



Maxwell Museum of Anthropology

Hibben Fellows in the Maxwell Museum 2025-2026



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEW MEXICO.

Each year, the University of New Mexico Maxwell Museum of Anthropology benefits immeasurably from the contributions of Hibben Fellows. As part of their award, graduate student fellowship recipients in Anthropology and Museum Studies work part-time in the Maxwell Museum, gaining experiences in museum work and practices that inform their research as well as their scholarly and professional development.

This report summarizes the work of the Hibben Fellows over the course of the 2025-2026 academic year. We invited them to recount their experiences in their own words. Their descriptions reveal both the nature and extent of the work they accomplished and what they gained intellectually and personally from their time as a Hibben Fellow.

Hibben Fellowships provide invaluable tangible and intangible support that simultaneously enriches students' lives and education and builds museum capacity. All who benefit from this support are truly appreciative of it.

The Department of Anthropology, Museum Studies Program, and Maxwell Museum of Anthropology are grateful to the Frank C. Hibben Trust for their support of these extraordinary emerging anthropologists and museum professionals.

All photographs by Karen Price, Archaeology Collection Manager, Maxwell Museum (unless otherwise

2025-2026 Hibben Fellows

Christopher Chaves	First Year Fellow Doctoral Program in Anthropology (Sociocultural and Linguistic Anthropology)
James Chaves	Second Year Fellow MS in Public Archaeology
John Conley	First Year Fellow MA in Museum Studies
Julia Dubois	Second Year Fellow MS in Museum Studies
Edber Dzidz Yam	Third Year Fellow Doctoral Program in Anthropology (Sociocultural and Linguistic Anthropology)
Adesbah Foguth	Second Year Fellow Doctoral Program in Anthropology (Archaeology)
Michael Hopper	Second Year Fellow Doctoral Program in Anthropology (Archaeology)
Cheyenne Laux	Second Year Fellow MA in Public Archaeology and Museum Studies
Olivera Masters	First Year Fellow Doctoral Program in Anthropology (Archaeology)
Nabil Mejia	Second Year Fellow Doctoral Program in Anthropology (Archaeology)
Donna Padilla	Second Year Fellow MA in Museum Studies
Todd Scissons	Third Year Fellow MA in Public Archaeology
Cassie Velarde Nehrer	Third Year Fellow Doctoral Program in Anthropology (Sociocultural and Linguistic Anthropology)

James Chaves



James Chaves is completing his second year in the Master's Program in Public Archaeology. James earned his BA in Anthropology from the University of Panama, where he gained extensive field and laboratory experience working with the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. His research interests lie in the application of scientific methods to the study of human behavioral ecology. When he completes his degree, James is committed to advocating for the preservation of Panamanian cultural heritage and biodiversity.

Tell us a little bit about your research and academic interests:

My academic and research interests lie in archaeology. My current project, titled “*From Open Waters to Estuaries: Investigating Pre-Hispanic Fishing Strategies Along the Santa María River in Central Panama*,” examines shifts in pre-colonial subsistence strategies along Parita Bay. Building on my work as a Fellow at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI), I have advanced into the analytical phase of the project, focusing on identifying changes in fishing practices through the study of fish bone remains from the Cueva de los Vampiros site using stable carbon and nitrogen isotope analysis. I expect to complete the analysis and present my results by the end of 2026.

Briefly describe the work you did this year:

This year, I had the opportunity to work directly with two major archaeological collections in the Maxwell: the ceramics collection from Mexico, Central America, and South America, and ceramics collection from the U.S. Southwest. I assisted in relocating these materials to their permanent storage locations and, concurrently, designed and constructed custom housing to ensure their proper preservation. Additionally, I supported the preparation and movement of artifacts for use in Global Archaeology courses.

What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

I developed hands-on experience in collections management and preventive conservation, particularly in evaluating the physical condition of ceramic artifacts and designing appropriate storage solutions to support their long-term preservation. Through this process, I

strengthened my ability to make practical, context-specific decisions about artifact care. I also gained a deeper understanding of how archaeological collections are maintained and mobilized to support both research and teaching.

What was most interesting? most challenging? most surprising?

The most interesting aspect was working directly with diverse ceramic traditions and seeing firsthand the variability in form, condition, and preservation needs across regions. The most challenging part was designing custom housing that balanced stability, protection, and efficient use of storage space, especially for fragile or irregularly shaped objects. The most surprising aspect was realizing how much planning and specialized knowledge goes into collections care behind the scenes, and how essential this work is for enabling future research and education

Please comment on the significance of the Hibben Fellowship to your graduate studies:

The Hibben Fellowship represents an essential opportunity to continue and complete my Master's studies. The Maxwell Museum is a dynamic space where I learn what it takes to work with large archaeological collections from around the world. Beyond that, it offers insights into the meaning of these collections and how they connect with the communities of Albuquerque and New Mexico.

