



NEAA NEWSLETTER

Unpacking Genomes in the Classroom:

Introduction

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Advances in genetic analysis have allowed the growth of an entire industry of private labs seeking to uncover your genetic identity using home-based mail-in kits. It is being marketed for doing everything from paternity tests to charting your family tree via genetic genealogy. This has been made possible because of relatively cost-effective rapid advances in DNA automated sequencing technologies that can select for short gene sequences. Although this is not enough to make individual identifications it can narrow down ancestral groupings. The more sequences you request (and pay for) the more details of your ancestry will be uncovered, often couched as your matches with “native” populations and world regions.

As a biological anthropologist I have been skeptical of the popularization of both DNA profiling and genetic testing linked to ones ancestry.

No matter the test it does not change our current understanding that our deep ancestral grandmother originated in Africa. Numerous ancestral DNA testing firms market their services specifically to genealogy enthusiasts who want to expand (or correct) the traditional paper record trail by linking surnames with DNA. A sampling of these services includes: www.familybuilder.com; www.dnaheritage.com; www.dnaancestryproject.com; www.worldfamilies.net; www.gtldna.net; and www.dnatribes.com (which especially targets those who want to discover their Native American ancestry).

What follows is anthropologist John Mazzeo's account of using the National Geographic Genographic Project (NGGP) for a course-based lab. Although the NGGP is a non-profit endeavour with all the best of intentions, led by anthropological geneticist Spencer Wells, the experience of his class reveals some of the shortcomings of interpreting ancestral DNA.

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Message from the Editor

Summer is here. I know that officially summer doesn't start until June 21st but for all of us involved in academics it starts when classes are over and grades are in. For students it is freedom from reading and writing for a few months. For graduates it is entering the next stage of their lives. And for professors it is a time to catch up on everything we said we were going to do during the semester but just didn't get to. It's a time to take a deep breath.

I am especially inspired by the NEAA this year. As all of you know, the annual meetings at Rhode Island College were very well-organized and well-run. The Department of Anthropology at RIC pulled off an incredibly successful conference. I was particularly impressed that their Anthropology Club, the Anthropods, hosted the Careers in Anthropology workshop (providing lunch and party favors—what a great idea!). And to have Nancy Carriuolo, President of Rhode Island College, address the NEAA members at the Saturday banquet with such positive words was really, to use an old cliché, icing on the cake. In a time when college and university presidents are being pulled in so many directions, Carriuolo's presence says a lot about RIC as an institution. From a student perspective, Josephine Francis, 2009 Rhode Island College graduate, sums up her experiences at the meetings in "Undergraduate Experience at the NEAA" here on page 8. For me personally it was great seeing Roger Williams University students take in all they could at the conference and I enjoyed meeting and talking with students from the other schools.

Looking to the future, we are thrilled that NEAA has secured the conference locations for the next three years ... but I don't want to take away from the President and President Elect's thunder (see "Why anthropology departments need the NEAA: A Cost/Benefit Analysis of the 2009 Conference" on page 7). Perhaps less apparent, but especially gratifying for me, is that we are seeing more people - professionals and students - asking how they can get involved with the organization.

This issue features two articles on Genomes. The first, "Unpacking Genomes in the Classroom: Introduction", is written by our very own NEAA President Barrett Brenton (St. John's University) wearing his other hat as newsletter Physical Anthropology Contributing Editor. The second, which complements Barrett's, is by John Mazzeo (DePaul University) entitled "Genographic Reflections: A Course-Based Experiment" (page 3). Both are timely, informative and instructive.

One last bit of news: this August we plan to launch a fourth volume in our yearly newsletter. This volume will be dedicated to publishing the work of the winners of M. Estellie Smith Graduate Paper Prize and John Omohundro Undergraduate Paper Prize. Be sure to look for it in your email inbox.

I hope you all enjoy your summer. Go out and challenge yourself to do something different. And don't forget to wear sunscreen.

