

## The Next Generation: Students Discuss Archaeology in the 21st Century

ASHLEY SANDS AND  
KRISTIN BUTLER

*University of Southern California*

## الجيل الجديد: ناقش طلاب علم الآثار في القرن 21

اشلي ساندز ، كريستين بتلر

جامعة جنوب كاليفورنيا

The Next Generation Project is a multi-agent, multi-directional cultural diplomacy effort. The need for communication among emerging archaeologists has never been greater. Increasingly, archaeological sites are impacted by military activity, destroyed through the development of dams and building projects, and torn apart through looting. The Next Generation Project works to develop communication via social networking sites online and through in-person meetings at international conferences. As new archaeologists, we want to raise issues, create relationships and mobilize to expand our collective ability to improve our field; we will accomplish these goals through engagement of an increasingly diverse group that includes the next generation of practitioners. Our efforts attempt to create networks and relationships that would not exist otherwise between new archaeologists. This project seeks to co-opt institutions (including WAC), media, communication technology and networking tools to support and extend these networking opportunities beyond the Internet, towards the goal of future collaboration. Through the process of dialogue, we discover ways to affect the future development of our field--its practices, ethics, and policy matters. The Next Generation Project began in early 2009. The first step was developing a Facebook group and discussion board to enable digital networking and dialogue. The first in-person meeting of the project was at the World Archaeological Congress Inter-Congress in Ramallah (August 2009). This paper introduces the Next Generation and summarizes the first six months of its activity as presented to the Ramallah Inter-Congress in August 2009.

ان مشروع الجيل التالي . هو مشروع متعدد العمالات ,بالاضافة الى كونه جهد دبلوماسي ثقافي متعدد الاتجاهات. حيث ان ضرورة التواصل بين علماء الآثار الناشئين لم تكن قط اكبر منها في هذا الوقت. فالمواقع الاثرية ,وعلى نحو متزايد , تتأثرا سلبا بالنشاط العسكري , وبيئات السدود والمشاريع الاخرى , وتمزق بسبب عمليات السلب والنهب فيها . ان مشروع الجيل التالي يعمل من اجل تطوير الاتصال عن طريق مواقع الشبكات الاجتماعية المنتشرة على الانترنت , ومن خلال تنظيم اللقاءات والاجتماعات والمؤتمرات الدولية . وكأثرين جدد , نحن نريد ان نثير قضايا مختلفة ,ونخلق علاقات ونتواصل من اجل توسيع قدرتنا الجماعية لتطوير وتحسين وحماية هذا المجال , وسوف نحقق هذه الاهداف عن طريق الانخراط في جماعة تزداد تنوعا وتشمل الجيل القادم من الاثرين . ان جهودنا هي عبارة عن محاولة لخلق الشبكات والعلاقات التي لم تكن لتوجد بطرق اخرى بين الاثرين الجدد , ان هذه الدورة تسعى لاستمالة ومشاركة المؤسسات (بما فيها ” ) , وسائل الاعلام , تكنولوجيا الاتصالات , والشبكات من اجل خدمة مصلحتنا ودعم قيمنا. ومن خلال عمليات الحوار , اكتشفنا عدة عوامل تؤثر على التطوير المستقبلي لمجالنا وهي: الممارسة ,الاخلاق , ومسائل السياسة العامة. لقد ابتدأ مشروع الجيل التالي من الاثرين في بدايات العام 2009 , وقد كانت اول خطوة هي انشاء مجموعة على موقع الفيس بوك بالاضافة الى لوحة نقاش من اجل تبادل الاراء والحوار. ولقد كان اول لقاء للاثرين في هذا المشروع هو المؤتمر العالمي للاثرين الذي تم في رام الله -فلسطين في ( اب/ اغسطس 2009) . ان هذه المقالة تعرفكم بمشروع الجيل القادم , وتلخص الاشهر الستة الاولى من نشاطاتها كما قدمت الى مؤتمر رام الله في اغسطس 2009.

The Next Generation Project (Next Gen) is a conversation amongst new archaeologists about the challenges we face as we move into the professional realm. The project is a networking opportunity that uses both online conversations and in-person discussions at international archaeological conferences as mediums for communication. Archaeologists from every country and culture around the world who have a research interest in the cultural heritage of the ancient near east are invited to participate.

The Next Generation uses Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)), arguably the most popular online social networking platform among young people, as its online interface. We chose Facebook as the medium for group discussions because of its particular reach to university students worldwide. The Facebook Group function allows for members to network on a one-to-one or combined basis including discussions and the sharing of hyperlinks, videos, photos, and events.