Christopher Chaves



Christopher is a first-year doctoral student in Sociocultural and Linguistic Anthropology (SCALA) in the Department of Anthropology. Christopher is a prominent citizen of the Pueblo of Santo Domingo (Kewa) Pueblo, the state of New Mexico and the University of New Mexico. He was born at Santo Domingo Pueblo in 1946 and was the Tribal Historical Preservation Officer there from 2006 through 2025. Beginning in 1968 he served in the U.S. Army Medical Corps as a Surgical Technician in Vietnam. In his first career he worked as a Physician's Assistant and pursued accreditation and training in various US states up until the 1980s. Later, he returned to New Mexico and attended the University of New Mexico, receiving a BA in University Studies in 2006, an MA in American Studies in 2017, and an MA in Native American Studies in 2022, before joining the Anthropology doctoral program in 2025.

With support from the Hibben Trust, Christopher Chaves has completed his first year in the doctoral program and contributed to the work of the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology. As former Tribal Historic Preservation Officer of the Pueblo of Santo Domingo, Mr. Chaves helped coordinate and participated with Tribal officers in a NAGPRA review and consultation, examining Maxwell Museum archaeological collections from Chaco Canyon as well as ethnographic collections.

An accomplished jeweler, Christopher continued to work with Curator of Archaeology Dr. Kari Schleher, Professor Hannah Mattson, and a collaborative team of Pueblo artists on a collections-based research and exhibition project on Ancestral Pueblo jewelry, which contextualizes collections in the Maxwell Museum in relation to contemporary jewelry practices. Mr. Chaves and Dr. Schlerer presented a talk on their collaboration to the Taos Archaeological Society in January 2026 and presented a co-authored poster on the project (with Hannah Mattson and Madison Drew) at the 2025 Society for American Archaeology annual conference.

John Conley



John is completing his first year in the Master's Program in Museum Studies. After earning a BS degree in archaeology at the University of Lancashire in England in 2022, John gained fieldwork experience working as a professional archaeologist in Southern England. He has interests in repatriation and ethical stewardship of museum collections.

Tell us a little bit about your research and academic interests:

My primary interests are museum collections management and the stewardship of archaeological and anthropological collections. By responsibly stewarding material culture in museums, I hope to connect people to the past and facilitate inspiring, tangible encounters with human stories. My capstone project will focus on historic metal artifacts in the Wetherill Well collection at the NPS Chaco-Aztec Collection Facility.

Briefly describe the work you did this year:

I contributed to three main projects in the archaeological collections at the Maxwell. The first was photographing sandals from the US Southwest. The second was inventorying lithics and ceramics in the Mimbres Foundation collection. My final project involved relocating perishable objects to new cabinets by moving and organizing objects, updating storage locations, and creating an inventory.

What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

I photographed nearly 200 sandals, inventoried more than 40 boxes of lithics and ceramics, and relocated and organized hundreds of perishable objects. I learned about the management, documentation, and care of museum collections. I have grown my skills with object photography, inventory, object handling, data cleanup, and organization. This experience has been invaluable for my intellectual and professional development and future success. I have also greatly enjoyed expanding my knowledge of Southwest archaeology by engaging with a variety of material culture from the region.

What was most interesting? most challenging? most surprising?

It has been fascinating to work with the perishable objects in the archaeological collections. Working with these well-preserved objects fosters a deep sense of connection with people in the past. Learning object photography by photographing the sandals has been very interesting. Relocating and organizing the perishable objects in new cabinets has been a complex endeavor and involved addressing issues and uncertainties along the way. The puzzle-like nature of this project has, however, been extremely enjoyable.

Please reflect on the significance of the Hibben Fellowship to your graduate studies: I am beyond grateful for the Hibben Fellowship. The financial support of the Hibben Fellowship makes it possible for me to undertake my Master's degree and pursue my aspiration of working in museums. Through the Hibben Fellowship, I am gaining extensive museum experience that is directly relevant to my professional goals. The opportunity to draw together my interests across museums and archaeology in my work with the Maxwell's archaeological collections has immensely enriched my studies. Upon graduation, I will be equipped with a unique, in-depth understanding of museum practices which will propel my professional museum journey moving forward.

Anything else you would like us to know?