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I sincerely thank him and his class at DePaul University in Chicago for sharing their critical insights and analysis of the “race” concept through an experience with unpacking ancestral DNA in the classroom. I invite you to be a part of this dialogue in future issues of the Newsletter.

In closing, I have to admit that it is intriguing to follow one’s ancestral path over the past 60,000+ years, but as is noted below, perhaps it is learning about our lack of genetic differences that is just as important. In a future follow-up article I will report on additional critiques that include positions of groups like the American Society of Human Genetics, and the tracking of my own ancestral genealogy or “Why my great-grandmother was not a Cherokee Princess” (as far as I know).

Genographic Reflections: A Course-Based Experiment

I have been using the National Geographic Genographic Project (NGGP) as part of a lab for my anthropology course “Anthropology of Race and Gender” at DePaul University in Chicago. I am a socio-cultural anthropologist by training and have been asked by my Department of Anthropology to teach this course because of my interest in the subject and my research in medical anthropology. This is a ten-week course (we are on the quarter system) required for anthropology majors and minors. Most students are already in their junior year and have a foundation in cultural anthropology and archaeology. Many also have taken courses that explore the concept of race as a socio-cultural construct, but none have examined the idea of racial ancestry from a biological or biocultural perspective.

During the first week of class I introduce the NGGS lab to the students and explain that this is an opportunity to take part in a genetic test used to identify the maternal (mitochondrial DNA) or paternal (Y Chromosome) lineage of individuals. I use the NGGP website to explain the science of ancestry testing and the kind of results it provides (<https://genographic.nationalgeographic.com/genographic/index.html>).

Students are intrigued by the prospect of participating in a DNA analysis and during our class discussions students express their belief that this sort of test will “help me to better understand who I am.” One common assumption that students make is that members of their haplogroup (the term used to distinguish a population of individuals with similar ancestral DNA markers) will look alike and have family from the same part of the world.

Participation in the NGGP is strictly voluntary. This year, 15 people out of a class of 35 volunteered. The teaching assistant and I also participated. Our department paid for half of the cost to conduct the test and students were responsible for the other half (the total cost per Participation Kit was \$99.95 plus shipping and handling). Nearly all of the students wanted to participate, but only about half felt that it was worth the cost. Students were presented with consent forms provided by the NGGP. I explained to volunteers that their results would be shared with the class as part of a larger project. Students who did not volunteer would have access to the results. All students were expected to produce an essay on the findings evaluating the merits of ancestral testing. The test takes approximately seven weeks to process (which is cutting it close for a ten-week course). During that time we cover topics such as the

anthropology of race, DNA and inheritance, modern evolutionary theory, and human origins and the Out of Africa theory. Students read two books, a physical anthropology textbook by Jurmain, Kilgore & Trevathanⁱ and Gould's Mismeasure of Manⁱⁱ. In addition they read and discuss several articles, including the debate on "Should Scientists Study Race and IQ" in the February 12, 2009 "Darwin 200" special issue of *Nature*, and two articles directly relevant to the NGGP because they examine the cultural implications of ancestry testing^{iii iv}. The class readings helped inform students about the science behind the NGGP, the problems of studying race, and offered some perspective on how to understand their DNA ancestry results.

As the quarter progressed, students who volunteered began to understand that their initial assumptions about ancestral testing were inaccurate. Through class discussions, students identified several *inaccurate* assumptions:

- Race is a valid biological category.
- Race is inherited and passed to future generations.
- Racial ancestry can be measured and the results of DNA testing can identify distinct racial groups.
- NGGP results represent their primary racial ancestry.

