Application Form

American University
College of Arts and Sciences
Department of Anthropology

Invites you to participate in its

2009 Great Dismal Swamp Landscape Study
Archaeology Field School

Continuing Archaeological Explorations of Pre-Civil War African-American and Native American Resistance Communities

May 13-June 25

General Project Statement

Directed by Dr. Daniel O. Sayers, American University Assistant Professor of Anthropology, this archaeological program is an interdisciplinary, multi-year initiative with a central focus on exploring the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) as a dynamic natural and cultural landscape in the Tidewater. The Great Dismal Swamp has been used and settled for several millennia and yet its complex cultural past is poorly understood despite its clear significance to our understandings of history and to the public. Our task is to recover cultural materials and information in order to expand this understanding and promote historical public dialogue about the swamp. In close interaction with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, stewards of the Refuge, and with a significant public interpretation and education orientation, this project continues to contribute to contemporary discussions and understandings of North American social history.

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Program Description

This will be the first annual American University Great Dismal Swamp Landscape Study (GDSLS) archaeological field school, an exciting, ongoing research program that is focused on recovering information about human settlement in the Great Dismal Swamp of North Carolina and Virginia. While all periods of human settlement are of interest, a central focus of the program at present is on Diasporic people who dwelled in the swamp during the historic period prior to the Civil War. During that period, thousands of African-American Maroons, or runaways from slavery, disenfranchised Native Americans, and enslaved African-American canal company workers lived, worked, and subsisted in communities while defying the outside world from within the morass. Previous GDSLS analyses of historical and archaeological information gathered over several seasons (2002-2006) succeeded in shining much-needed light on the political economies and exilic conditions that emerged within the swamp during the historical era among Diasporans and their permanent communities (Some project results and swamp histories can be found in the sources listed in the GDSLS bibliography below).

For 2009, the field school crew will continue archaeological explorations of specific sites in the swamp interior that have been demonstrated by the GDSLS to have been occupied for several centuries by communities that were comprised of African-American and Native American maroons. As perhaps the only project in North America that is intensively exploring these kinds of communities archaeologically, student members of the crew will be making important contributions to a study of poorly understood, yet extremely significant, Diasporic and resistance histories while learning important professional and life-valuable skills in the process. This is an extraordinary opportunity for student participants to learn the craft of archaeology while coming to intimately know the historical Diasporic world that emerged in the Great Dismal Swamp prior to the Civil War. Students interested in the precontact history of the swamp will likely have ample opportunities to work with staff prehistorians on Native American materials and cultural features. Also, participating undergraduate and graduate students may have opportunities to work with swamp materials for research projects and writings.

Students will benefit from training in several key areas of archaeological research (e.g., excavation methods, GPS, precision surveying, and artifact identification) within the active context of exploring Maroon and Diasporic histories and daily life in the interior of a most unique landscape. The archaeological sites that we work at are dry; we will generally not be excavating in typical mucky, wet swamp peat soils. Students will be provided close supervised instruction in the field and will have the opportunity to interact with United States Fish and Wildlife personnel, academics, and interested members of the public who understand the great importance of the cultural resources that we will be exploring. We will work 4-5 days a week in the field and weekends will be off. Because the Dismal is located approximately 3.5 hours from Washington D.C., we will be staying (likely camping) at a location reasonably near (but outside) the Refuge during the course of each workweek. Participants will have the option of going back to Washington D.C. on weekends.

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Registration Information

Admission to the 2009 Field School is limited and is by consent of the director. Participants should enroll for six (6) hours of academic credit through American University Department of Anthropology. Tuition costs per credit hour are $1,093.00 undergraduate and $1,178.00 for graduate students, and there will be additional field school fee not to exceed $800 for transportation, lodging, food, and equipment. These costs are subject to change and successful applicants will be notified should any such changes occur.

Name (print or type): ________________________________________________

Mailing Address: ___________________________________________________

Current University/Affiliation: _______________________________________

Other universities attended (if applicable): _______________________________

Currently enrolled as (check one): Undergraduate_____ Masters_____ Doctoral_____

Academic Major(s) or areas of research interest/focus: _______________________

Current Year/level achieved (e.g., Freshman, Sophomore, second-year MA): ___________

Current degree/program Grade Point Average: ___________

Phone: ____________________________

Email: ____________________________

Other contact information: ________________________________

Please List up to Eight (8) Anthropology, Archaeology, Public History, History or related courses you have taken by course title:

_____________________________________  _____________________________________

_____________________________________  _____________________________________

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Archaeological and Relevant Research Experience
Please describe/discuss any archaeological field, laboratory, and/or analysis experiences. Also, please describe any public history, ethnographic, documentary, and/or interview research experiences (attach Curriculum Vita if desired).

Outdoor Work, Hobby, Activities Experience:
Please describe/discuss any activities you regularly do outdoors (e.g., biking, hiking, landscaping) that are not archaeology-related

Provide any other information about your professional experiences, life experiences, and interests, and that may be relevant

Please briefly discuss why you wish to participate in this field school:
Please read the following very carefully and sign

I, the undersigned, recognize that the Great Dismal Swamp will be a very difficult environment in which to physically work and therefore understand that any rules and protocols established for participants in the field school must be followed at all times. I understand that American University faculty and teaching personnel will provide a reasonably safe and structured environment in which to learn but, because we will be working in the outdoors in a swamp, I must act responsibly at all times and be vigilantly mindful of my own safety and the safety of others. I am aware that working in the Dismal Swamp as an archaeologist requires me to be in good physical shape because of the physically demanding natures of walking survey, soil excavation, and general working conditions that will be encountered during the Field School. I will follow any Federal Regulations, as interpreted and announced by the Field School Director or Refuge personnel, related to my expected behavior and potential impact in the environmentally sensitive Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.

I understand that my admission into the 2009 Field School is at the sole discretion of the Project Director, Dr. Daniel O. Sayers and because of the limited number of students (15 maximum) to be enrolled in the course, my application may potentially be assessed in relation to other applicants. I understand there may be a waitlist should the applicant pool exceed the limit but, ultimately, this application does not guarantee my acceptance into the 2009 Field School regardless of the number of applicants to this year’s program.

Signature_________________________________________   Date______________________

Successful applicants will be notified by April 25 2009. To obtain further information, stay tuned to the American University Department of Anthropology webpage, read sources listed below, and/or contact the Project Director Daniel O. Sayers (sayers@american.edu; (202) 885-1833)

Please send completed application form to:
Dr. Daniel O. Sayers
American University
Department of Anthropology
Battelle-Tompkins Hall
4400 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington DC 20016-8012
Great Dismal Swamp Landscape Study Relevant Literature

GDSLS Articles and Monographs

The Diasporic World of the Great Dismal Swamp, 1630-1865. Doctoral dissertation, Department of Anthropology, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia. UMI, Ann Arbor.


Sayers, Daniel O., P. Brendan Burke, and Aaron M. Henry (2007)


GDSLS related articles in Newspapers and Magazines


August 16, 2006, Portfolio Weekly, Bouquets and Brickbats.

