

ASYLUM HILL CEMETERY EXCAVATION, MISSISSIPPI, U.S.

Course ID: HIS 489

June 29–August 2, 2025

Academic Credits: 8 Semester Credit Units (Equivalent to 12 Quarter Units)

School of Record: Culver Stockton College

This program requires Health & Criminal background screening. Admitted students MUST begin the process by mid-April as the submission and review of such background screenings is a lengthy, multi-step process. Students who have not begun the process by May 5, 2025 will forfeit their slots at the field school and will not receive a refund of tuition. All materials and steps for background screening MUST be submitted and completed by June 9, 2025.

DIRECTORS:

Dr. Jennifer E. Mack – Lead Bioarchaeologist, Asylum Hill Project; Assistant Professor, School of Population Health, University of Mississippi Medical Center (jmack@umc.edu)



PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Center for Bioethics and Medical Humanities at the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC), in conjunction with Millsaps College, invites anthropology students to participate in the bioarchaeological field school at the cemetery of the original Mississippi State Lunatic Asylum (ca. 1855-1935). This unique opportunity is available to a limited number [20] of students in 2025.

The cemetery, which is located on the UMMC campus, contains the unmarked graves of over 4,000 individuals who will be removed to make way for vital medical center expansion. Students will spend five weeks in the heart of Jackson, Mississippi, working alongside a professional archaeological crew on the excavation as well as laboratory tasks. Training will focus on bioarchaeological methods, including burial excavation, human osteology, and mortuary artifact identification. Students will also receive instruction in basic archaeological methods,

such as mapping, soil sample collection, and the creation of field sketches. Previous coursework in human osteology is not required but will be beneficial to participants. All students should have completed an introductory course in archaeology or anthropology and should come prepared to work in the extreme heat and humidity of a Mississippi summer.

The Asylum Hill Cemetery field school will provide students the rare opportunity to gain experience in human burial excavation without the expense of traveling abroad. Participants will contribute to a greater understanding of the African American and Euro American population that lived and died at the asylum and will gather data that allow the stories of deceased patients to be told. The Asylum Hill Project plans to permanently memorialize the interred individuals during a later phase of the work.

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER

The Center for Field Sciences was established to support field training in a range of sciences at sites within the U.S. & across the world. Traveling and conducting field work involves risk. Students interested in participating in any CFS program must weigh the potential risk against the value of education provided by the program of their choosing.

Risk is inherent in everything we do and the CFS takes risks seriously. A committee of leading scholars review each field school location prior to approval. Once a program is accepted, the CFS continually monitor conditions at the program's site and so we can provide an experience that is as safe as possible.

The CFS does not provide trip or travel cancellation insurance. Students are encouraged to explore such insurance policies on their own. Post Covid 19, most basic policies do not cover trip cancellation due to pandemics. If you wish to purchase an insurance policy that covers such contingencies, explore Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) plans. [Insuremytrip.com](https://www.insuremytrip.com), [Squaremouth.com](https://www.squaremouth.com) or [Travelguard.com](https://www.travelguard.com) are possible websites where students may explore different insurance policies.

Students should be aware that conditions in the field are different than those experienced at home, dorms or college towns. Students will be exposed to the elements, live in rustic accommodation, and expect to engage in daily physical activity.

We do our best to follow schedule and activities as outlined in this syllabus. Yet local permitting agencies, political, environmental, personal, and/or weather conditions may force changes. This syllabus, therefore, is only a general commitment. Students should allow flexibility and adaptability as research work is frequently subject to modification.

All students must consult medical professionals to ensure they are fit to participate in a CFS field program. CFS is not qualified to provide medical advice. For all other concerns, please consult with CFS staff members or program director(s) – as appropriate.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will be familiar with human skeletal terminology, burial excavation techniques, and methods for recognizing and recording pertinent data in the field and lab. They will gain experience in the interpretation of soil stratigraphy, soil sampling, artifact identification, field photography, Total Station mapping, Planview drawing, excavation form completion, water-screening, artifact cleaning, human remains cleaning, and laboratory tracking procedures. While the focus of the field school is the acquisition of practical skills, through this project students will also learn about the ethical issues surrounding the excavation and analysis of human remains, and the nuanced story of the Mississippi State Lunatic Asylum and its patients.