Once the tests were completed and posted to the NGGP website, students retrieved their results on their own. The lab took place over two class periods. During the first class, students shared their results with the class and discussed their initial impressions. The discussion revealed several common confusions. First, the website talked about ancestry in terms of haplogroups rather than racial categories (ie. African, European, Asian, Native American). Students tried to 'translate' their maternal or paternal haplotype into an accepted racial category, but discovered this did not always work. Students whom they phenotypically viewed as belonging to different racial groups sometimes shared the same haplogroup. Based on prior discussions about biocultural adaptations (e.g., the sickle cell trait and malaria), students assumed that haplogroups possessed distinct biological differences because they were associated with different ecological regions and subsistence strategies. Second, while students appreciated the NGGP's explanation of the global migration of humans, they were confused about the emergence of different haplogroups. The information is presented in a manner that can be mistaken for an evolutionary sequence. The class, who was now well versed in dangers of evolutionary determinist thinking, critiqued the presentation of the haplogroups. They agreed that the NGGP made the L haplogroup, the oldest human haplogroup, appear to be the most primitive, while the H haplogroup, originating thousands of years later in the region of Europe, appear to be a more modern or recently evolved group of humans.

The second class was dedicated to a discussion based on two essays they prepared. The first essay asked students to explain why race is not a valid biological category in layman's terms. I specifically asked for a non-technical piece because I felt that it would prepare them to discuss race with others who have not taken this class. In their essays, most students drew on the NGGP test to demonstrate that one's "racial ancestry" depends on which point in the past one is referring to. In their responses they highlighted that the history of modern humans is relatively short compared to other species, humans are highly mobile, use primarily culture rather than biology to adapt, and are not reproductively isolated.

The second essay question asked students to critique Ancestral DNA Testing and explain why they think it has become popular. Their responses clearly identified all of the *incorrect* assumptions they initially made about ancestry testing providing a definitive and scientific answer to the question, "who am I?"

They realized that ancestry testing actually tells them very little about who they are with any certainty and is only useful for the study of population movements, not the specific ancestry of an individual. They also explained that this sort of test appealed to them at first because of the “scientific look and feel of it.” They were referring to sampling cheek cells and putting their DNA sample into sterile test tubes. Taking a cheek swab sample, viewing online videos of DNA analysis, and seeing the high-resolution report reinforced the belief that what they were receiving was a scientifically valid product (This is not to criticize the scientific procedures of the NGGP, I am only referring to the experiences and perceptions of students). Students compared ancestry testing to other kinds of DNA tests, such as medical DNA profiling, using advanced technology to better understand the “past and the future of us all.” Additionally, many students described how being a part of the NGGP project made them feel like modern/scientifically progressive people who were using advanced technology to once and for all answer confusing and sometimes uncomfortable questions about identity.

Overall, the NGGP Ancestral DNA test was an excellent tool to create a positive learning experience for an anthropology course. It wasn’t just the NGGP results, but more so the critique of the results and realizing that their initial assumptions were based more on science fiction than fact that provided the positive learning experience. The exercise provided students with a good example about how easily even a well-informed public can misinterpret ancestral testing because of their cultural desire to reinforce racial distinctions through modern science. It demonstrates to students that the science of race is actually self-defeating because it does a better job of demonstrating there are fewer differences than there are similarities between humans. It also further problematizes the concept of race from a biological standpoint and forces students to engage with the concept in more productive social, cultural and historical ways.

Fortunately, none of the students felt “tricked” or “ripped off” when I asked them if they regretted taking the test. They felt that the process actually reduced their interest in their genetic ancestry and relying on DNA technology to answer the questions, “who am I and where do I come from?” However, they felt they were able to better articulate and appreciate arguments against the biological concept of race and the idea that racial groups vary in terms of IQ or other variables. They agreed that organizations like National Geographic, who they felt represented legitimate scientific pursuits, were capitalizing on contemporary interest/fascination with DNA tests. Some students argued that the NGGP didn’t go far enough to make clear the limits of the test, but “left the interpretation of the results as they pertain to us up to our own imaginations.” They pointed out that this raised ethical questions with them as consumers of this knowledge since they placed so much trust into National Geographic and these details were overshadowed by the website’s allure to ““Discover YOUR deep ancestry...””.

