

Recommendations for Safety Education and Training for Graduate Students Directing Field Projects

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ABSTRACT

Graduate schools provide students opportunities for fieldwork and training in archaeological methods and theory, but they often overlook instruction in field safety and well-being. We suggest that more explicit guidance on how to conduct safe fieldwork will improve the overall success of student-led projects and prepare students to direct safe and successful fieldwork programs as professionals. In this article, we draw on the experiences of current and recent graduate students as well as professors who have overseen graduate fieldwork to outline key considerations in improving field safety and well-being and to offer recommendations for specific training and safety protocols. In devising these considerations and recommendations, we have referenced both domestic and international field projects, as well as those involving community collaboration.

Keywords: graduate training, field safety, broader safety considerations, safety and field protocol recommendations

Las escuelas de posgrado proveen oportunidades para que los estudiantes realicen trabajo de campo y reciban entrenamiento sobre métodos y teoría arqueológica, pero a menudo dejan de lado la instrucción sobre seguridad y bienestar en el campo. Argumentamos que una orientación más explícita sobre cómo llevar a cabo un trabajo de campo más seguro, contribuye al éxito general de los proyectos liderados por estudiantes, a la vez que los prepara como profesionales para dirigir programas de trabajo de campo seguros y exitosos. En este artículo, nos basamos en las experiencias recientes de estudiantes de posgrado, así como de los profesores que han supervisado trabajos de campo de posgrado, para esbozar reflexiones claves que permitan mejorar la seguridad y el bienestar en el campo y ofrecer recomendaciones para capacitaciones específicas y protocolos de seguridad. Al elaborar estos argumentos y recomendaciones, hemos considerado tanto proyectos de campo nacionales como internacionales, así como aquellos que involucran colaboración comunitaria.

Palabras clave: formación de estudiantes de posgrado, seguridad en trabajo de campo, consideraciones más anchas para bienestar y seguridad, recomendaciones de protocolo de seguridad y campo

In recent decades, archaeologists have discussed with more frequency and urgency the need for explicit field safety trainings for graduate students directing fieldwork (Clancy et al. 2014; Howell 1988, 1990; Sharp and Kremer 2006). Several scholars have recognized that because graduate students often do not have the same levels of funding, types of institutional support, or access to insurance as faculty members, student-led projects have their own risks and pose their own challenges (Higgit and Bullard 1999). Nevertheless, most graduate programs do not offer formalized safety-related courses or programs for students who are directing field or lab projects. Student safety training, therefore, tends to be haphazard, idiosyncratic, or even absent. Graduate students must either learn safety training secondhand from their advisors and peers or take on safety training as a

self-initiated venture—often, if not always, funded by the interested individuals themselves.

Every field project is different, and safety concerns are not uniform. Nevertheless, we consider seven facets of field safety planning applicable to many student-led projects: (1) finding safety-related information (trainings, resources, plans, etc.), (2) tailoring safety plans to crew demographics, (3) negotiating safety issues in diverse cultural contexts, (4) considering well-being and mental health in novel social contexts, (5) developing a code of conduct that addresses sexual harassment and assault as well as bullying, (6) incorporating legal considerations into a safety plan, and (7) addressing logistical concerns. We conclude by discussing additional considerations graduate

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student field directors should take into account once they are in the field.

PREPARING TO DIRECT SAFE FIELD PROJECTS

Finding Safety-Related Information

There are several safety-related resources available for graduate students leading field projects. Here, we offer several suggestions for students planning to direct their own fieldwork.

Become Familiar with Safe Work Practices. Student project directors should know and plan to comply with all local, state, and federal work safety regulations and also consider location-specific issues they may encounter. They should keep the following in mind:

- What is the maximum depth an excavation unit can be dug in this location before it requires stabilization or shoring?
- What kind of equipment will be used on-site, and what level of personal protective equipment will be needed?
- What are the minimum requirements for site first aid kits?
- What is the availability of food and clean drinking water in field and in camp, and is the project director responsible for making these necessities available?
- Have crew members reviewed workplace hazards, and is there a mechanism for identifying, reporting, and avoiding hazards as they appear?

