

LETTER FROM THE FIELD

Katie Schurr's letter is based on her experiences as a freshman at Beloit College, where she is studying anthropology in the hopes of pursuing a career in archaeology. Her first letter was written in February 2007.

My name is Katie Schurr. I am currently a Freshman at Beloit College and am looking forward to declaring my major in anthropology this coming fall. In tenth grade I started thinking about possible career paths. I wanted a job that would involve outdoor activity and the opportunity travel. In hindsight, those were rather unrealistic expectations for a job. But using these criteria as guides, I came up with archaeology as a possible major. Upon doing more research about archaeology, I fell in love with the idea of uncovering remains of ancient people and cultures that no one has seen for countless centuries. I made my mind up then that I was going to be an archaeologist.

The first major dilemma I faced came when trying to search for colleges that would let me major in archaeology. I think I searched every school in the U.S. with maybe one success, The University of Evansville. I went to visit the University, but it just didn't feel like me. So I scratched it off my list. Thus, I was left searching for schools that offered anthropology as a major...and almost every school offers that. I knew I wanted to go to a smaller school because I feel more comfortable with personalized attention. In the end, I narrowed it down to two well-renowned schools: Case Western Reserve in Ohio and Beloit College in Wisconsin. Both have glittering reputations for anthropology and I loved both campuses when I visited. Now I was faced with another dilemma. I knew I wanted a school that would look good on my application to get into grad school, so I called a few people to get their opinions.

I first called an anthropology professor at the Ohio State University and asked him if he had two applications for graduate study, one from Case Western and the other from Beloit, which one would he choose to give a grant to. He couldn't give me a definitive answer because he thought they were both excellent schools for the field. So, back to square one. My mom suggested that I call the Society for American Archaeology and see if they had any insights; so I did. I was put in touch with Maureen Malloy, the manager of education and outreach. We talked for about an hour, going over the pros and cons of each school. She pointed out that although Case Western is well known for anthropology, it's better known for biomedical anthropology than archaeology. Beloit on the other hand had many opportunities in archaeology. It has a museum attached to the anthropology building and since it is solely an undergrad college, the opportunities for field research would increase. This, along with the financial aid package made up my mind, and I came to Beloit.

And I'm so happy I did. Right now, I am taking two entry level anthropology courses. One is a biological anthro course and the other is cultural. My biological course has started out fairly well so far. I've learned all about the theory of evolution, cells and

biology, and am now moving on to non-human primates. Its an interesting course and I can't wait to see where it takes me. My cultural course is a little harder, but only because I'm not a huge fan of purely cultural studies. The terms are rather complex and everything seems to run together. But on the whole, it's a very interesting course which makes me look at aspects of my culture in a completely new light.

Last semester I took my first archaeology course. It was intro into archaeology and prehistory and was difficult but quite interesting. We talked about all the "important" or type sites and covered various groups of people. Towards the end of the semester, we talked about Mayan sites such as Tikal and I fell in love with Mayan civilization. I want to learn more about the Maya and I may concentrate in Meso-American studies. Not sure yet, but just an idea to get me going in some direction. An opportunity afforded by the department can also help me determine if South and Central American archaeology is right for me. Each summer, archaeology professor, Dan Shea, heads a fieldschool in Chile and he takes interested students. If I go, I will receive credit and get valuable, first hand experience in the field! I'm looking forward to going...if I can just save up my nickles and dimes...