Next Generation not only meets online, but also in person. The first meeting for the group was at the World Archaeological Congress (WAC) Inter-Congress in Ramallah. The 2009 Ramallah Roundtable offered emerging archaeologists an opportunity to meet in person and to engage in dialogue, not only with other young archaeologists, but also with practicing professionals and academics. At a roundtable discussion and lunch that followed the session, we had the opportunity to raise and answer questions, as we shared diverse perspectives and networked with peers and future colleagues.

The purpose of the roundtable was to enable conversation among the emerging generation of archaeologists. We discussed issues that initially came up in the on-line forum about diverse topics related to funding, academic freedom, mentors, language training, travel, family support, and field experience. Next, we discussed the varied challenges that lay before us from our unique perspectives as archaeologists-in-training. Additional conversations naturally emerged throughout our time together including topics of educational traditions, politics, and cultural issues related to valuing the past. All these conversation points directly affect research and potentially impinge on creating and sharing archaeological knowledge.

Because this session was held in Ramallah, there were physical-access issues for Israelis and others. That inability to attend is emblematic of barriers that impede academic discourse across borders. For instance, Palestinians have long suffered from constraints on travel to and participation in meetings outside the occupied territories. Language was also an issue: the official language of the session was English and therefore some local students were unintentionally left out of much of the discussion and participation, as only some portions of the session were translated into Arabic. These logistical problems highlight the need for new means of discussion and networking in order to address these structural issues in the future.

## **Discussion Board**

The discussion board is a vital aspect of the Next Generation Facebook group. The application allows group members to post questions and responses to one another in an organized yet casual setting. Members of the Next Generation group posted questions and answers to topics that they felt were the most relevant to their experiences in archaeology. Modern translation sites, such as Google Translate ([translate.google.com](http://translate.google.com)) also allow participants to post in their native language and to then be instantly understood in any other language. While this online tool offers transliteration instead of translation and is thus imprecise, it facilitates conversations among students without a common language and most users are aware of this limitation from the outset.

During the first six months of the operation of the Next Gen discussion board, the topics that were the most popular were those pertaining to language, stereotypes, education, and technology. Many interesting topics and ideas came up on the discussion board allowing participants to hear multiple, candid perspectives on important topics in our field. We will briefly discuss the posted topics as examples of the willingness of participants to engage in discussions on a range of topics including participation in sometimes self-critical conversations.

### ***Topic #1 English: Tyranny or Ticket***

The first discussant asked: "Americans get to be lazy because English is a widely used language. Is that fair?" Most of the responders viewed Americans as 'linguistically lazy' because learning a second language is not mandatory or at least not taken up as seriously as is the case in other places in the world. It was also noted that non-English speaking academic respondents are taught English so that their scholarship can reach a largely Western audience. Israeli responders noted that they would also like to learn Arabic because it would be more useful personally. Indeed, in many places English may not be the most important second language to learn.

### ***Topic #2 Languages***

A group member asked: "How many languages do you speak?" The most common language was English, and for most it was their first and primary language. Others learned it as a part of their high school curriculum. French, Spanish, Hebrew, Greek, Turkish, and Arabic (respectively) were the other languages commonly spoken as either a primary or secondary language.

### ***Topic #3 Stereotypes***

A Next Generation member queried: "What stereotypes are attributed to your home country?" Interestingly, most of the stereotypes listed were the same cross-culturally. For example, both Americans and Israelis were viewed as loud, arrogant, and aggressive. Unfortunately, most of the responders agreed that the stereotypes were rather accurate for the most part, but all are trying to change that opinion by being good representatives of their cultures.

Additionally, we can use this discussion board to learn about how cultural difference contributes to misunderstanding and the development of negative stereotypes. By virtually meeting one another through an online platform, we can appreciate each other first for our academic and personal insights; stereotypes (dress, manner of speaking) may be secondary to written words from emerging scholars of different backgrounds.

### ***Topic #4 Lies***

A student asked online: "Have you ever lied about your nationality when traveling?" All of the responders had lied about their nationality when traveling abroad, at one point or another, to prevent being hassled or because it was difficult to make a good impression when there was such a negative opinion of their home country.

### **Topic #5 Archaeology in the University**

A member wondered: “How far did you have to travel to find a university that offers an archaeology program? Were you not able to attend your first choice in university because the program was not offered?” One response described how Israeli universities have archaeology programs, but colleges do not. Most universities in America have archaeology courses and fieldwork within the discipline of anthropology, but few have individual archaeology department programs. We also learned from a Next Gen member that in Peru, there are 70 universities total--only 7 of them having archaeology programs, and only 2 with graduate programs despite Peru’s rich archaeological and cultural heritage.

