, formed the basis of Althoff and Beach's friendship, which has enabled candid discussions about both challenges and joys of graduate work in Alaska. Though they did not overlap on the project, the shared connections and experiences solidified their relationship. These encounters resulted in the networks we now rely on for support, networks we envision the graduate student group facilitating and formalizing, rather than leaving to chance. Our work would truly not be possible without the interpersonal relationships we have formed with colleagues and collaborators when visiting Alaska. Their caretaking and kindness have played a large role in our continued dedication to pursuing archaeology in Alaska and is further exemplified by our invitation to participate in the CAAA workshop.

CHALLENGES TO GRADUATE RESEARCH IN ALASKA

The challenges we outline below are not insurmountable or unexpected; many of them have been experienced by generations of Alaska archaeologists. Given their persistence, we see value in discussing the challenges from our lens as graduate students to more productively and communally alleviate them, including through the AAGC. While the large size of the state means there is vast archaeological potential, it also serves as an impediment to conducting truly community-centered archaeology. Over 400 Rhode Islands can fit into Alaska, or more than two of Texas, and the vast size of the state comes with a cost, often literally. Remoteness further comes into play. From our respective institutions, we all need around 11 hours of flight travel to reach Anchorage, with one stop along the way (usually in Seattle). From Anchorage on, it is necessary to take further transportation, often by air, to reach our destinations, many of which are off the road system. Such travel, beyond taking time, can be prohibitively expensive, thus potentially impeding or even excluding impromptu visits, short stays, or mere conference attendance, for instance.

The physical distance poses a challenge to our commitment of ongoing rapport with communities. It requires consistent effort and planning to spend time in Alaska, severely limiting our ability to speak to our friends, contacts, interlocutors, collaborators, or other stakeholders in person. It can make first meetings difficult and can create uncertainty about who to reach out to without the guidance of locally known networks and priorities. The physical distance of our universities from Alaska means we most often travel to Alaska during the

summer months, during the typical "field season." This is a time when many local community members are pursuing seasonal work, limiting conversation across communities. Additionally, for many Alaska archaeologists, research questions relate to the nonhuman environment, central to Alaska Native life and well-being in the past and present. The short summer field season must consider local seasonal activities, animal behaviors and patterns, and changes in the landscape. Thus, distance from the state during the academic year creates unique challenges.

Next to physical considerations like size, distance, and remoteness, a second challenge to establishing and upholding good relations with communities is the very nature and framework of graduate school. As a "younger" generation of archaeologists, we have been brought up in our various academic institutions during a time when there are active discussions about community-based archaeology, Indigenous archaeology, and collaboration. Such conversations extend to dissertation-granting agencies and the current job market, both of which seek out applicants who have demonstrated community-based approaches. At the same time, we feel particularly bound by the nature of our PhD programs. Depending on the framework of the graduate institution, there will be strict limitations on the scope, the funding, and the timeline of the research. This point has already been discussed by Heany (1993), Atalay and McCleary (2022), and Atalay (2012:260), with the latter extending this concern to junior faculty. Most of us are expected to finish within a designated time frame and will receive funding only at specific stages of our research. The goals and expectations of tight academic timelines often conflict with the slower, long-term process of forming community-based projects.

Tensions may arise over priorities in the research, as well as the scope of research questions being aimed at local concerns (cf. Heany 1993). Students may find their committees more interested in pursuing orthodox archaeological questions, rather than questions the community has outlined as pertinent. Similarly, local knowledge may not be seen by institutional frameworks as immediately pertinent data or theory in some cases. As graduate students, we are navigating an institutional construct in which we may not be fully in power to make all decisions about our projects. While this impacts our ability to pursue truly collaborative archaeology, we want to be clear that it does not negate it. Simultaneously, we are in a privileged position to command a wide array of resources, including financial, that we are expected to wield in a productive and meaningful way.

Further muddling the expectations of graduate students is the reality that communities in Alaska may not *want* to work primarily with new, not-yet-established archaeologists. When handling something as sensitive as one's heritage, ancestors, and traditions, communities might prefer academics who can evidence both the quality of their research and their commitment to power-sharing. It is self-centered to expect that communities should want to work with us. We can develop skill sets that help answer community-driven questions in attempts to make our projects useful and meaningful to local communities, but we recognize that our projects are in a very real way not geared primarily toward a community-centered goal. Instead, we acknowledge that graduate projects are designed to result in a dissertation that will count towards the requirement of a masters or doctoral degree. We see the need to be transparent about the fact that these projects do benefit us in our careers as researchers and are tied to specific academic goals.