LEARNT SKILLS

We are aware that many students may not seek academic careers but will pursue employment in the private sector. To that end, we are following the example set by Twin Cairns with their Skills Log Matrix™ (<https://twincairns.com/skills-log-matrix/>). Students will be trained in the following skills:

Skill	Skill Definition
Understanding stratigraphy	Ability to understand the relationships between layers of both cultural and natural depositions
Total station	Able to create maps and plans using a Total Station
Small hand tools	Can operate a trowel or similar small hand tool to conduct excavations
Screening	Ability to use geological and general screens to identify, collect and record small scale finds
Recording-Excavations	Ability to understand, collect and record all excavation processes and data
Recording sheets	Ability to understand and properly record excavation process, stratigraphy, sections and artifact documentation
Photography	Ability to take clear images of various features, artifact & soil colors at various light and field depth conditions
Large hand tools	Can operate a pickax, hoe or similar large hand tool to conduct excavations
Drawing plans	Can create site plans using plumb bob and measuring tape
Artifact washing	Ability to wash different artifact types while maintaining their material characteristics for research purposes
Artifact recovery	Ability to record, safely excavate and properly storage artifacts and ecofacts made of different types of materials (ceramics, metal, lithics, etc.) and various level of fragility
Artifact processing	Ability to identify, collect and record a wide range of artifact types, understanding their relative fragility within different site types and conditions
Artifact classification & seriation	Understand how to assign artifacts to accepted cultural/geological spheres, across space (classification) and across time (seriation)

ACADEMIC GRADING MATRIX

Students will be graded based on their work as follows:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance—37.5 points (1.5 per day) Participation—25 points (1 per day) Engagement and attitude—25 points (1 per day) Professionalism—12.5 points (0.5 per day) 	90–100% = A 80–89% = B 70–79% = C 60–69% = D <60% = F
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SKILLS MATRIX LEVELS

The school instructors will evaluate the level each student achieved on the list of skills provided above. Each skill will be graded on one of the following three levels:

Basic: Can perform the skill/task with some supervision.

Competent: Can perform the skill/task without any supervision.

Advanced: Can perform the skill/task and teach others how to do it.

COURSE SCHEDULE

June 29	Students arrive in Jackson by late afternoon; welcome event at 7:00 pm Central time
June 30	Introductory lectures, explanation of field procedures, tour of site and lab
July 1	Field techniques demonstration and commencement of excavation
July 2-3	Fieldwork and lectures, with lab work on rainy days

July 4	No fieldwork, optional celebration
July 5	Fieldwork (lab work if rain day)
July 6	Rest day
July 7-11	Fieldwork and lectures, with lab work on rainy days
July 12	Rest day with optional excursion
July 13	Rest day
July 14-18	Fieldwork and lectures, with lab work on rainy days
July 19	Rest day with optional excursion
July 20	Rest day
July 21-25	Fieldwork and lectures, with lab work on rainy days
July 26	Rest day with optional excursion
July 27	Rest day
Jul 28-31	Fieldwork and lectures, with lab work on rainy days
Aug 1	Site closing, lab and equipment clean-up, osteology workshops, farewell dinner
Aug 2	Students depart

*Course structure may be subject to change upon directors' discretion

TYPICAL WORKDAY

7:00 am	Make-your-own breakfast available in Millsaps dorm kitchen for dorm-stay students
8:15 am	Dormitory and local-stay students meet at Millsaps to load up in the vans
8:30 am	Students arrive on site and begin work
10:00-10:15 am	Mid-morning break
10:15 am-12:00 pm	Field or lab work
12:00-1:00 pm	Lunch at lab
1:00 pm	Return to field or lab work. <i>Some days, students will instead have a lecture or a workshop at 1:00 prior to returning to work.</i>
2:30-2:45 pm	Afternoon break
2:45-4:00 pm	Field or lab work
4:00 pm	Students load up on vans to return to Millsaps campus

ATTENDANCE POLICY

The required attendance for the successful completion of the field school is 100% of the course hours. Absences for medical or other serious personal reasons will be excused, and students who miss hours for these reasons will be given an opportunity to catch up on the field school study plan through additional readings, homework, or tutorials with program staff members.

