



## Physical Anthropology Section - 2014

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### H31 Athena in Disguise: The Mentorship of Dr. Norman J. Sauer During the Last Ten Years at Michigan State University

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have an understanding of the breadth of successful mentorship that Dr. Norman J. Sauer has demonstrated during his last ten years of tenure at Michigan State University.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by assessing the mentor-protégé relationship between Dr. Sauer and two of his graduate students and his influence on both the direction of their research and their development as professionals.

One of the earliest documented accounts of mentorship comes from Homer's *The Odyssey*. In this classic tale, Odysseus's son, Telemachus, is aided by a character named Mentor, who happens to be Athena in disguise. This Mentor archetype has persisted today and remains a critical aspect of professional development in graduate education. Successful mentors serve as teachers, motivators, role models, advocates, and voices of reason and conscience. Dr. Sauer's relationship with his protégés has not only been educational, but also profoundly personal and mutually respectful. Dr. Sauer's breadth of expertise is largely confirmed by graduate research he supervised during the last decade at Michigan State University.

Jane Wankmiller has been Dr. Sauer's student since 2005. Dr. Sauer's breadth of expertise and mentorship is highlighted by projects on which he and Ms. Wankmiller have collaborated, involving diverse forensic cases and bioarchaeological research. In addition to traditional cases involving skeletal analysis, Dr. Sauer and Ms. Wankmiller have collaborated on a number of forensic facial image comparison cases, directly leading to Ms. Wankmiller's current membership in the Facial Identification Scientific Working Group (FISWG) and employment with the Michigan State Police. Ms. Wankmiller's dissertation research involves bioarchaeological analysis of a pre-Columbian village site in northwestern Costa Rica, combining skeletal analysis with the spatial analysis of mortuary practices. Ms. Wankmiller initially served as Dr. Sauer's assistant on the project in 2007 and has continued to work with the project's archaeologists as well as with archaeologists and staff from the National Museum of Costa Rica. Her successes are a reflection of Dr. Sauer's commitment to forensic anthropology and bioarchaeology as scientific disciplines and his dedicated mentorship in building rapport and maintaining strong collegial relationships with professionals within and outside of Anthropology.

Cate Bird recently graduated from Michigan State University with a PhD in Physical Anthropology under the guidance of Dr. Sauer. Through the analysis of peri-mortem trauma, her research demonstrates that state-sponsored violence in the Soviet Union during the Stalinist period was not performed uniformly across time or personnel. Rather, state violence was implemented at the discretion of individual agents, who differentially complied with state guidelines for execution. Currently, Dr. Bird is developing a regional index of violence which compares peri-mortem trauma across numerous geographical, temporal, and political contexts during the Stalinist period. Dr. Sauer profoundly impacted Dr. Bird's research during the last six years by stressing a holistic, bio-cultural approach to interpersonal and state-sponsored violence. Specifically, he encouraged her to explore not only patterns of trauma at a population level, but also to investigate the social, psychological, and material explanations for this violence in forensic contexts. Dr. Sauer's generalist approach to anthropology has encouraged his students to combine skeletal biology, human rights, and socio-political theory to create robust research agendas.

This presentation demonstrates that strong mentorship can have a significant impact on the quality of the graduate student experience. Dr. Sauer's wisdom, integrity, and personal investment in his students are apparent through generations of graduates. His approach to education serves as a successful example for mentors in forensic anthropology.

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#### **Mentor, Forensic Anthropology, Bioarchaeology**