The challenge then lies in proving ourselves as collaborative researchers when we have not yet been able to conduct work that reaches our own full expectations of "good archaeology." While reflecting on this challenge, the three of us were reminded that collaboration does not require one to individually create or lead a community-based, collaborative project. It is just as valuable, and often more feasible, to join already established projects, archaeological or otherwise. Such avenues are mutually beneficial to researchers and communities; we do not need to take up the yoke of creating and conducting a collaborative project in its entirety and the community does not have to accept work exclusively with one archaeologist who could disappear or become differently affiliated once completing graduate school, a scenario that is more common than we like to admit, especially given the limited job availability in academia. For some projects, the duration of a graduate student's timeline might be acceptable, whereas for others, an abrupt termination upon dissertation completion would not be a welcome end to the community project overall. By joining already established projects, we can work to ensure that our contributions are not overly individualistic, but truly a team effort that reflects the needs and wants of the community. We also argue that participation from graduate students can strengthen already established projects with regard to bringing in new innovative ideas and approaches.

In addition to establishing and upholding community relations, we have found that another common challenge is the steep learning curve that comes with familiarizing oneself with the legal frameworks as well as the diverse cultural backgrounds and traditions of Alaska Native communities. Alaska's land ownership is patchwork in nature, with 89% of land held by the state and federal governments and just over 10% owned privately, including those lands held by Alaska Native corporations (Hanson 2007). Distinct legal frameworks, namely Alaska Native corporate ownership as laid out by the ANCSA of 1971, often impact archaeological work done in rural, remote, Alaska Native communities (Franklin 1994; Hanson 2007). This complex law extinguished aboriginal land claims and formalized traditional use and occupancy under a corporate system. It is distinct from the reservation system most North American archaeologists are familiar with.[3] Thoughts and opinions on the nature of corporate land ownership vary person to person, and it is important to familiarize oneself not only with the formal impacts on archaeology but also its history and various perspectives on it (e.g., Allaway and Mallott 2005; Edwards and Natarajan 2008; Hirschfield 1992; Pratt 2009; Sanders 2016; Suarez 2022; Summit 1997; Thomas 1986; Thornburg and Roberts 2012).

Practically, ANCSA impacts how archaeology is conducted in a variety of ways. ANCSA created private land ownership through corporations, and this solidified Alaska Native ownership of archaeological materials, since under U.S. law archaeological sites and artifacts are the property of private landowners (Hillerdal 2017; Hillerdal et al. 2023). Further, ANCSA requires Alaska Native corporations to both control and utilize their land as a resource and conserve archaeological sites on the land (Franklin 1993). Despite the centrality of ANCSA to our work, there is little training on it for graduate students. Those just beginning their studies may not realize that there is a different legal framework in place, of which they will have to gain a crucial understanding. Speaking from experience, it can be intimidating to ask faculty or colleagues questions about ANCSA. Many of us perceive this as "basic knowledge" and do not want to sound unprepared or ignorant, but struggle with both the legalese and finding a starting point for engagement with the vast literature on the topic. Other times, we might feel comfortable asking questions but the faculty in our department do not work in Alaska and are not familiar with ANCSA either. Yet, not having a sufficient understanding of these legal frameworks fails to uphold our accountability as settler scholars.

While ANCSA is the legal framework that we often function within, it is not necessarily the moral or ethical scaffolding of collaboration. At times, the need to conserve archaeological sites is at odds with a group's right to self-determination (see Franklin 1993). Thus, beyond being familiar with the legalese, it is critical that we understand collaboration beyond the corporate framework, therefore not only considering land ownership and corporate entities but also federally recognized tribes (distinct from Alaska Native corporations), state recognized tribes, non-federally recognized tribes, and landless tribal entities. In our changing world, we should also consider not just material ownership but data sovereignty (e.g., Brewer et al. 2023; Marley 2019) as well, though our laws may be slow to reflect these concerns. Further, on lands that are not ANCSA corporation-owned, corporations and tribes together still steward these regions and understanding the impacts of our work on local stakeholder communities is vital.

The lack of educational resources may also pertain to academic training in the cultural context of the region. While graduate students have many institutional resources when it comes to theoretical and methodological aspects of research, regional knowledge and connections specific to Alaska are rare outside of Alaska itself. Even in departments that do have one or two Alaska archaeologists on faculty, their expertise may not always be applicable to other parts of the state. Furthermore, few universities can offer classes on archaeology in the Arctic. Ethnographic method courses are not often among the options for archaeologists, despite their importance for those of us working with descendants to co-produce knowledge.