Thank you so much for this incredible opportunity. The Hibben Fellowship has made a profound, positive impact on my life. I am excited to see what the next year will bring and to continue assisting with projects here at the Maxwell Museum.

Julia Dubois



Julia is graduating this spring with a Masters degree in Museum Studies. Her MA research focused on visitors services and museum evaluation. Driven by a passion for museum education, Julia's Master's project focused on creating educational experiences for teens at Explora Museum's XStudio.

Tell us a little bit about your research and academic interests:

My time in the Museum Studies Program has focused on object-based learning and the hands-on opportunities museums provide. Whether through handling teaching collections or creating educational programming, I am thrilled to pursue professional opportunities that continue to prioritize museum education and visitor experiences.

Briefly describe the work you did this year:

I worked in the education division of the Maxwell Museum with Curator of Education, Erica Davis. Most of my time was spent working with the Traveling Trunk Program. I updated the content, dismantled trunks that are no longer in use, added objects to the collection's inventory, and created new trunks. I created trunks on "Evolutionary Anthropology" and "Art Across the Ages." Both contain objects from the teaching collection, curricula for K-12 audiences, research, presentations, and hands-on activities.

What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

My time in the education division taught me so much about the behind-the-scenes aspects of museum work. I gained invaluable skills in creating programs on diverse topics for a wide range of audiences. I also gained experience crafting curricula for educational experiences. This has been extremely helpful as these skills are directly aligned with my professional goals of working in museum education. I also learned about handling objects and working with collections. From my work on the Museum's archaeological collections, I learned a great

deal about the management, documentation, and care of museum collections. I have gained skills in object photography, inventory, object handling, data cleanup, and organization. Together, my experiences in museum education and collections have been invaluable for my intellectual and professional development and future success as a well-rounded and valuable museum professional.

What was most interesting? most challenging? most surprising?

Exploring the objects in the teaching collection and finding creative ways to incorporate them into Traveling Trunks were the most interesting, challenging, and surprising aspects of this experience all at once! It was engaging to handle and discover new objects, and it took problem-solving skills to figure out how they could work together to create a productive and fascinating experience for students.

Please comment on the significance of the Hibben Fellowships to your graduate studies

My experience as a Hibben Fellow has been extremely rewarding, and I am so grateful that I had the opportunity to be involved. The Hibben Fellowship played a significant role in the journey towards my degree through taking away financial uncertainty so that I could truly focus on my work and studies. The experiences I gained during this fellowship will continue to stay with me as I move forward and grow as a museum professional.

Anything else you would like us to know?

I want to emphasize again how grateful I am that I got to work with such wonderful people in such a wonderful museum. My time spent here has truly been a pleasure.

Edber Dzidz Yam



Edber (Edy) is a 4th year doctoral student in Sociocultural and Linguistic Anthropology in the Department of Anthropology. His research interests span anthropology, linguistics, and linguistic anthropology, focusing on discursive practices, linguistic ideologies and language change through processes of standardization.

Tell us a little bit about your research and academic interests:

I am a speaker of Maayat'aan (Maya language or Yucatec Maya), born and raised in Tuzik and Felipe Carrillo Puerto, Quintana Roo. My research focuses on the speakers of Maya language (Yucatec Maya) and how the standardization of the Maya language affects speakers' vernacular language use.

Briefly describe the work you did this year:

During Fall 2025, I worked to transcribe interviews collected during the Maxwell Museum's collaborative *All-Rez* project, with co-curators artist Rapheal Begay and Lilia McEnaney. The project centered on a photography exhibition that traveled across the Navajo Nation, featuring scenes of everyday life on the Rez through the lens of Rapheal Begay. My final product was a list of transcriptions that can be displayed for several community purposes. As part of the results, the All-Rez team published: *All-Rez Community-Based Museology through Creative Placemaking* <https://journal.voca.network/all-rez/>.

What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

My work involved updating the transcriptions and meetings with the All-Rez project team. Lilia and Rapheal have been incredibly supportive, and their feedback has helped my understanding of the project and the broader goals behind it. Their dedication and generosity have made it possible for me to meaningfully contribute and grow as part of this important initiative and also reflect about my own community in the Maya area of Quintana Roo, México.

What was most interesting to you? What were the challenges? As this was my second year working with Rapheal and Lilia, there were not difficulties or challenges as in my first year. It is still surprising the way that some experiences in the Diné community resonate with the experiences we have in my community. I learned and experienced lot of positive emotions while working in/on this project.

