Socios en Patrimonio (Partners in Heritage): Engaged Archaeology, Digital Heritage, and Community Development in Choctamal, Peru

**PI:** Parker VanValkenburgh - Assistant Professor of Anthropology

*Note to Applicants*

Please contact Dr. VanValkenburgh (parker_vanvalkenburgh@brown.edu) about your interest in this project at your earliest convenience – before January 1st. The project is looking to finalize our research team by January 5th.

**Background, Significance, and Synopsis of Research Goals**

This collaborative research project with three Brown University undergraduate students centers on archaeology, community development, and the digital preservation of cultural heritage in Choctamal, Peru. Archaeologists who work in the global south frequently operate in an extractive fashion: we travel to field sites, collect data, and then return to our universities, where we worry more about what our data have to say about the past than what our work does to the people who live in and around the landscapes we study. However, a growing number of practitioners have advocated for engaged and collaborative approaches that serve needs identified by local communities while continuing to pursue scholarly objectives (Atalay et al. 2016; Gould and Burtenshaw 2014; Rowan and Baram 2004; Silliman 2008).

The town of Choctamal (pop. 300) is located in the shadow of one of Peru’s most impressive archaeological sites – the “fortress” of Kuelap, built between 1000 and 1450 CE by the poorly-studied Chachapoyas people and subsequently modified by invading Inka armies in the late 15th century CE (Figure 1). Over the last ten years, the Peruvian Ministry of Foreign Commerce and Tourism (MINCETUR) has aggressively promoted Kuelap as a “second Machu Picchu” to draw tourists away from the overcrowded circuits around the city of Cuzco. Choctamal has been ideally located to benefit from this campaign, as it lies along the primary road into Kuelap, and its residents have responded to increasing tourist traffic by building restaurants, hostels, and shops that cater to these new visitors. In March 2017, however, the community was effectively cut off from this source of livelihood when a new cable car (teleférico) began shuttling visitors to Kuelap from another town located further down-valley.

I arrived in Choctamal in June 2017 to begin the Paisajes Arqueológicos de Chachapoyas (PACha – or Landscape Archaeology in Chachapoyas) project, whose goal it is to study the growth of Chachapoyas civilization and the region’s subsequent incorporation into the Inka and Spanish empires, by means of the systematic mapping, dating, and spatial analysis of archaeological landscapes within a 600 km² area around Kuelap. Before my team and I set out to conduct this work, we formed a partnership with the local comun, the organization tasked with administering rights to communal landholdings in the region. In exchange for permission to work in Choctamal’s lands, we hired a team of local workers and agreed to present regular updates on the progress of our work. Over the course of our interactions, community members
expressed a great deal of anxiety about the impact of the cable car on Choctamal and asked if the research we were conducting might provide avenues for developing new economic opportunities – specifically, by transforming smaller sites into tourist destinations and offering training in Chachapoyas culture history to local guides. By the end of the season, we had agreed to develop a program that would build capacity for local stewardship of archaeological heritage and assist in the development of sustainable tourism.

This UTRA project will begin to fulfill that promise by designing and implementing a curriculum to provide essential training in archaeology and culture history to a group of young women and men in Choctamal – and build infrastructure for expanding our collaboration by creating a digital platform for conserving and managing intangible heritage. We will draw on existing scientific literature to create materials and hands-on activities that teach key concepts from Chachapoyas culture history and archaeological methods. We will also develop modules for basic English language instruction. In the field, the UTRA team will implement this curriculum with a team of half a dozen socios (between approximately the ages of 17 to 25), who will also be paid members of the PACha research project. UTRA students and these local partners will work side by side in archaeological research settings five days a week, providing opportunities for hands-on instruction. During one to two afternoons a week, the UTRA students will meet separately with the socios to discuss course materials. On Saturdays, the UTRA students will work with local partners to develop independent projects to curate Choctamal’s intangible heritage, including oral histories and current cultural practices. These collections will then be recorded in a digital repository built using the Mukurtu platform – a series of web design tools designed to “empower communities to manage, share, an exchange their digital heritage in culturally relevant and ethically-minded ways” (http://mukurtu.org/). Designed by scholar Kimberly Christen Withey and collaborators, Mukurtu provides communities with tools to build websites and mobile applications that facilitate restricted access to culturally sensitive materials, while providing platforms for sharing information to wider audiences.