Most institutions and agencies issue helpful safe work guidelines that can help prepare for fieldwork. If institutions do not provide these guidelines, the [Field Operations Safety Manual](#) from the University of California (2019) and the Occupational Health and Safety Administration's "[Safety and Health Topics](#)" are both excellent resources, among other more topically focused references (e.g. Poirier and Feder 2001). Although a graduate-student-run field project may have different goals and structure from a field school, resources such as *Archaeological Field Schools: A Guide to Teaching in the Field* (Baxter 2009) provide important considerations about project planning, field logistics, maintaining crew well-being, and project success. Notably, safety negligence at a field site can have legal implications, especially if a crew member is injured.

Registering with the STEP Program. Students directing projects outside the United States should register with the U.S. State Department's [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#) (STEP). This free program ensures that students will receive e-mails with updated information about safety conditions in the country in which they are traveling, and it allows the U.S. Embassy as well as family and friends to contact travelers in case of an emergency, including natural disasters and social unrest.

Registering with Your University. Many universities require students conducting off-campus fieldwork to register their projects. The registration process can increase student awareness of potential safety issues, and project location and contact information will be important if it becomes necessary to evacuate the project site. Each university's policies differ, and registration information may come from different university offices (e.g., Study Abroad, Community Engagement, International Services). Project

directors should check with their university to find the correct office and information.

Purchasing International Health Insurance. Because U.S. health insurance policies often do not cover individuals while they are traveling internationally, those planning to direct projects outside the United States should purchase—and encourage their American participants to purchase—international health insurance. Medical bills can quickly become insurmountable, and such insurance plans generally provide coverage for necessary medicines, clinic visits, and hospital procedures, as well as emergency services such as medical evacuations. They also offer multilingual information about prescriptions and other health-related topics. Some universities offer such plans for free to those participating in university-sponsored travel. Project directors should consult their university's Office of Risk Management or a comparable office. Plans can also be purchased from various companies online. Field directors may want to consider supplemental insurance for field sites that require additional, locally based resources for international helicopter and plane evacuations or ground ambulatory services—for example, the [AMREF Flying Doctors](#) in East Africa. Travel insurance can be written into many major archaeological fieldwork grants (e.g., National Science Foundation, Wenner-Gren) for the field director and for senior personnel and accompanying students. Funds typically need to be budgeted at the time of application.

Completing Safety-Related Courses and Certifications. Knowing the proper steps to identify and manage a medical emergency can save lives. Consequently, prior to beginning fieldwork, student directors and other crew members should complete Basic First Aid, CPR/AED, and possibly Wilderness First Aid courses. More than one crew member should be certified. Low-cost courses are often offered by universities, community centers, or outdoor outfitter stores. In addition to saving lives, being certified can satisfy certain legal obligations and can be beneficial when applying for land management agency jobs. It is also important to consider bringing safety-related resources—such as the Red Cross First Aid app—or other handbooks (e.g., Isaac 2013; Lipman 2013; Werner 2017) to the field.

Although trainings help prepare crew members to handle emergencies, they do not prevent emergencies from happening. Project directors should draft Incident Report Forms, or patient case forms, for primary rescuers (i.e., first field responders) to describe what happened and provide any information about initial contact, including weather conditions, mental state and/or response to stimuli, initial examination, and treatment. Copies of these forms should be kept with the first aid kits (see Boston University [2020] for examples).

Tailoring Safety Plans Based on Crew Demographics

Project safety plans should consider the demographics of project participants, and directors should ask crew members to complete emergency contact and medical information forms. In the event of the director's absence, it is important that other project members be aware of crew medical history and emergency contacts.

Crew-member age, health, background, gender, and employment status (such as student, volunteer, employee, day worker, or field

camp resident) present different safety concerns and considerations. For example, field plans should be adjusted for crews with elderly members to include more water breaks and lighter-weight tasks to mitigate risks of heat stroke and muscle injury. Repetitive strain is a common health concern on archaeological projects (Clarke and Phillips 2011), so assigning a variety of jobs to crew members may help avoid or relieve strain-related problems. Additionally, all crew members should have access to proper sanitation resources, which include methods for safely changing and disposing of feminine hygiene products among other gender-related factors (see Sloten et al. 2017). Director responsibilities may also vary if crew members are students, younger than 18, or paid employees as opposed to volunteers. The Archaeological Institute of America's student fieldwork preparation guide (see Archaeological Institute of America 2020) is a particularly useful resource for how to interact with student crew members, and new crew members can be directed to this resource for their own arrangements.