Please comment on the significance of the Hibben Fellowship to your graduate studies:

The fellowship has been instrumental in supporting both my academic development and financial stability. It has allowed me to dedicate time to what I am passionate about—learning new cultural ways of seeing the world and applying my academic training in meaningful ways. Financially, the fellowship has eased the burden of living abroad as a graduate student by helping me cover living expenses and access essential resources such as classes, books, and materials crucial to pursuing my academic goals. With the support of the Hibben Fellowship, I have been able to manage my personal and academic expenses while focusing on defending my research proposal and passing my comprehensive exams. This support has been key to reaching my current ABD status in the doctoral program.

Anything else you would like us to know?

The Hibben Fellowship empowers graduate students by offering professional experiences that deepen their academic growth and position them for long-term success. For example, from my perspective, the All-Rez project fosters a space where we can thoughtfully engage with and articulate our experiences.

Adesbah Foguth



Adesbah is completing her second year in the anthropology doctoral program at UNM, where she previously earned a MA in Public Archaeology (2019) and BA in English Literature and Philosophy (2011). After completing her MA, Adesbah gained worked as a professional archaeologist with the National Park Service (Chaco Canyon and Tent Rocks), the BIA, the New Mexico State Land Office, and several archaeological consulting firms. Adesbah is a member of the Diné Nation and is passionate about giving back to her community through her research.

Tell us a little bit about your research and academic interests:

I am an archaeologist with years of experience working in the Southwest. I became interested in historic uranium mining on the Navajo Nation when I worked with the US EPA as they studied toxicity levels in the Lukachukai Mountains. The focus of my PhD research is on this uranium mining district.

Briefly describe the work you did this year:

I have been working on inventorying the Sapawe collection. Sapawe is a large 1300's AD pueblo that was excavated by UNM professor Florence Hawley Ellis during the 1960's. Many of the excavated materials need updating (provenience, museum location information, date, item descriptions, etc). I have been working my way through the boxes in the warehouse this year and adding missing information to the spreadsheets. I have inventoried new items as well.

What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

This year I completed an inventory of all the Sapawe boxes, pots, and items in the drawers in the Hibben Center basement. I have now moved onto the Sapawe boxes in the off-site storage facility. Because I have spent the last two years inventorying the Sapawe collection, I am very familiar with the types of items in the collection and the locations the items were excavated from. I have become more familiar with the Sapawe spreadsheet, CollectiveAccess database, and the locations of the items in the Maxwell basement.

What was most interesting? most challenging? most surprising?

The most interesting thing about working on the Sapawe collection is seeing the variety of items in the collection. I feel I am becoming familiar with pottery types and lithic materials. I also appreciate that while I inventory, I can cross check the spreadsheet with the original field records for items that might be potentially NAGPRA.

Please comment on the significance of the Hibben Fellowship to your graduate studies:

I am grateful for the opportunity to learn how to care for a collection in the museum, and for the chance to help inventory the Sapawe collection. I've learned a lot about how to enter and manage the data and navigate the museum repository.





James Chaves



John Conley



Donna Padilla



Adesbah Foguth
(photo by Adesbah Foguth)



Julia Dubois



Edber Dzidz Yam



Olivera Masters

Michael Hopper



Michael, a member of the Osage and Choctaw Nations, is completing his second year in the doctoral program in Anthropology while working full time as the NAGPRA Coordinator for the Choctaw Historic Preservation Division. His doctoral research focuses on Indigenous archaeology and repatriation, and examine approaches to cultural preservation that integrate Indigenous knowledge with archaeological approaches. Once he completes his PhD, Michael plans to serve his tribes in a leadership role focused on reclaiming and preserving cultural heritage and education at tribal cultural centers and museums.

Tell us a little bit about your research and academic interests:

I am a citizen of the Choctaw and Osage Nations of Oklahoma and earned my MA in Public Archaeology in the summer of 2024 at UNM. I just completed my second year in the Anthropology doctoral program. With my formal training and interests in NAGPRA and repatriation, I was hired as the NAGPRA Coordinator for the Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation Department in summer 2024. My position has allowed me to continue my training and networking with museums both domestically and internationally.

My doctoral research builds on my Master's to focus on Indigenous Archaeology and repatriation. I examine and practice approaches to cultural preservation that integrate Indigenous knowledge practices with traditional archaeological approaches. My other focus is on Native American Plains war shields, some of which are associated with my direct ancestors and others that are held at various museums around the United States.