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ⁱ Jurmain, Robert, Lynn Kilgore & Wenda Trevathan (2008) *Essentials of Physical Anthropology*. Thomson/Wadsworth. 7th edition.

ⁱⁱ Gould, Stephen J. (1996) *The Mismeasure of Man*. WW Norton. 2nd Edition

ⁱⁱⁱ Brodwin, Paul (2002) Genetics, Identity, and the Anthropology of Essentialism. *Anthropological Quarterly* 75(2): 323-330.

^{iv} El-Haj, Nadia (2007) The Genetic Reinscription of Race. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 36: 283-300.

Message from the President

Let me begin by giving my sincere thanks to everyone on the Executive Board for their leadership in strengthening a dedicated membership and initiating positive transformations in the organization over the past year. I would also like to congratulate Graduate Student Representative Ammie Mitchell (SUNY Buffalo) and Undergraduate Student Representative Valerie Paige (SUNY Potsdam) on their newly elected positions. The position of NEAA Secretary is currently open and I would welcome any nominations or self-nominations for that role. It is a great opportunity to be involved with the organization.

Our 2009 meeting theme “The Challenges of Exploring Diversity” posed a number of questions to our discipline concerning how we go about uncovering the human condition in all times and places. It was clear from the diversity of papers presented at the meeting that anthropology’s unifying holistic and varied approach to human understanding is well positioned and equipped to accept future challenges of exploring diversity. In this year of celebrating the legacies of Charles Darwin, it was a fitting tribute that the meetings ended with an excellent keynote address by biologist Ken Miller on: Is Evolution “Only a Theory”? His insights on the battle against evolution and science education in America were highly relevant to anthropology’s shared unifying principle of evolution for understanding of how our species came to be and where we are going. Overall, as in meetings past, the conference was a great success due in no small measure to presentations by a mix of faculty, professionals and students at all levels of experience.

That said I want to extend a special note of gratitude to the leadership of Pierre Morenon and the entire Rhode Island College community for their wonderful sponsorship and support. Additional thanks for underwriting some of the conference expenses are due to Roger Williams University’s Feinstein College of Arts and Sciences, The Public Archaeology Laboratory (PAL), and Gray & Pape - Cultural Resources Consultants. Congratulations are also in order to Kathryn Rhine (Brown University) who was awarded the M. Estellie Smith Graduate Paper Prize for her paper on “Dilemmas of Diagnoses: HIV Testing in Northern Nigeria,” and to Erica Varlese (Drew University) who was awarded the John Omohundro Undergraduate Paper Prize for her paper on “Birth Junkies: Labor Support and Resistance in American Birth.” We also awarded for the first time a student prize for the best undergraduate poster paper. This went to Katelyn Rusk (UMASS-Amherst) for her poster on “Quantifying Age-Related Morphological Changes in the Human Pubic Symphysis.” The quality of this year’s submissions is a testimony to a vibrant new generation of anthropologists.

At the general business meeting I addressed the transition that our webpage is currently going through. We did finally make the move to a new server with a new format (with tremendous financial savings to the organization), and basic meeting information was available. However, a new more user-friendly design should be rolled out in time to promote next year’s meeting. Volunteers with web-design skills and member suggestions are highly desired. In addition, there was some discussion at the business meeting on how we might reorganize the structure of session time slots. In the end it was agreed that program chairs should maintain the flexibility to arrange multiple formats of sessions in coordination with session organizers and individual paper submitters. It was also announced that we will have a Summer edition of

the NEAA Newsletter to highlight the Student Paper/Poster Prize winners and other outstanding contributions to the meetings.