Directors should also prepare project-specific Crew Information Packets to be distributed to crew members well before the project begins. This packet should include project rules and expectations for participants, a description of the project area and its unique safety concerns, a summary of project accommodations and facilities, a packing list, a schedule, and a list of resources and contacts. Examples of these forms can be found in the Supplemental Materials for this article (see Supplemental Text 1 and Supplemental Text 2), on the Society for American Archaeology website (Emerson 2019), and in Emerson (2021).

Negotiating Safety Issues in Diverse Cultural Contexts

Addressing safety issues is critical in novel settings such as archaeological field environments. International fieldwork, for example, may present additional challenges such as foreign languages or different cultural approaches to safety concerns and protocols as well as medical issues. Student field directors should also be aware that travel for fieldwork, although often exciting, may come with culture shock and anxiety from being away from familial, social, and medical support that they or their field participants may rely on (Birnie and Grant 2001). Cultural differences—such as norms regarding work, family, food, treatment of animals and the natural environment, among many topics—may impact not only the field director but also the field crew when different perceptions collide.

Field directors should be aware of the medical resources available as it pertains to their fieldwork setting. Field directors and crew members should have the necessary vocabulary to communicate effectively with local health authorities—for example, by learning phrases related to health and medicine in the local language. International health insurance plans, as mentioned earlier, can be helpful in this regard. All project participants should know the rules surrounding legal and illegal substances in the project area (these may differ from the federal rules), what common diseases and dangerous plants and animals are present, and the locations and hours of the nearest hospitals and pharmacies. Participants should bring enough of any required medications to last the duration of the project. Other researchers who conduct fieldwork in similar areas and circumstances can also offer advice based on their experiences. Learning about the prior experiences of others

can help directors prepare for regionally specific hazards, thereby reducing the risk of safety issues (see Williams et al. 1992). Directors should prepare, distribute, and review procedure and protocol guideline sheets with crew members for expected issues and emergencies that may arise.

Considering Well-Being and Mental Health in Novel Social Contexts

Even fieldwork located in more familiar settings takes place in novel social contexts: the culture of outdoor fieldwork alongside new colleagues, often in physically and emotionally demanding ways, in variable environmental settings, and where social interactions often continue in group settings after the workday is complete (Eifling 2021). These situations may be invigorating for some, but they may be more taxing, unsettling, or outright uncomfortable for others.

Sexual harassment and assault in fieldwork settings (discussed below) is a related safety issue that demands attention and planning. Active smoking and drinking cultures within the archaeological community can further isolate and even encourage harassment and bullying (Leighton 2020). Protecting one's own mental health and that of one's field team is essential for dealing with many of these challenges.

Safety is a holistic concept that includes mental health and wellness. As discussed by Eifling, fieldwork “offers anthropologists a dizzying series of paradoxical stimuli for mental and behavioral health: lonesome but connected, revelations among monotony, exhausted while energized, and an affluence of meaning amid stark deprivation” (2021). Depression, for example, is often seen as a taboo topic, which may lead to stigmatization because it is seen as a weakness (see Klehm et al. 2021; Vieth 2018). Growing attention to mental health, stress, and anxiety in archaeology and in related disciplines is normalizing this conversation (Birnie and Grant 2001; Fitzpatrick 2018, 2019; New Ethnographer 2018, 2019; Phillips and Gilchrist 2012; Rocks-Macqueen 2016; Tucker and Horton 2019; Vieth 2018; see also Eifling 2021; Klehm et al. 2021).

Eifling (2021), Emerson (2021), and Klehm and colleagues (2021) all offer information and guidance relevant to student project directors on the topic of mental health in the field. For example, directors should know the contact information for crisis hotlines as well as their institution's counseling center, office of victim assistance, and others. These resources should also be made available to the field crew. Directors should take time to practice self-care and observe their own mental health during a project, and they should be conscientious of crew members' well-being. Scheduling downtime and days off for long field seasons is instrumental to maintaining crew wellness. Good practice guidelines developed by the Inclusive, Accessible Archaeology Project (IAA) are available for free online (Phillips and Gilchrist 2012; Phillips et al. 2007). Although they were designed around the inclusion of disabled students, these principles of equity and inclusion are enabling for all.