PREREQUISITES

Introduction to Anthropology or Archaeology or a similar course is required. A course in Human Osteology is not required, but a previous knowledge base will allow students to engage more extensively with the fieldwork.

This is hands-on, experiential learning, and students will study on-site how to conduct archaeological research. Field work involves physical work and exposure to the elements and thus requires a measure of understanding that this will not be the typical university learning environment. You will have to work outdoors and will get sweaty and tired. Students are required to come equipped with sufficient excitement and an adequate understanding that fieldwork

requires real, hard work, in the sun and rain. The work requires patience, discipline, and attention to detail.

SCREENING AND HEALTH REQUIREMENTS

HEALTH/IMMUNIZATION REVIEW

Because UMMC is a medical campus with vulnerable patients, all students (clinical and non-clinical) are required to provide proof of current immunization (or immunity) for measles, mumps, and Rubella (MMR); varicella (chicken pox); and tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (TDAP). Students must also have proof of a negative test for tuberculosis (TB). Immunization records and TB testing may be obtained from your health care provider, local clinic, or health department. Vaccinations may be obtained through these providers or a pharmacy.

Students who are accepted to the field school program will be given more specific instructions regarding verification. Students are responsible for any fees associated with completing health requirements at their provider of choice. After completion, students will upload proof of health requirements to a unique, personalized link from UMMC.

CRIMINAL HISTORY REVIEW

After acceptance to the field school program, students will need to obtain fingerprint cards from their local police or Sheriff's department. These cards will be submitted to UMMC's HR Service Center along with a signed consent form for a full background check. Students may be disqualified from the program if the background check finds a history of felonies of a violent or sexual nature or felonies related to theft or the possession or sale of drugs. If a student is disqualified from participation, any tuition paid will be refunded. The \$50 background check fee is non-refundable.

HEALTH INSURANCE

Students must obtain and maintain health insurance for the duration of the field school and provide proof of health insurance upon request by UMMC. Any cost for medical treatment provided during the field school will be the responsibility of the students.

PROGRAM ETIQUETTE

No smoking or vaping is permitted on site or anywhere on the UMMC campus. No pets may be brought to the Millsaps dormitories or the site. Cell phone use is not permitted on site, and ear buds may not be worn on site or in the lab. Taking personal photos of the human remains will result in immediate expulsion from the field school with a failing grade and no refund of tuition. Students are expected to always demonstrate the utmost respect for both the dead and their descendants. This is especially important because descendants and members of the descendant communities may visit the site during the field school.

EQUIPMENT LIST

Students should come equipped with:

- **Sturdy, water-resistant boots**, preferably broken in prior to the project
- **Rubber boots** (a good idea, but not required)
- **Durable, well-fitting work gloves**. Fit is important as dexterity is necessary for careful excavation work. Gloves will prevent blisters, scratches and cuts, and direct contact with noxious plants.
- **Sturdy raincoat** (not a poncho) and **rain pants** for water-screening and working in light rain
- **Insect repellent**
- **Sunscreen**
- **Wide-brim hat** (for sun)
- **Reusable water containers** sufficient to supply the student for an entire day in hot weather (2 quart capacity is ideal)

- **Inexpensive mapping compass** similar to [this](#)
- **Sunglasses**
- **Backpack**
- **Kneeling pad from garden store**
- **Small combination lock for locker**

Students should pack at least **five days of field clothing** as well as clothing for after hours. **Long pants** are advisable on site due to the presence of fire ants and poison ivy. Dark denim jeans should be avoided due to the heat.