Similarly, archaeology students are rarely given any formal training in the Institutional Review Board process, a step often necessary for research that aims to work closely with living communities, especially if interviews are part of the project. Classes in critical Indigenous studies are helpful for getting a basic understanding of Indigenous theory and different knowledge systems, but do not tend to extensively talk about Alaska Native communities. Discussions in such classes may shape what students view as "good" community-based research and can emphasize the importance of the research being tailored to a specific community and place. The University of Alaska offers many classes online to make the university accessible across the state; however, the reality is that many students at other institutions do not have the funding or time to take additional courses at another university.

Lastly, we want to touch on the pragmatic side of being prepared for fieldwork in Alaska. Not being properly equipped can be detrimental, and in some cases quite dangerous, when embarking on Alaska archaeology fieldwork. Most students cannot afford all the high-quality gear outlined on packing lists and are unaware of the limited communication and transportation in most areas of the state, the latter of which can also be costly. It took the three of us numerous field seasons of trial and error and informally learning from peers to feel truly prepared at the start of each new season. While the same can be said for fieldwork preparation in any location, having the proper gear and knowing how to navigate fieldwork experiences in Alaska can make a serious difference in the safety and well-being of the student. Talking to other students who have been in the field about which gear should be prioritized and is non-negotiable versus which items are more akin to amenities, as well as sharing budget-friendly quality alternatives, enables decision making that can directly impact safety. The reality of being a student on a budget means we have to choose which of the items we can afford. We argue that in order for students to come to the field equipped and prepared with the necessary gear, there needs to be a solution-oriented resource available that will allow for a better understanding of the demands of fieldwork in Alaska.

ALASKA ARCHAEOLOGY GRADUATE COMMUNITY (AAGC)

In order to redress the challenges outlined above, we suggest the establishment of a collaborative student-oriented resource network. To begin the work on such a network, we have founded the AAGC. The pedagogical value of networking and mentorship between peers is well known (e.g., Lorenzetti et al. 2020; Lorenzetti et al. 2019; Paolucci et al. 2021), and we see the creation of a network for graduate students in Alaska archaeology as particularly needed. We understand that it may not be possible for all students working with Alaska materials to attend conferences or in-person meetings. While we agree that in-person events are particularly conducive to building rapport, as discussed above, we acknowledge that students working in the Lower 48 or even outside of the U.S. may not be able to afford travel and accommodation, or be permitted time away from our institutions, especially during academic terms. While we hope to establish meetings at conferences in the future, such as the Alaska Anthropological Association's annual meeting, we want to begin with a virtual platform to make first connections.

The website will be available through search engines, as well as listed with other special interest groups on the Alaska Anthropological Association webpage. Virtual communities for graduate students have been successful like their in-person counterparts (see Allen 2014). We hope that our website (*akarchgrad.com)* will serve as a starting point for current and prospective graduate students working in Alaska and seeking support and community in doing so. Our ethos is to draw on the strengths we see to address the challenges we face. The reality of graduate school may mean that many of us pursue a master's or doctoral program outside of Alaska. But this should not mean that we need to leave behind the open conversations, collegiality, and peer support we experience in the field. While individual departments can provide structured help in navigating the intricacies of graduate school, a community dedicated to furthering the success and engagement of students working in Alaska is needed. Such a resource can connect students across departments, specializations, and years. Special interest groups commonly address the concerns and issues of specific communities in such a way, and we imagine that the AAGC will function similarly, without the limitations of occurring *only* at in-person conference meetings.

More often than not, we are the only graduate students in our programs working in Alaska, and by connecting with others who are based elsewhere but work in Alaska, we can establish connections that persist despite geographic and physical separation and isolation. The AAGC then functions to broaden our Alaska archaeology communities, while also providing the potential to meet those doing related research. We believe that a website is the best node for this network because it is an accessible space that graduate students can use regardless of their location and time zones. It will serve as an initial point of reference and contact, aiming to enable further communication across media in addition to in-person meetings. The website reflects the tenets of community-centered archaeology in that it is designed to be participation-based, evolving, and with the goal of cultivating relationships as well as being committed to information sharing. In other words, while it is a stationary place, it is not static. It works to counter the gatekeeping that can be notorious in academia, where one is left on their own to work out a solution rather than to ask for help. We believe that we are better together, and that

collaboration with others in similar situations is vital to our graduate research.