Briefly describe the work you did this year:

My work and research focuses on the process of repatriation and on facilitating the transfer of NAGPRA-related ancestors and objects back to their communities in a respectful and timely manner. This year, I have continued my work with the Pecos vessel collection at the Maxwell Museum and Native American Plains war Shields. Many components that have factored into these projects, the biggest of which is collaborating with the Osage and Jemez Pueblo communities. For the Pecos collection, I have had great success tracing how

the vessels arrived at the Maxwell. This included contacting and visiting museums and institutions that the records and vessels had traveled before arriving at the Maxwell. And for the Osage Shields, I visited and examined additional shields, which has enabled me to expand my research database.

What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

I learned that relationships and trust are a big part of my research. Being an indigenous PhD student and NAGPRA coordinator for my tribe has allowed me to work with museums around the country. This is a responsibility that I do not take lightly.

What was most interesting? most challenging? most surprising?

The most surprising and challenging part of this year was learning the responsibility we have as professionals in our fields. For my projects, I work with both my own and outside tribes. They have given me their trust and support as I work on these important projects. I am honored and accept that responsibility.

Please comment on the significance of the Hibben Fellowships to your graduate studies:

Being a Hibben Fellow has tremendously contributed to my training and academic experience. Without the continued support of the fellowship, I would not have been able to devote as much time to my formal academic training. For that, I am greatly appreciative to be part of the Hibben Fellow family.

Anything else you would like us to know?

I am truly honored to represent the Maxwell Museum and the Hibben Fellowship. It has most certainly changed my life and allowed me to pursue my path in helping my people.

Cheyenne Laux



Cheyenne Laux is completing her second year pursuing dual Master's degrees in Public Archaeology and Museum Studies. She earned a BA in Anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley. Prior to joining UNM, Cheyenne spent time gaining experience in public outreach and museum work at Aztec Ruins National Monument, the Department of the Interior Museum in Washington, DC. and the Getty Museum.

Tell us a little bit about your research and academic interests:

I am originally from California and received my Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology with a concentration in Archaeology from the University of California, Berkeley in 2019. I then worked for a few years in various museum institutions to gain experience in the field, doing everything from archival work to collections management to basic art conservation. I started my graduate studies in UNM knowing I wanted to focus on indigenous archaeology, repatriation, and improving collections care. My Master's project centers around typing Southwest ceramics that were looted and subsequently seized by the FBI, with the goal of the hopeful repatriation of the almost 50 vessels.

Briefly describe the work you did this year:

This year, as a Hibben Fellow, I was able to rehouse 20-30 ceramics in the type collection utilizing best practice archival materials, as well as photograph and condition report the ceramics that I'm working with for my Master's project as they are housed here at the Maxwell.

What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

I was able to rehouse a decent portion of the collections in the type collection, which is a satisfying feeling. This year I was able to learn from Collection Manager Karen Price how to photograph museum collections properly for museum use, which is an incredibly useful skill to have.

What was most interesting? most challenging? most surprising?

My favorite part of collections management work is figuring out the best way to handle and create housing for materials that are not straightforward. It was fun to create custom housing for ceramic vessels of various shapes and sizes. The most surprising aspect of my work this year was learning how much work and thought goes into getting a good photograph of materials of various material types.

Please reflect on the significance of the Hibben Fellowship to your graduate studies:

As a recipient of the Hibben Fellowship, I am incredibly grateful for the opportunities to put my main focus on my academics and to continue to learn more about museum work in a practical way at the Maxwell Museum.

Anything else you would like us to know?

I just want to reiterate my gratitude and express my appreciation for all the individuals I have the opportunity to work with at the Maxwell Museum!



Olivera Masters



Olivera is a first year doctoral student in Anthropology, focusing on archaeology. She earned her BA and MS in anthropology from the University of Utah, where she gained experience working in the Natural History Museum in Utah. She continued her commitment to museum work in 2024-2025 as an Anne Ray Intern at the the Indian Arts Research Center at the School for Advanced Research in Santa Fe.

Tell us a little bit about your research and academic interests:

I began working at the Natural History Museum of Utah as an undergraduate and fell in love with working in collections. I hope to one day work as a collections manager or curator of archaeology in an anthropology or natural history museum. My research will focus on the relationship between ceramic technology and agricultural production during the Basketmaker II to Basketmaker III period. I intend to collect my data over the next few years at different museum collections across the United States. I am passionate about collections-based research and hope that more researchers (where appropriate) take advantage of working with collections.

