

Water Heritage Anthropological Project Hosts NASMP Students for Virtual Lab During COVID19 Pandemic

07/06/2020

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The Water Heritage Anthropological Project (WHAP) hosted USU students Shastee Holliday and Stacey Whitehair for a week-long lab, June 1st – 5th, as part of the Native American Summer Mentorship Program.

The group met, virtually, each day to discuss topics related to water heritage including the history of water management and infrastructure in Utah. The two students learned about and practiced the different methodologies that the WHAP is using to study water heritage and its meaning for Utah communities. For example, the WHAP team relies on geospatial technology to understand the relationship between the location of water features and social and environmental processes. One lab focused on geospatial technologies and required that the students use ESRI ArcGIS Online to create their own cartographic representations of two water features in Cache Valley.

Another method the WHAP team integrates into its approach includes ethnography and participant interviews. The WHAP team is currently interviewing participants from around northern Utah to understand the relationship between residents and water heritage in the region. Holliday and Whitehair conducted interviews with each other to practice ethnographic data collection and shared their responses with the WHAP team. Graduate student and WHAP team member who assisted with the virtual lab, Kelly Jimenez, remarks “I especially enjoyed hearing the testimonies of Stacey and Shastee because they

provided how native communities view and interact with their local water features. This is different than what we have previously heard in our interviews.”

Molly Boeka Cannon, project co-director, found the virtual labs and collaboration between the WHAP team and Holliday and Whitehair both challenging and rewarding. “The challenges are many including poor internet connections, inability to spend time with our students to make connections face-to-face, and the limitations of some of the work that our project is doing but the rewards are that we can work with students from across the state of Utah and beyond to do research in meaningful ways.”

The WHAP is in its first year of a five-year multidisciplinary project supported by a grant from the Bureau of Reclamation to study Utah’s historic canals and water features. “The virtual lab serves as our first, of many to come, outreach efforts” said Cannon. “The NASMP was a great way – especially during a time when face-to-face interaction is restricted – to integrate research, teaching, and outreach about the role of waterways in Utah communities” adds project co-director Anna Cohen. Program goals include the development of a digital archive with oral history accounts, collated historic documents such as photographs and other archival materials, as well as archaeological research and documentation.