The AAGC is open to anyone who feels part of this community. We have designed the website to serve as a toolkit in hopes that graduate students at any point of their graduate career have access to resources to pursue archaeology in Alaska. The website will include sections that are roughly centered around three main themes: pragmatic resources, ethical archaeology, and community space. For graduate students who are just beginning their programs, we will have a page on recommended first steps and information we wish we had been told earlier on in our graduate careers. We will share how we have been able to find classes within and outside home institutions. For students who do not have access to Arctic- or Alaska-specific classes, we will have recommended reading lists. There will also be a list of contacts including museums, archaeological repositories, tribal representatives, Native corporations, archaeologists willing to be point persons for answering questions, etc. This section will also have announcements about funding applications, upcoming conferences and events, and fieldwork opportunities. We will provide a packing list where we share what we feel are necessities to have in the field, as well as lower-cost alternatives that we have found. There will be a page with links to different communication and transportation options. Lastly, we will provide safety tips when traveling for fieldwork as well as guidance on additional training such as wilderness first aid training.

We want to invite members to participate in the conversation about doing meaningful and ethical archaeology in Alaska. AAGC members are able to add resources, which will include descriptions of and dialogues around ANCSA, how to write an Institutional Review Board protocol, and recommended readings in Indigenous theory and collaborative-based research. While we feel that it is important to supply these resources, we don't want this space to simply provide a universal definition of what we think ethical, collaborative work looks like, but rather a place for members to discuss their experiences and troubleshoot challenges together. To engage members, there will be a forum/blog page and listserv (akarchgrad@gmail.com).

It is important to us that the website is not a static entity, but rather that it is constantly changing through the participation of the members. In addition to the forum page, we will have a form for website visitors to submit suggestions and recommendations. We also will include a blog space where members can share stories and thoughts. This space should serve as a place where members can introduce themselves and their interests, and from here we encourage working relationships to continue beyond the website. We hope that the AAGC will expand in the future to also include virtual and in-person workshops and meetings, helping foster a sense of belonging in the community. The interest in the AAGC is clear; after presenting the plan for the AAGC at the 2025 Alaska Anthropological Association annual meeting, more than 20 students signed up to be added. While a website alone will not solve all of the challenges mentioned above, our aim is that it serves as a jumping off point to develop relationships, share knowledge, and create a space where the members can problem-solve together.

CONCLUSION

Archaeological research is conducted not in solitude but in community. Outside of the field, these communities may appear more ambiguous and informal. Often, they can take years to create. For graduate students, such undefined communities can lead to feelings of isolation and insecurity when we are working back at our home institutions, not yet having formed a strong network with other Alaska archaeologists. By creating the AAGC, we not only hope to encourage communal knowledge sharing and production, but also to encourage relationships of support and care already foundational to community-based archaeology in the field. While academia often seems to reward highly competitive, individualistic practices, the reality is that networks always exist. Through a website like that proposed for the AAGC, we can make transparent and accessible such networks and be more open with acknowledging the community that goes into such knowledge production and research. Such a community will have greater longevity than any of our individual time in graduate school; thus, it is not dependent on any one individual but rather is formed by the community of graduate students at the time, enabling their interconnectedness.

In coming together to write this piece, we acknowledged feeling disconnected from this sense of community outside of the field. It was a joy to meet through video calls and lend each other support and encouragement. Cultivating this kind of community among graduate students beyond personal connections is crucial to alleviate the challenges of doing archaeology in Alaska. To foster this community and be able to learn from each other, we

envisioned a graduate community that will enable others to pursue research in Alaska and provide additional tools to pursue "good" archaeology in its many iterations. Having an easily identifiable and accessible resource through which to direct questions and seek out additional references and materials struck us as an important tool that is currently missing. We invite readers to visit our website, engage, provide feedback, and join us on our communal path toward better practices.

ENDNOTES

1. XTRATUF® is a registered trademark of Rocky Brands, Inc. The authors are not affiliated with, endorsed by, or sponsored by the brand used in the title. This article is an independent scholarly work.
2. The BLS notes that the "location quotient is the ratio of the area concentration of occupational employment to the national average concentration" (BLS 2023).
3. The Metlakatla Indian Community of the Annette Island Reserve is an exception as the only reservation or reserve not extinguished by ANCSA (43 U.S.C. §1618 [ANCSA §19a]).

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