SPRING 2019 COLLOQUIUM SERIES

Archaeological Data: Uniquely Informative but Complex, Fragile, and Underutilized

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This presentation explores the nature, treatment, preservation, and exploitation of archaeological data. Over the last century we've generated lots of data, at enormous cost—the US now spends about $1B/year on cultural heritage management. You will undoubtedly agree that our data are uniquely informative. However, I'll also argue that generally, we haven't been responsible in making our data accessible or preserving it for others to use, nor have we lived up to our obligations to science or the public to exploit these data to anything like their potential. While there is much to be done, I'll briefly discuss two initiatives designed to help address these issues: tDAR (the Digital Archaeological Record), which is concerned with preserving data and making it accessible and useable in research; and a complementary effort, and the Coalition for Archaeological Synthesis, which is concerned with exploiting those data to advance science and benefit society.

As you would expect, I'll provide an *ex post facto* argument for *why* archaeological synthesis and digital data access and preservation are important, and I will briefly describe *how* those initiatives serve to address the issues identified above. In addition, I hope that a complementary, more personal and highly contingent historical account of the events and circumstances that led to these initiatives may also contain some useful lessons.

Thursday, Jan. 17, 2019 | 3:30-4:30 | Hibben 105