Briefly describe the work you did as a Hibben Fellow this year:

I worked on various projects this year. These included the inventory of of archaeological items from the Tonque Pueblo excavation. I worked with other Hibben Fellows and Collections Manager Karen Price to begin reorganizing the pottery vessels in the Hibben Center. We organized all of the Mesoamerican vessels and began organizing the U.S. Southwest type vessels. I also helped to reorganize object drawers by region, making it easier to find items and show visitors. Other projects included box and mount making, condition reporting, and using the digital database CollectiveAccess.

What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

Even after just a year, I feel like I have been able to accomplish so much working at the Maxwell Museum. I made special dividers for all of the reorganized drawers, which has helped keep everything organized by region

and archaeological site. Something I love about working in a new collections space is learning how to work with its digital database. This was my first time working in CollectiveAccess, and it has been a great learning experience so far. I look forward to continuing to use it.

What was most interesting? most challenging? most surprising?

Something that has been the most interesting to me has been familiarizing myself with how to initiate and accomplish large reorganization projects within the collections space. I really like the aspect of problem-solving when working to organize items within the collection that are intended to be visually appealing, stable, and accessible to researchers.

Please comment on the significance of the Hibben Fellowships to your graduate studies:

I have been so grateful for the financial and academic support that the Hibben Fellowship has provided me. I am grateful that I get to use the museum skills and knowledge I already have and to build upon what I already know. The financial support that the Fellowship offers allows me to focus my attention on building my foundation as a PhD student, which will help me become successful in my academic and professional career.

Anything else you would like us to know?

Thank you again for accepting me as a Hibben Fellow! I feel so privileged to work with the other Fellows and collections staff at the Maxwell. I am also honored to be one of the few people who get to care for the items in the collection that have so much significance to many communities across the Southwest and the world.

Nabil Mejía



Nabil joined the PhD program in Anthropology in Fall 2024 after earning a Licenciatura in Anthropology from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras (UNAH). Raised in a working-class home in a banana-producing town, Ms. Mejía developed a deep interest in the Honduran past. She has archaeological field experience at major sites in the Choluteco River Basin, the Ulúa Valley, and the Copán Valley, as well as extensive experience with museum collections. After completing her PhD, Nabil intends to pursue a career in archaeology in service of heritage preservation and public education.

Tell us a little bit about your research and academic interests:

I am from Honduras. I am the second in my family to get an undergrad degree and the first pursuing a graduate degree. I am the first Honduran archaeologist educated at the public National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH) to come to the United States to continue graduate studies. And I am working towards being the first Honduran woman to lead research in Honduras.

My academic interest is shifting towards the role of women in the Maya political economy. I have been working since 2020 on textile production among the ancient Maya at the site of Copán in Honduras. I wrote my Licenciatura thesis on thread production, and a few weeks ago, I defended my Master's thesis on textile production among royal women in Copán. I look forward to expanding this research by analyzing different artifact classes and organic evidence.

Briefly describe the work you did this year:

I worked part of my service time in Museum Studies as well as in the Maxwell archaeology collections. In the Maxwell collection, I continued working on analyzing the Mesoamerican spindle whorl collection. My work focuses on metric and typological examination, and identifying the fibers most likely spun and production patterns. Also, I helped with the reorganization of the archaeological collection and updating inventories and locations.

What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

I accomplished my Master's degree. I learned more about conducting research and preparing funding proposals to conduct research.

What was most interesting to you; what were the challenges?

The most challenging has been getting funding to continue my research; however, this process has been extremely helpful.

Please reflect on the significance of the Hibben Fellowship to your graduate studies:

This fellowship has given me the opportunity to acquire more experience in archaeological research and collections management. I have enjoyed the safety net that the Maxwell offers, and everyone's support by allowing fellows to do our job based on our personal research interests.

Anything else you would like us to know?

Thank you. I feel very grateful to have been given this opportunity.



Donna Padilla



Tell us a little bit about your research and academic interests:

I received a general education at St. John's College before deciding to pursue a degree in Museum Studies. I am primarily interested in objects themselves, how we decide objects are important, and how one can preserve their importance in an often unpredictable world. I am interested in Art History, the preservation of family collections, and applying museum-level registration practices to private collections.

Briefly describe the work you did as a Hibben Fellow this year:

This year, I worked for Dr. Lea McChesney at the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology as a Curatorial Assistant, where I managed paperwork and performed research for an exhibit on Native Pueblo Pottery. I also worked as a teaching assistant to Dr. Cassidy for Museum Practices and an Oral History classes. and was a TA for Dr. Traxler for an in-person Museum Practices class. This final semester, I also interned at the Albuquerque Museum.

What did you accomplish; what did you learn?

