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URL:
https://dal.ucla.edu/backdirt/2025/at-the-institute/idp/

Citation (Chicago):
B. Acabado, Stephen. “The Archaeology Program.” In *Backdirt 2025: The Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Annual Review*. Los Angeles: The Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, 2026. https://dal.ucla.edu/backdirt/2025/at-the-institute/idp/.

Citation (MLA):
B. Acabado, Stephen. “The Archaeology Program.” *Backdirt 2025: The Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Annual Review*, The Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, 2026, https://dal.ucla.edu/backdirt/2025/at-the-institute/idp/.

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Stephen B. Acabado

The past two academic years in the UCLA Archaeology Interdepartmental Program (IDP) were defined by student progress and sustained training. We welcomed new graduate students into the program while supporting others through the completion of their degrees. These milestones reflect how the IDP continues to function as a focused, interdisciplinary training environment, one that prioritizes mentorship and preparation for a range of professional paths in archaeology and related fields. This work continues amid ongoing uncertainty around funding and institutional support for graduate education, challenges that affect students and programs across higher education. Even so, the IDP has remained committed to maintain-ing standards of training and student welfare.

Over the past two academic years, we admitted five new doctoral students: in 2024, Mac Elizalde, Karla Saracay, and Wenyi Zhao; and in 2025, Talia Neelis and Akphivath Vitou. Each entered the program with defined research interests and a willingness to work across disciplinary and methodological boundaries. Their projects reflect the kinds of questions that the IDP is designed to support, which require engagement with multiple literatures and different scales of analysis. I thank the admissions committee for their attention to fit, not only in terms of research alignment but also in terms of how each student would contribute to the intellectual life of the program.

At the same time, we celebrated the graduation of four students in 2025: Rachel Wood, Maryan Ragheb, Eddie Cleofe, and Baisakhi Sengupta. Their post-graduation paths highlight the range of outcomes that archaeological training at UCLA makes possible. Rachel Wood is currently part of the Getty Graduate Internship Program in Public Programs at the Getty Villa, applying her training to public engagement and institutional programming. Maryan Ragheb is now a part-time lecturer at CSU–Fullerton, continuing her work in teaching and curriculum development. Eddie Cleofe remains at the UCLA Career Center, where his role bridges academic training and career preparation, an increasingly important space for graduate education. Baisakhi Sengupta has returned to India and is in the process of exploring professional opportunities that build on her doctoral work, taking time to assess options that align with her interests and long-term goals.

We also recognize the achievements of our 2024 graduates. Danielle Kalani Heinz is now Assistant Professor of American Indian Studies at CSU–Northridge. Georgi Kyorlenski is serving as the Mayer Center Curatorial Fellow for Art of the Ancient Americas. Kirie Stromberg is the Rand Postdoctoral Fellow at Pomona College. Their placements reflect the program's commitment to preparing students for careers in teaching, museums, and research.

These transitions speak to the program's current strengths. The IDP emphasizes depth of training alongside flexibility in intellectual and professional development. Students are not directed toward a single model of what an archaeologist should become. Instead, they develop skills in critical analysis, project management, clear writing, and working across institutional and cultural contexts. This training prepares graduates for a range of paths, including academic positions, museum and heritage work, university administration, and roles beyond the academy. The program's interdisciplinary design remains one of its core assets. Archaeology at UCLA draws on anthropology, classics, history, geography, environmental science, and allied fields. This structure allows students to tailor their coursework and research to their questions rather than forcing questions to conform to a rigid curriculum. It also encourages collaboration among students, across departments, and with communities and institutions beyond UCLA. That collaborative orientation continues to

shape how our students approach fieldwork, archival research, laboratory analysis, and public-facing scholarship.

None of this is possible without sustained faculty engagement. Advising in an interdepartmental program requires time and a willingness to support projects that do not always fit neatly within a single discipline. The faculty affiliated with the IDP continue to provide that support, often well beyond formal advising obligations. Their commitment is evident in students' progress through milestones and in the quality of the work that emerges from the program.

The work of our staff is central to the program's operation. The day-to-day functioning of the IDP depends on staff who bring institutional knowledge and consistency to their roles. Their work ensures that students can focus on research and writing while navigating the practical demands of graduate training. The program's stability owes much to their efforts.

We are also deeply grateful to our supporters and donors. Fellowship support, research funding, and discretionary resources provide students with the time and flexibility needed to complete demanding archaeological projects. In a field where research can require extended field seasons—often international—and laboratory work, this support is essential.

As chair, I see this past year as evidence of continuity rather than transition. The program is doing what it is meant to do by admitting strong students and preparing them for a wide range of professional paths. This work depends not only on academic training, but also on sustained attention to graduate student welfare, including clear advising and stable support structures. In a shifting academic landscape, maintaining an environment that values both rigorous training and student well-being is essential, and this kind of progress is worth acknowledging and sustaining.