Finally, I am excited to report that Don Pollock and his colleagues at the University of Buffalo and neighboring institutions will be hosting the 2010 NEAA meetings in Buffalo, NY from March 5-7. The theme will be "Borders, Margins, and Passages." This will be the NEAA's 50th Annual Meeting and we hope that a large showing of the membership will join the celebration. Further details will be made available at our website in the months to come and in the Fall 2009 newsletter. In the meantime please feel free to contact me or the NEAA executive board members for any assistance that you may need. In closing, I wish everyone a prosperous and productive summer ahead.

NEAA President

Barrett Brenton (St. John's University)

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Why Anthropology Departments Need the NEAA: A Cost/Benefit Analysis of the 2009 Conference

At the 49th Northeastern Anthropological Association's meeting banquet in Providence on March 14, 2009 Rhode Island College President Nancy Carriuolo confided: "I always wanted to be an anthropologist." Earlier, RIC students ate and discussed *Career Advice for Anthropology BAs* at a luncheon session with students from SUNY Potsdam, Roger Williams University, and many other programs. They aspire to be anthropologists. Imagining and examining anthropology are benefits to hosting this conference.

Organizing this year's conference started immediately after the 2008 meetings, hosted by UMass Amherst in March 2008. Thirty different sessions were designed to engage the 104 cultural anthropologists, archaeologists, linguists and biological anthropologists who contributed abstracts. Lead time was short: most attendees registered a few weeks before the conference and one-quarter registered on-site. Full time and adjunct faculty, current and former students did benefit: they presented ideas in easily accessible meeting spaces, arranged to accommodate their needs; selecting from organized symposia, poster, workshop, panel, and luncheon sessions. Most of the 216 attendees arrived on Friday, and participated in several sessions, luncheons and social events over two days; 116 heard the Saturday night keynote address.

College web, news, signage, printing, technology, conference and special events coordinated services; staff, faculty and student registrars met on-demand needs. Dining Services delivered free coffee, fruit and Danish to begin each day; two luncheons (one free to student registrants), free crudités and drinks at evening social get-togethers, and a banquet ended this full-course conference. Saturday's events concluded with Barrett Brenton's NEAA presidential session, *The Challenges of Exploring Bio-Cultural Diversity*, a well attended business meeting, and Ken Miller's public after dinner keynote address *Is Evolution, "Only a Theory?"* NEAA conferences are work, but this effort was shared by students,

faculty, staff and administrators. This whole-college event was supported by an active NEAA executive committee and forty-nine years of practice.

On Friday March 13, administrators and Native American community members discussed practical ways to make college accessible. Students from Western Connecticut State University presented results from last summer's Revolutionary War encampment excavations. A session on sacred places connected scholars, planners, preservationists and tribal members. On Friday undergraduate and graduate papers were reviewed and on Saturday paper prizes were announced. A panel on national security discussed the ethics of anthropologists working in military settings. Among dozens of choices were sessions on the body and several on identity. Topics ranged from primates to *Homo cyber*; critiques of past scholarship balanced contemporary fast food analyses. Hundreds networked in varied settings for two intense days. Sessions were packed, with standing room only in some cases. These were conditions that inspired presenters and audiences, alike.

Here are other measures: External grants and contributions from Rhode Island College, Roger Williams University, the Public Archaeology Lab Inc., and Gray and Pape, Inc. covered \$6500 of the registration fees, and conference costs. In sum, the NEAA prospered, adding \$10,000 to its budget. And its future is in good hands: the University of Buffalo is planning the 50th conference in 2010. The 2011 conference will be at Franklin and Pierce University, and Bridgewater State College will host the NEAA in 2012.

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Undergraduate Experience at NEAA

I transferred to Rhode Island College in 2006 as a mature student from England. I knew almost nothing about anthropology until I happened across the department's web page and was immediately fascinated by the discipline. After three years of hard work, I graduated this May and I am now preparing to embark on an MSc in Paleopathology at Durham University (UK), with a view to a career in forensic anthropology.