Poison ivy cleanser will be available in the lab but students who are highly allergic should bring their own for showering in the dorms.

All medications needed for the 5 week period should be obtained prior to traveling to avoid any issues with out-of-state refill transfers. This includes extra contact lenses, vitamins and supplements.

TRAVEL & MEETING POINT/TIME

We suggest you hold purchasing your airline ticket until six (6) weeks prior to departure date. Natural disasters, political changes, weather conditions and a range of other factors may require the cancelation of a program. The CFS typically takes a close look at local conditions 6-7 weeks prior to program beginning and makes a Go/No Go decision by then. Such a time frame still allows for the purchase of deeply discounted airline tickets while protecting students from potential loss of airline ticket costs if CFS is forced to cancel a program.

Students **arriving by air** should book flights arriving at the Jackson-Medgar Wiley Evers International Airport (JAN) prior to 6:00 pm Central on June 29, 2025. Flight number and arrival time must be communicated to the project coordinator for transportation to Millsaps College to be arranged. You may be asked to wait one or two hours for other students to arrive for a single pick-up. Be advised that there are few amenities at the airport.

If you missed your connection or your flight is delayed, please call, text or email the project director immediately. A local emergency cell phone number will be provided to all enrolled students.

Students **arriving by car** should proceed directly to Millsaps College campus. A map will be provided showing parking facilities and the location of the dormitory. Students who are planning to drive must inform the project director ahead of time so that a parking pass can be arranged.

All students will attend a welcome event at the Millsaps College dormitory on June 29 at 7:00 pm.

VISA REQUIREMENTS

This is a domestic program, and no visa is needed for U.S. Citizens. Procedures for sponsoring international students are not in place for the 2025 field school.

MEALS & ACCOMMODATION

Student accommodation will be single-occupancy rooms (with two rooms sharing a bathroom) in a dormitory at Millsaps College. Students who already live locally or who opt to provide their own accommodation will pay a reduced tuition rate.

Participants staying in the Millsaps dormitories will be expected to bring their own bed linens, blankets, pillows, towels, and toiletries sufficient for a 5-week stay. Bathroom tissue is provided. Padded mattress covers were recommended by participants of the 2023 field school.

Continental breakfast will be available seven days a week in the Millsaps dormitory kitchen *for dorm-stay students only*. This will consist of an assortment of items such as cereal, yogurt,

granola bars, muffins, bagels, fruit, milk, non-dairy milk, fruit juice, coffee, and tea. The cost of breakfast is included in the field school fees for dorm-stay students. Vegetarian and gluten-free options will be available upon request.

Lunch will be provided on site Monday through Friday. A buffet will allow students to make their own sandwiches and will also include fruits, vegetables, chips, snacks, and water. The cost of site lunches is included in the field school fees *for all students*. Students who need accommodation for dietary restrictions must inform the project director in advance of arrival in Jackson.

Weekend lunches are not included in student fees. On excursion days (optional), the class will stop at a restaurant for the midday meal, but students will be responsible for their own expenses. Be sure to have sufficient funds to cover this meal each week of the field school if you plan to participate.

Dinners will be self-catered. There is a small kitchen in the dormitory that students may use, and basic pots, pans, and utensils will be provided for cooking. There are also nearby restaurants, and the dormitories are accessible by food delivery services. Students may opt to shop and dine independently, but the Teaching Assistants will also organize group trips to grocery stores/restaurants as needed.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

International dialing code: 001 (if dialing from outside the US)

Money/Banks/Credit Cards: USD\$

ATM availability: An ATM is present in the Millsaps cafeteria building.

Local Language: English, with a Southern accent.

Measure units: degree Fahrenheit (°F), foot/yard/mile, pound (lb), quart/gallon.

Field units: Meter (m.), Gram (gr.)

Time zone: Local time is Central.