The Research Team
Collaboration with a team of students with diverse academic backgrounds will be essential to the successful completion of this project. My ideal team would include one student with experience in education, one student with archaeological field research experience, and one student with computer programming experience (Javascript, Python, XML). The first two students would take the lead in the development of the Socios en Patrimonio curriculum, with the former attending to pedagogical design and implementation and the latter providing the expertise necessary to guide selection of course content in consultation with the faculty advisor. The lead developer will be responsible for developing a Mukurtu website and an optional mobile module. Because none of our local research partners speak English, it is crucial that all of these student research partners have some command of Spanish.

Mentoring Strategies, Research Environment and Research Plan
Over the last nine years of running field research projects in Peru and laboratory research projects in the United States, I have had the pleasure of mentoring nearly three dozen Peruvian and American students. I have found that they are most fulfilled (both academically and
personally) when they are treated as full scientific partners, rather than as field school students or volunteers. The crux of my mentoring philosophy will be to treat the UTRA team as junior colleagues and collaborators, while also providing them with the academic and social support necessary to learn about new areas of research and adjust to life in a foreign country. A previous I-Team UTRA project that I ran in 2016 (“Expanding Archaeology’s Digital Frontier: Building and Testing a Tablet-Based Recording Module for Archaeological Research in Peru”) was among the most rewarding mentoring experiences that I have had and led to the submission of a jointly authored manuscript to the journal *Advances in Archaeological Practice*, which is currently under review.

In February 2018, I will submit an application to the Brown IRB to approve the human subjects component of our research. During spring semester, students will be provided with a comprehensive reading list on Chachapoyas culture history and archaeology, which they will be expected to read before arriving in Peru. Our work will begin in earnest on June 2nd, 2016, and our first four weeks will be devoted to curriculum and web development. Students will stay in a shared house in a safe district of Lima (Miraflores), and be provided with shared workspace at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, where I am an affiliated researcher. During week one, we will wire-frame both the curriculum and the web module. Weeks two and three will be devoted to core development of both project components, and week four will be dedicated to revising the curriculum, preparing printed materials, making final modifications to audiovisual presentations, and website revision. Throughout this time, I will meet with the UTRAs collectively for two hours each weekday, followed by one-on-one, follow up sessions to discuss project progress and personal goals. Weekends will feature informal trips to archaeological and historical sites.

On June 30th, we will travel to Chachapoyas by air and begin implementation of the project curriculum on July 2nd. From July 2nd to August 10th, the UTRA students will carry out archaeological field research alongside our community partners for approximately eight hours a day (7am-4pm, with a break for lunch), five days a week, incorporating hands-on instruction into our daily routine. For two afternoons a week, students will meet with our community partners for approximately 1:30 hours to review course material. On Saturdays, while the remainder of the research team is conducting laboratory work (artifact cleaning, labeling, and photography), the UTRA team will work with our community partners on their independent curatorial projects. At the end of our project study period (circa August 10th), the UTRA team and the socios will present the results of their final projects and experiences to the whole community in a joint meeting. Throughout this time, I will be working side by side with the research team in the field, and we will be joined on a daily basis by six Peruvian undergraduate and graduate students, as well as my Peruvian co-director and two Brown University Ph.D. students.

Pending successful completion of our summer research and student interest, we may seek an optional extension in fall 2018 to allow the socios’ final projects to be integrated into the Mukurtu website alongside the results of our archaeological fieldwork.
Schedule
February 2017 – Submission of proposal for IRB approval
June 4th - July 1st – Curriculum and Website Design in Lima, Peru
July 2nd – August 10th – Fieldwork and training in Choctamal Peru
Fall 2018 – Optional extension to integrate content into Mukurtu website

Works Cited
Atalay, Sonya, Lee Rains Clauss, Randall H. McGuire, and John R. Welch

Gould, Peter G., and Paul Burtenshaw

Rowan, Yorke, and Uzi Baram

Silliman, Stephen W.

Figures
Figure 1. News Article on *Teleférico* Construction near Kuélap

Figure 2. Map of the location of Chotamal and other Project locations
Figure 3. Satellite survey of archaeological features conducted by Paisajes Arqueológicos de Chachapoyas Proyect.

Figure 4. Archaeological Site of La Fila, within PACHa survey area