As I prepared to present my paper at the 2009 meeting of the NEAA, it occurred to me that despite my years of stage experience I felt somewhat disadvantaged. As an inexperienced undergraduate, standing before seasoned anthropologists and graduate students, about to deliver a presentation of my reflections on the procedures used to assess ancestry from skeletal remains, I realized that to sing for an audience was a different kind of performance. In comparison, I was used to presenting somebody else's work, whereas in this case I was presenting my own research to an audience of scholars who, rather than remarking on my musical talent, would be listening to what I had to say.

Having been to the AAA meeting in 2007, I had an idea of what to expect from the audience. I knew that there would be some who would stay for the whole session while others would only stay for the papers

they were interested in. As I took the stage, I noticed that the room was almost full, and I began to feel the pressure, especially as I saw a few spectators with notebooks, poised with pen in hand. At that point my anxiety increased as I recognized the significance of the event: this was real, I was not playing make-believe any more and I certainly was nowhere near Kansas.

My presentation passed in a blur, I have very little recollection of the 10-15 minutes that I spent talking about bones and measurements. The feedback, however, suggested that it went well and I had a sense of pride when I caught a glimpse of the notes taken by one audience member. There were a few minutes available, after my monologue, to answer questions and I surprised myself with how professionally I responded. In retrospect I concluded that this was because as the presenter, and scholar, I was the authority on the research material; for that short time, I was the teacher.

I highly recommend it to any other student who is considering taking the leap. It is not nearly as intimidating as it seems and it helps to bear in mind that the audience are there because they are genuinely interested. Their presence in the room represents their support for your research and any discussion that ensues can be used to your advantage as you develop your thesis. In closing, I can say that I eagerly anticipate the next opportunity to present my research. I am honored to have had the chance to step into the real academic world and I now feel like a legitimate member of the anthropological community.

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Job posting 6-17-09

Assistant Professor, Cultural Anthropology
Rhode Island College
Starting Fall 2009

The Department of Anthropology at Rhode Island College invites applications for this full-time, one-year limited term position starting Fall 2009, to teach Introduction to Cultural Anthropology and Applied Anthropology or Research Methods in Cultural Anthropology; and Non Western Worlds: area specialty of faculty member.

We are seeking a cultural anthropologist who is actively committed to solving human problems in Third World settings, and can engage Rhode Island College students in that process. The applicant preferably has worked effectively in medical, health and human development areas among Non-Western peoples, and has linked cultural research to other areas of critical inquiry, particularly medical anthropology.

This is a full-time, one-year limited term position. **Requirements include:** ABD in Anthropology and a record of excellence in undergraduate teaching. **Preferred requirements include:** Ph.D. in Anthropology; established track record in directing student inquiry and research and skills to seek external grant funding;

IMPORTANT: For a full job description, see our web site at <http://www.ric.edu/hr>.

General Information/Application Procedure:

Applications must be received in the Office of Human Resources by July 10, 2009. Submit cover letter, c.v., official transcripts, and three current letters of reference. When applying, cover letter must include the Search Code for the position. If you are applying for more than one position, separate materials **MUST** be submitted for each. Mail or fax (e-mail not accepted) application to:

Office of Human Resources
Attention: **Search Code: ANTHRO-09**
Rhode Island College
600 Mt. Pleasant Avenue
Providence, RI 02908-1991
Fax: 401-456-8717 - Tel: 401-456-8216

As an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity institution which values and is committed to expanding the diversity of its faculty and staff, the College invites members of protected classes, including minorities and persons with disabilities, to identify themselves as such at the time of application.

YOUR INVITATION TO JOIN THE NEAA!!

TO JOIN THE NEAA SEND this form and the membership dues to:

Alan Hersker, Treasurer, NEAA
Department of Anthropology, SUNY Potsdam
44 Pierrepont Avenue
Potsdam, NY 13676-2294

Dues: \$25.00 for full-time professionals; \$15.00 for students, adjuncts or sessionals.

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