ACADEMIC CREDITS & TRANSCRIPT

Attending students will be awarded 8 semester credit units (equivalent to 12 quarter credit units). Students will receive a letter grade for attending this field school based on the assessment matrix (above). This program provides a minimum of 160 direct instructional hours. Students are encouraged to discuss the transferability of credit units with faculty and the registrar at their home institutions prior to attending this program.

Students will be able to access their transcript through our School of Record – Culver-Stockton College. C-SC has authorized the National Student Clearinghouse to provide enrollment and degree verification (at <https://tsorder.studentclearinghouse.org/school/select>). Upon completion of a program, students will get an email from C-SC with a student ID that may be used to retrieve transcripts. The first set of transcripts will be provided at no cost, additional transcripts may require payment. If you have questions about ordering a transcript, contact the C-SC office of the registrar at registrar@culver.edu.

REQUIRED READINGS

PDF files of all mandatory readings will be provided to enrolled students via a shared Dropbox folder.

Bell, Edward L.

1990 The Historical Archaeology of Mortuary Behavior: Coffin Hardware from Uxbridge, Massachusetts. *Historical Archaeology* 24:54–78. **25 pgs.**

Gibson, Lida

2022 Timeline of the Mississippi State Asylum, 1855–1935. **50 pgs.**

LeeDecker, Charles H.

2009 Preparing for an Afterlife on Earth: The Transformation of Mortuary Behavior in Nineteenth-Century North America. In *International Handbook of Historical Archaeology*, edited by Teresita Majewski and David Gaimster, pp. 141-157. Springer, New York. **17 pgs.**

Lillie, Robin, and Jennifer Mack

2015 *Dubuque's Forgotten Cemetery: Excavating a Nineteenth-century Burial Ground in a Twenty-First-Century City*. University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, IA. Chapters 1, 5, and 9. **45 pgs.**

Mack, Mark E. and Michael L. Blakey

2004 The New York African Burial Ground Project: Past Biases, Current Dilemmas, and Future Research Opportunities. *Historical Archaeology* 38:10-17. **8 pgs.**

Mytum, Harold

2021 Ethics and Practice in the Excavation, Examination, Analysis, and Preservation of Historical Mummified Human Remains. *Historical Archaeology* 55:96–109. **14 pgs.**

Sprague, Roderick

2005 *Burial Terminology: A Guide for Researchers*. AltaMira Press, Lanham, MD. Chapter 3 (pp. 27–36) and Chapter 4:XIII and XIV (180–190), **21 pgs.**

Steadman, Dawnie Wolfe and Steven A. Anderson

2009 The Marty Miller Case: Introducing Forensic Anthropology. In *Hard Evidence: Case Studies in Forensic Anthropology*. edited by Dawnie Wolf Steadman. Pp. 8-28. Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River. **21 pgs.**

Steadman, Dawnie Wolfe and Lyle W. Konigsberg

2009 Multiple Points of Similarity. In *Hard Evidence: Case Studies in Forensic Anthropology*. Edited by Dawnie Wolf Steadman. Pp. 68-79. Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River. **12 pgs.**

Wiersema, Jason, Jennifer C. Love and L. Gill Naul

2009 The Influence of the Daubert Guidelines on Anthropological Methods of Scientific Identification in the Medical Examiner Setting. In *Hard Evidence: Case Studies in Forensic Anthropology*. edited by Dawnie Wolf Steadman. Pp. 80-90. Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River. **11 pgs.**

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Lillie, Robin, and Jennifer Mack

2015 *Dubuque's Forgotten Cemetery: Excavating a Nineteenth-century Burial Ground in a Twenty-First-Century City*. University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, IA.

Penney, Darby, and Peter Stastny

2008 *The Lives They Left Behind: Suitcases from a State Hospital Attic*. Bellevue Literary Press, New York.

White, Tim D., Michael T. Black, and Pieter A. Folkens

2012 *Human Osteology*, 3rd edition. Elsevier Academic Press, Burlington, MA.