Archaeology is the study of the past through material remains that survive into the present. Examining material remains of the past offers direct access to the experiences of a wide range of people in numerous cultures across the globe, allowing us to not only understand how different groups lived but also shed light on how present societies came to be.

The Stanford archaeology program is an interdisciplinary field that combines the study of humanity, social sciences, and natural sciences with fieldwork and laboratory analysis. The broad range of studies allows students to build a solid foundation not only in archaeological skills but also general skills such as critical thinking and persuasive oral and written communications that are applicable in any field. Students graduating from the program are well prepared for a wide range of career options as well as advanced training in professional schools in education, medicine, and law.
The Archaeology Major

The mission of the undergraduate program in Archaeology is to provide students with a broad and rigorous introduction to the analysis of the material culture of past societies. Students in the major learn to relate these analyses to the practice of archaeology in the contemporary world. The program seeks to help each student achieve a high level of understanding through concentrated study of a particular research area. Courses in the major complete a comprehensive curriculum that draws on faculty from a wide range of University departments and programs. Archaeology majors are well prepared for advanced training in professional schools such as education, medicine, law, and journalism and, depending upon their choice of upper-division course, graduate programs in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences.

Impactful Research

Faculty and students conduct fieldwork in prehistoric, historic, and contemporary contexts, and in many parts of the globe including South and North America, Europe, Africa, South and East Asia, and Australia. In these ways and by focusing on non-western and non-modern societies, we provide a broader space-time framework for those attempting to understand contemporary and future societies. Current faculty in particular focus on the following examples of impactful research: the Anthropocene, indigenous and community archaeology, the development of inequality, the history of disease, archaeology of colonialism, slavery and labor, human mobility, ocean systems and interaction, heritage and ethics, and human environments.

Interdisciplinary

Archaeology at Stanford provides a unique opportunity for undergraduates. It is an interdisciplinary branch of study that spans the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities. Learning about archaeology involves studying physics (e.g. radiocarbon dating), geology (stratigraphy and sourcing of rocks used to make tools, geophysical prospection), biology (ancient DNA) and chemistry (the chemical residues of foods). It also involves the social sciences, from anthropology to gender studies, as well as the humanities, from Classics to East Asian cultures and languages.

Students gain from this broad training and from the challenges that come from grappling with very different perspectives and different traditions and skills. The existence of the Stanford Archaeology Center as an interdisciplinary hub provides an ideal framework within which students can learn from each other, from faculty, from postdocs and visitors, all specializing in different areas and topics.

Students are exposed to more ideas, topics and opportunities through their interactions with an indisciplinary group of undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, postdocs, and visitors.
Field Schools

Stanford undergraduates who are interested in archaeology have a unique opportunity to participate in our field schools. Each of our field schools is part of one of our faculty members' ongoing research projects, and is a deep dive into the realities and complexities of archaeological fieldwork. Locations may vary year to year, but in the past have included Italy, India, Mauritius, Peru, China, Turkey, etc. Field schools are typically 4-6 weeks during the summer and are fully funded by VPUE.

Undergraduates can also participate in a field school organized on campus by the University Archaeologist Dr. Laura Jones. As well, students can participate in one of the BOSP programs frequently taught by archaeology faculty in locations including Oxford, Florence, and Venice.

Hands-on Learning

Archaeology is unique in that it offers students the opportunity of learning through hands-on experience with objects. This object-based learning is achieved in a variety of ways, whether it is through enrolling a class that uses the Stanford University Archaeology Collections (SUAC) where students can work with over 100,000 artifacts from all over the world, taking part in one of our faculty lab research projects and work on techniques from digital mapping to soil analysis, or participating in one of our on-campus or off-site field excavation projects. There is thus a range of opportunities for students to explore ideas and theories through practical engagement with materials and cultural and natural objects.