Working for Dr. McChesney, I learned about exhibit design and interpretation in practice, reached out regarding loans to other institutions, and interacted with knowledge holders and community members. As a TA, I felt like I was able to connect more deeply with the source material. The work also gave me a lot of opportunities to pass on what I had learned in previous semesters and learn from incoming students with diverse interests.

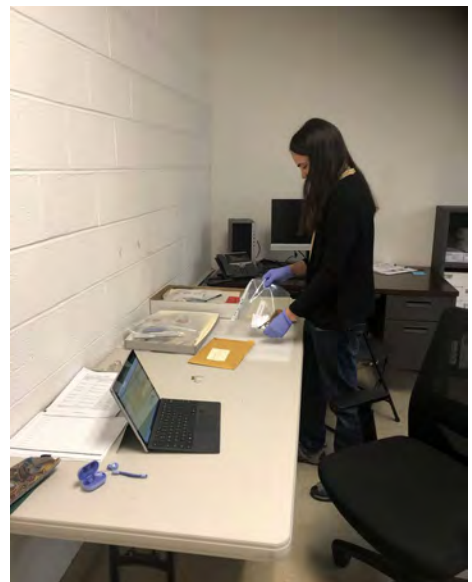
Donna Padilla earned her bachelor's degree in Comparative Literature and Liberal Arts from St. John's College in Santa Fe. There, she developed interests in ethnobiology and living botanical collections through work on the St. John's campus and at the Santa Fe Botanical Garden. With interests in collection management and documentation, Donna's MA project developed and implemented protocols for collection documentation and reporting, taking a private collection from inventory and reporting through a virtual exhibition.

What was most interesting to you? most challenging? most surprising?

I was most challenged by the tight scheduling and the coexistence of multiple projects within a museum environment, often shuffling between responsibilities. However, I felt like I was able to rise to the occasion. I was surprised by the sheer scope that many local museums cover, and became further interested in the Museum as a Cultural Touchstone rather than simply a repository for objects.

Please comment on the significance of the Hibben Fellowship to your graduate studies:

I would not have been able to complete my field of studies without the support from the fellowship, and feeling recognized let me take pride in my work and studies. It was a great opportunity to participate in internships and roles which I would not otherwise have had access to, such as the practicum at the Albuquerque Museum.



Todd Scissons



Todd Scissons joined the Master's Program in Public Archaeology in the Department of Anthropology in Fall 2023. He earned his BA in Anthropology from Eastern New Mexico University. A member of Acoma Pueblo, he worked for his tribe and served as the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer from 2018-2020. Todd is currently employed as a NAGPRA Archaeology Collections Associate in the Maxwell Museum. His long-term goal is to found and lead a cultural resource management organization in New Mexico.

Tell us a little bit about your research and academic interests:

This spring, I completed the first draft of my MA thesis. I was able to include research that I did as a part of Dr. Mattson's clay source project in Chaco Canyon, which I am so excited about. I currently working to revise my thesis and am looking to defend this June and am looking forward to graduating with my MA in the summer.

Briefly describe the work you did as a Hibben Fellow this year:

I worked as a Hibben Fellow in the Fall 2025 term. I continued to work on inventorying and cataloging archaeological collections, which included updating records in the CollectiveAccess database. I assisted in the reorganization of collection drawers along with Nicholas Poister and Hibben Fellow Olivera Masters. The drawers were organized according to culture, location, place, and site. We completed a new inventory and perishable items were relocated to make them more accessible for research. In Spring 2026, I was hired as a permanent employee of the Maxwell and am now working as a NAGPRA collections associate.

What did you accomplish; what did you learn?

I became more skilled at working with CollectiveAccess and learned how to create, edit, and update records, find and locate missing objects, create new box labels and accession numbers. I learned how to make boxes to rehouse objects. I inventoried the Chaco collection and updated the records. I helped pull items for student research projects as needed.

What was most interesting to you? most challenging? most surprising?

The most interesting part was learning more about how the Maxwell Museum collections are managed and what has been accomplished up to this point. The challenging part is that there is still so much to do because we have so many collections at the Hibben Center and at the warehouse. We were always busy with various projects and we had to jump around a lot because of deadlines or priority. Understanding the cataloging systems was very interesting as well, but I also saw how this system is outdated in certain ways. The other challenging part was having to work with collections with restrictions because the Maxwell Museum is also involved with NAGPRA. The new NAGPRA regulations require the museum to reach out to tribes to get approval for requests, which can delay proposed projects or alter previously planned projects.

