

Evolutionary Anthropology Society

Mary K Shenk, Contributing Editor

**Evolutionary Anthropology at University College London:
The Biological Anthropology Program and the
AHRC Centre for the Evolution of Cultural Diversity**

University College London (UCL) has a long history of evolutionary approaches, originally focused in the areas of paleoanthropology, genetics, and primatology under the aegis of such faculty as Leslie Aiello and Bob Martin. Interest in human sociobiology began in the late 1980s when Robin Dunbar began to take this approach and continued with the hiring of Ruth Mace in the mid 1990s, who later set up UCL's Human Behavioral Ecology research group.

Current evolutionarily-oriented faculty include paleoanthropologist Charles Lockwood who focuses on the evolution of early hominids in South Africa, Christophe Soligo whose specialty is the evolutionary history of primates, primatologist Volker Sommer who focuses on the behavior of wild monkeys and apes, primatologist Joanna Setchell who specializes in the behavior of mandrills, and evolutionary ecologist Mace who works on the evolutionary ecology of fertility in Africa as well as phylogenetic approaches to cultural diversification. In addition to the anthropology faculty, there are also several evolutionary anthropologists and biologists at or affiliated with UCL in other departments. These include geneticist Mark Thomas, faculty in biology and member of the Centre for Genetic Anthropology, and Chris Stringer at London's Natural History Museum.

Also important to evolutionary training opportunities at UCL is the AHRC Centre for the Evolution of Cultural Diversity (CECD), which was set up in 2006 building on the earlier work of the AHRB Centre for the Evolutionary Analysis of Cultural Behavior. Principal Investigators for the CECD come from several UCL departments including Anthropology, Archaeology, and Genetics as well as various other universities in the UK and abroad. The goal of the CECD is to support research that explores the relationship between cultural or linguistic diversity and variation in the size and structure of human populations; currently the number of graduate students is about equally divided between anthropology and archaeology. In addition to anthropology affiliates, several faculty from the Institute of Archaeology are affiliated with CECD and work on evolutionary topics, including CECD Director James Steele who works on the evolution of speech and tool use as well as modeling diffusion processes, Ethan Cochrane whose emphasis is the prehistory of the Pacific Islands, Mark Lake who focuses on the development of quantitative and computational models, Roger Mathews who works on the prehistory of Anatolia and Mesopotamia, Stephen Shennan whose focus is the application of evolutionary theory to prehistoric demography, ethnicity, and social institutions, and Dietrich Stout whose emphasis is cognitive and brain evolution.

The UCL Anthropology Department offers both a Ph.D. and an M. Phil. in Anthropology as well as an MSc. in Human Evolution and Behavior, and faculty agree that UCL has excellent facilities for research in evolutionary anthropology. "It must be one of the easiest places in the world to get hold of anthropology literature," says Mace, as UCL's excellent library is supplemented with the collections of the British Museum and the School for Oriental and African Studies located within half a mile. The Biological Anthropology group hosts a weekly invited speaker series during term time and CECD

runs a bulletin board and associated weekly journal club. In addition, the large community of evolutionary anthropologists in London means that students and faculty can benefit from frequent research talks both at UCL and elsewhere year round. Finally, funding for UCL graduate students comes from a variety of sources, including studentships (the British equivalent of a graduate fellowship), faculty grants, and funding offered through research centers such as CECD. UCL Anthropology graduate student Fiona Jordan summarizes the UCL postgraduate experience by commenting that “being in London is exciting and stimulating, and more importantly, gives you access to colleagues and resources in other world-class departments, universities, museums and libraries.”

Evolutionary anthropologists also have access to a variety of resources provided by the CECD, including Centre-funded Ph.D. studentships and postdocs, discretionary funding for research, conferences, and summer school, and access to the CECD's scientific staff, PIs, and visiting scholars to assist with research design and implementation. CECD also hosts periodic workshops and conferences of direct interest to evolutionary anthropologists, and boasts what CECD Director Steele calls “an exciting and creative interdisciplinary academic environment.” CECD is also affiliated with IGERT Program in Evolutionary Modeling (joint between the University of Washington and Washington State University) which was profiled in this column in October 2006.

Recent evolution-oriented graduates of UCL anthropology and/or the CECD have obtained faculty positions at the London School of Economics and the Universities of Bristol, Durham, and Sheffield in the UK and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Others have obtained postdoctoral positions at CECD, UCL, and the Universities of Durham (UK) and Leiden (the Netherlands).

Contributions to this column are welcomed and may be sent to mshenk@unc.edu. EAS columns are archived at www.evolutionaryanthropologysociety.org.