Developing a Code of Conduct That Addresses Sexual Harassment, Assault, and Bullying

As discussed by Peixotto and colleagues (2021) and others (e.g., Colaninno et al. 2020; Meyers et al. 2018; Nakhai 2017;

VanDerwarker et al. 2018), gender discrimination as well as sexual harassment and assault remain consistently alarming issues in fieldwork settings. Student field directors need to be aware that it is crucial to develop policies and procedures for handling harassment and assault. Several (Colaninno et al. 2020; Nelson et al. 2017) have developed general fieldwork and archaeology-specific recommendations for tactics, policies, and procedures to mitigate the risk of sexual harassment and assault and to build safer, more inclusive field school environments. We further recommend the archived Society for American Archaeology (SAA) online seminars by Maureen Meyers (2019) and Carol Colaninno (2020). Both are available for free for SAA members.

Bullying and harassment may be related to other personal characteristics, such as religious affiliation, disability, neurodiversity, physical appearance, ethnicity, race, sexual identity and orientation, gender, and socioeconomic background. As with sexual harassment and assault, a no-tolerance policy toward bullying should be included in the code of conduct (Perry 2019).

Interactions with project members and with local community members should be based on respect, dignity, and mutual understanding, and we recommend codifying these values in a memorandum of agreement or code of conduct signed by all project participants. Clear behavioral expectations and a reporting system can reduce issues of misunderstanding, discomfort, harassment, and bullying, as well as violence, abuse, or assault. Perry (2019), Colaninno and colleagues (2020), and Emerson (2021) provide guidance on ensuring safe field school experiences, much of which can be adapted for general field settings. Professional organizations such as the SAA and the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR 2020) provide additional resource guides or policies to consider, and examples of conduct policies can be found in the Supplemental Materials for this article (see Supplemental Text 1 and Supplemental Text 3).

So that policies are not forgotten, they should be reviewed with participants before the field season begins and discussed throughout the season to make sure the code of conduct remains a central tenet of field behavior.

Incorporating Legal Considerations into a Safety Plan

In addition to the code of conduct and crew information packets, it is important for both transparency and legal reasons that project directors have crew members formally acknowledge the risks inherent to working in a rugged, outdoor, and often remote environment. Depending on the demographic of the participants, directors may or may not be legally able to have participants sign waivers. An Acknowledgement of Risk form can be a good alternative if waivers are not permitted.

Due to privacy laws, photo release forms should also be signed by anyone who will be photographed doing project work. Any participant data or personal information the director collects (medical history forms, insurance information, etc.) should be stored in a protected file system. Examples of risk forms and photo release forms can be found in the Supplemental Materials (see Supplemental Text 1, Supplemental Text 4, and Supplemental Text 5; University of Colorado Boulder 2018).

We recommend that directors, field assistants, and crew members attend formal training sessions on, for example, assault and Title IX issues.

Addressing Logistical Concerns

Successfully leading an archaeology project requires extensive planning and attention to detail. Below, we consider some of the most common and important logistical concerns for project directors.

Sanitation in the Field Camp. Expectations for housekeeping, food preparation, water sanitation, and project location cleanliness should be shared with project participants. Having a bleach station for dishes, frequently cleaning the water coolers, storing food at proper temperatures and in animal-proof containers, and disposing of garbage properly are all important to prevent illness. While in the field, it is also important to have adequate sanitary supplies with which to store and dispose of biowaste, including menstruation products (Becker 2016).

A project director, regardless of gender, needs to be aware of and plan for maintaining the field hygiene of the crew. Disregarding this and not providing the appropriate resources can lead to more serious health problems, such as infections, which then are worsened by limited access to hospitals.

Field Vehicle Mechanics. Maintaining proper vehicle safety is a vital component of keeping a safe field site. It is dangerous to have a field vehicle break down, whether it be in a remote location where participants may not be able to call for help or in a high-traffic area where there is greater risk of injury to project participants and others. Disabled vehicles can turn into safety issues if someone is injured, has a health emergency, or is stranded with insufficient water, food, or shelter.

If any member of the crew will be using a motor vehicle, basic mechanical training is essential. Supplemental Text 6 contains useful recommendations for being field-vehicle responsible in places where access to mechanics, tow trucks, and cell service may be limited. Any director who is unsure how to do vehicle maintenance tasks should ask their mechanic, consult the vehicle's owner's manual, or watch online training videos.

