



Anthropology Section - 2015

Reference:

1. Wiersema, J.M., Love, J.C., Derrick, S.M., Pinto, D.C., Donaruma-Kwoh, M., Greeley, C.S. Standardized Descriptive Method for the Anthropological Evaluation of Pediatric Skull Fractures. In press: *Journal of Forensic Sciences*.
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Skull Fracture, Adult, Blunt Trauma



Anthropology Section - 2015

A68 Identifying Undocumented Border Crossers From the Texas-Mexico Border: A Collaborative Effort

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand how the Forensic Anthropology Center at Texas State (FACTS), in collaboration with other universities, human rights organizations, and government offices, facilitate identifications from a humanitarian crisis along the Texas-Mexico border. Additionally, this presentation will highlight the mentoring of future forensic anthropological practitioners through these humanitarian efforts.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by highlighting the various collaborative efforts and methodologies used to help identify and repatriate Undocumented Border Crossers (UBCs) from South Texas.

A high number of UBC deaths occur each year in Brooks County, TX (80 in 2011, 129 in 2012, and 87 in 2013); these deaths fall under the jurisdiction of a Justice of the Peace (JP), as there is no medical examiner within the county. Due to the dramatic increase in deaths and lack of resources, the local JP and Brooks County Sheriff's Office were overwhelmed with deaths and began to bury the UBCs, most without proper analyses or collection of DNA samples, leaving little chance for UBC identification and repatriation. During the summers of 2012 and 2013, Drs. Lori Baker and Krista Latham and their students performed voluntary exhumations of UBC burials within Brooks County for the purposes of skeletal analysis and DNA sampling in hopes of facilitating positive identifications. The purpose of this presentation is to describe the work of faculty and students at Texas State to identify and repatriate the remains of these individuals as well as to specify the external collaborations that are required for this humanitarian crisis.

The majority of the Brooks County exhumations contained individuals in early to late stages of decomposition, requiring a storage area or location for further decomposition until the maceration could be accommodated. Because the FACTS has large-scale storage and maceration capabilities due to the Forensic Anthropology Research Facility (FARF) and the Osteological Research and Processing Laboratory (ORPL), UBCs with significant amounts of flesh (47 in 2013 and 20 in 2014) were brought to the FACTS to await maceration and analysis. Once in the FACTS custody, all UBCs are taken to the FARF and placed in a special enclosure within the facility. The UBCs are not used in any decomposition or taphonomic studies at the FARF. During placement of UBCs at the FARF, faculty and staff conduct intake procedures that involve opening the body bags and documenting the condition of remains and personal effects. At this time, personal effects are removed and placed in plastic bags for freezer storage until they can be hand-washed and dried for photography.

All case information is entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) and students search through the possible missing persons matches to narrow down potential identifications. DNA samples are sent to the University of North Texas for profiling and uploading into the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS). Clothing descriptions, along with biological profiles, have facilitated several potential identifications and DNA results are currently pending. Resources for decedent identification within the United States, such as NamUs and CODIS often lack missing persons information or appropriate DNA family reference samples for comparison to UBCs. Therefore, the FACTS faculty and students also work with human rights groups such as the Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense, the Colibrí Center for Human Rights, and foreign consulates, providing each agency with case information and skeletal analyses.

The Scientific Working Group in Forensic Anthropology (SWGANTH) suggest best practices in education and training in forensic anthropology should include theory, methods, techniques, and forensic casework. This large-scale effort to identify the UBCs in South Texas provides both mentorship and specialized forensic casework training opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students. Students are involved in every aspect of working toward the identification of the UBCs including: intake, maceration, washing clothes, entering personal effects and case information into databases, and collection of DNA samples. Student involvement in case analysis is reserved for graduate students and supervised by faculty. As recommended by SWGANTH, graduate students log their hours spent working on casework to track their specialized training. Student involvement in UBC identification efforts allows students to be involved in the holistic and collaborative nature of forensic anthropology and, in this case, provides exposure to a humanitarian crisis within the United States.

Undocumented Border Crossers, Human Rights, Identification