Please comment on the significance of the Hibben Fellowship to your graduate studies :

The Hibben Fellowship provided me the opportunity to attend UNM and be part of the Public Archaeology graduate program without a heavy financial burden. It allowed me to focus on my academic studies and learn new skills. Being able to work in a museum setting added to the skills I already acquired in CRM, NAGPRA, historic preservation, tribal consultation, etc. I am grateful to have the opportunity to work in a museum setting and gain a different perspective of archaeological and ethnological collections. This perspective has certainly helped me in my graduate studies as I have been able to acquire references, written material and other valuable guidance and knowledge that I otherwise wouldn't have had access to.

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Todd Scissons (continued)

Anything else you would like us to know?

I have thoroughly enjoyed working with the Maxwell Museum as a Hibben Fellow, learning new skills and meeting new people who have since become my friends. This student employment allowed me the opportunity to become a full-time employee of the museum. I had always wanted to work in a museum, but I felt that opportunity was not in my cards, so I pushed forward with other endeavors that I wanted to achieve and still hope to at some point. The chance to become a part of the Maxwell museum family came at the right time for me as I am finishing up my graduate studies and will be graduating this summer.

The door to my academic studies is closing, but as if on cue, the next door opened wide, and with an opportunity that I have longed to be part of. I have always believed that nothing happens by chance, and I really feel that I am meant to be here. Whether it was the work of the ancestors or not, I do not take this role for granted and I am fully invested in doing my part to help the Maxwell Museum continue its mission of community-based outreach, collections management and the development of strong relationships in all areas.

A big thank you to the Maxwell Museum staff who welcomed me with open arms as a student employee and now as a full-time staff member. I am excited about what the future holds, not just on a personal level but on a professional level as well. Working at the Maxwell Museum has been the best and I know it will continue to be because of the wonderful staff (my new friends) and awesome atmosphere!



Todd Scissons



Cassie Velarde Nehrer

Cassie Velarde Nehrer



Cassie joined the Department of Anthropology doctoral program in Sociocultural and Linguistic Anthropology in Fall 2022. An enrolled member of the Jicarilla Apache Nation, and a U.S. Army veteran, Cassie earned her undergraduate degree at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. Her doctoral research interests focus on Indigenous perspectives that include Identity politics, Indigenous Pedagogies, and Indigenous histories.

Tell us a little bit about your research and academic interests:

My research centers on Indigenous perspectives in Indigenous politics, language revitalization, and cultural preservation, with an emphasis on Western ideology as it pertains to the Southwest. This focus is deeply connected to my own experiences growing up on the reservation, venturing out into the broader world, and ultimately returning home to contribute meaningfully to my community's progress. Throughout my academic and professional pursuits, I am committed to amplifying Indigenous voices and perspectives, offering alternative contexts that exist beyond the Western framework, and ensuring that these viewpoints are represented in every space I enter.

Briefly describe the work you did as a Hibben Fellow this year:

Working in the Education office this year, I filled in as needed leading school tours sponsored by the Maxwell in Motion program and helped plan family day events. I established a relationship between UNM Children's Hospital and our traveling trunk program. They have an in-house educator who teaches long-term patients.

What did you accomplish; what did you learn?

I was able to bring the *Honor Song* documentary to campus, which was shown at the Wiczo Sa Review Symposium and Hibben Center. The event at the Hibben center was not only a viewing but a panel discussion. I invited the Jicarilla Apache Arts & Culture Museum to table items for viewing and sale during the event. The event was catered and centered

around honoring Indigenous Veterans and their history. I raised the majority of the funding for this event by fostering connections with different departments on campus through my networking. I learned that despite colonial entanglements within history that can be divisive, we can each bring our own unique lived experiences to the table to have meaningful discourse.

What was most interesting to you? most challenging? most surprising?

Despite the current administration's budget cuts, it was heartwarming seeing UNM communities come together to help one another. I did not expect that during these trying times when higher education is under attack. Most surprising was getting sponsorship funding from UNM Native American Studies and DiCE (Division for Change and Empowerment) for my event.

Please comment on the significance of the Hibben Fellowship to your graduate studies:

As I wrap up the final year of my Hibben Fellowship, I reflect on all the connections I have made through just showing up and participating and learning something new. This fellowship helped me grow academically, but also showed me that it takes grit to see it through to the end. I am eternally grateful for this fellowship to provide funding for my first three years of grad school. So much has changed but for the good.

Anything else you would like us to know?

I plan on applying for the Senior Hibben Fellowship once I am ABD status to help fund my dissertation writing. So be on the lookout for my updated research.



Maxwell Museum of Anthropology



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