Before any drive, it is important to make sure the vehicle is packed safely and that all equipment is tied down properly. If the vehicle is pulling a trailer, this is also the time to make sure that the trailer weight balances properly and that the electrical hookup for the trailer brake lights and turn signals are working.

Packing. Field equipment can often be written into grants. Frequently overlooked but important gear includes first aid kits, menstruation and hygiene products, GPS devices, radios/walkie-talkies and batteries (do not rely solely on cell phones), vehicle emergency kits (see above), fire extinguishers, solar panels (if access to electricity is infrequent and/or unreliable), waterproof containers to transport field equipment, additional fuel, and a copious supply of water to take into the field. Containers should be the proper weight and size for crew members to lift without hurting themselves. Heavy-duty, waterproof rolling bins are good for this purpose and available for reasonable prices at most large home improvement stores.

Additional resources for what to include in first aid kits can be found by consulting Boston University's "First Aid Resources in the Field" page (Boston University 2020). The authors of this article have experience finding field first aid kits with medicines that are expired and antiseptic wipes that have dried up, so it is important to make sure that all the supplies in first aid kits are in working order. Student directors should adjust their kits based on the size and composition of groups, field environment, length of the field season, degree of remoteness, known or anticipated preexisting conditions among the crew members, and whether multiple field kits (if the crew is working in multiple areas) are needed.

DIRECTING SAFE FIELD PROJECTS

When in the field, safety should be a daily consideration. Project directors must adapt and manage situations as they arise. Developing a system that allows participants to share feedback and concerns during the project is an important way to identify and address emerging hazards. It is good practice to update and review transportation and communication plans regularly with the crew. For example, directors should ensure that crew members know emergency meeting locations and when to use cell phones versus radios. Each day, when the crew gets to the project site, we recommend having a safety briefing with weather updates, reports of any pest sightings, and a review of potential hazards for that day. Project directors may want to designate a safety officer or take on this role themselves. The safety officer can be responsible for checking the first aid kits daily/weekly and restocking as needed, conducting vehicle maintenance checks, and researching and providing any updates on weather, pests, and other issues.

Finally, beyond team meetings and updates, it is important for all team members to know that they matter as individuals and that they have a space to voice their concerns and needs. A project director can check in with each team member informally and make appropriate adjustments to the program based on feedback received. Asking crew members if there is anything they need—such as clearer instructions in the field, more unstructured downtime, a specific meal or food request—may seem trivial, but it can make crew members feel supported and valued and increase communication among project members.

CONCLUSION

Field safety should be an active, intentional part of graduate student training. Incorporating formalized safety discussions into graduate student training enables students to better prepare and plan their field projects. Some examples of how to do this include (1) setting up student-advisor meetings to review safety-related information and procedures, (2) presenting safety-related information as part of a department-wide or subdisciplinary professionalization workshop, (3) scheduling and completing the safety-related certifications as a group (the department can either host these trainings or sponsor the students to go to them, or students or advisors can write them into grants and go as a group), (4) having a session or workshop that covers these items at conferences, and (5) developing a department file with relevant links/documents/resources.

We recommend that graduate students, their advisors, and their departments be proactive in planning safe projects, and we have

presented seven facets of field safety planning for students preparing to direct field projects. Although it is not exhaustive, we hope to provide graduate students and advisors with some of the information needed to help graduate students plan a safer—and consequently more successful—field project.

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Data Availability Statement

The original data in this article consist of the insights drawn from the authors' experiences in the field. Therefore, all data (insights) can be found in the text of this article and the accompanying supplemental documents. Original data in the conventional sense of statistics, artifacts, and survey and excavation findings were not used in the preparation of this article.

Supplemental Materials

For supplemental material accompanying this article, visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/aap.2020.46>.

Supplemental Text 1. Example of a field crew information packet that includes information about the project site, crew member expectations, safety protocols, emergency contact forms, and acknowledgment of risk forms, designed for a U.S.-based field project.

Supplemental Text 2. Example of a field crew information packet that includes information about the project site, crew member expectations, and safety protocols, designed for an international field project.

Supplemental Text 3. Example of a memo of agreement, or conduct contract, that includes information about crew member expectations and safety regulations, designed for an international field project.

Supplemental Text 4. Example of an acknowledgement of risk (release of liability) form designed for an international field project.

Supplemental Text 5. Example of a "permission to photograph" form that participants can sign.

Supplemental Text 6. Vehicle maintenance recommendations and emergency supply list.

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