### **Topic #6 – Fieldwork**

A student excavator asked: “When you are working in the field, where do you live? Do you live amongst local populations, or separated? Do you have a positive or negative interaction with the people who live near where you work?” The responders who work in Turkey have had a very positive and friendly relationship with the local population. Others have very little outside interaction except for local members on the excavation crew. Another respondent felt that true friendships are not forged very often as excavators and the local work force form instead a more “business-like” and “professional” relationship.

## **Survey**

The Next Generation distributed a survey asking about Education in Archaeology using the free online software tools at <http://surveymonkey.com>. The survey acquired more in-depth information on the topics that members found the most interesting from the discussion board. All members of the Facebook group were invited to participate by answering ten questions. Please see Figure 1 for the demographics of the respondents.

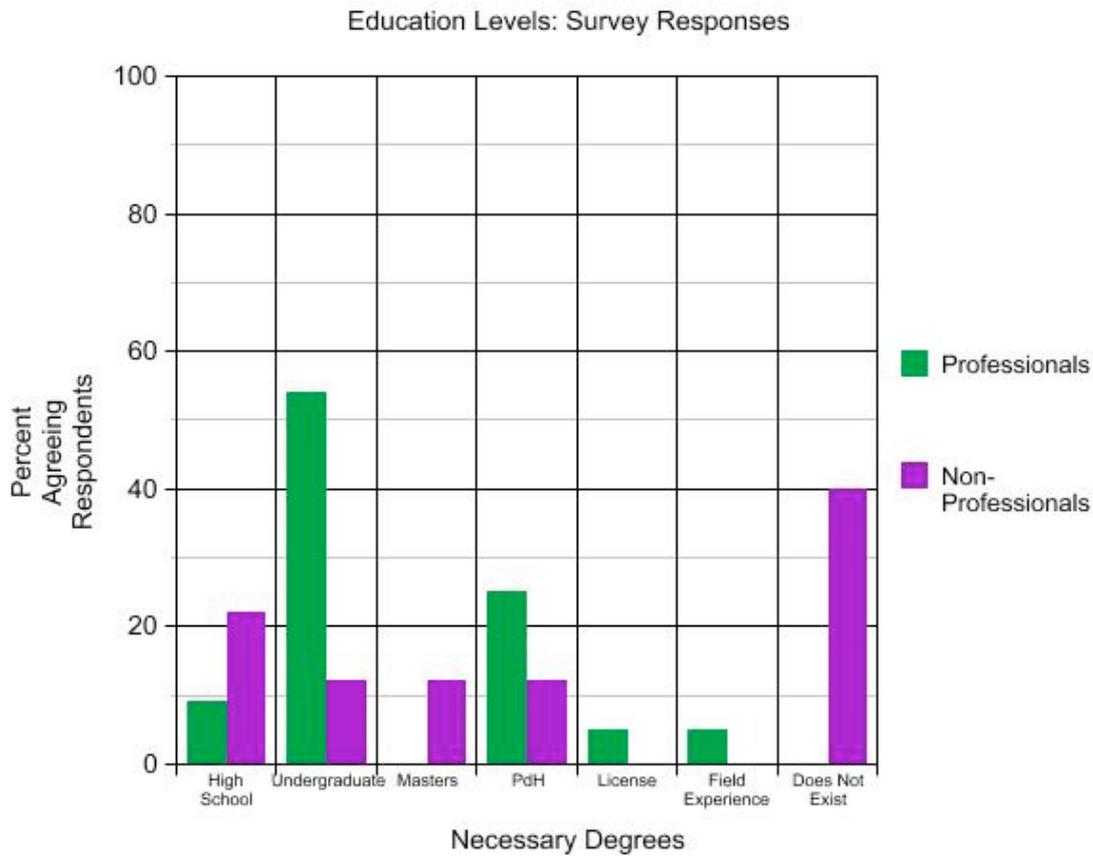
- Countries of Origin
  - Great Britain, Peru, United States, Israel, China, Germany
- 11 Female, 7 Male
- Language Experience
  - Ancient Egyptian, Arabic, English, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Mandarin, Russian, Turkish, Quechua, and Spanish
- Highest Degree Already Attained
  - High School Diploma: 1
  - Undergraduate Degree: 9
  - Masters Degree: 5
  - Progress on PhD: 2
  - PhD: 1
- Ages
  - 20-29 years: 9
  - 30-39 years: 5
  - 40+ years: 2

**Fig. 1:** The demographics of participants in the Education in Archaeology survey

**Survey Response: Levels of Education**

The questions included: “What is the lowest level of education required to become a professional archaeologist in your country? Are there non-professional archaeologists in your country? What level of education must be attained?” (Figure 2)

Follow-up questions to ponder considering the survey results: Do you think that archaeologists in your country are required to obtain enough training? Is it too much? Do most archaeologists obtain training within their home country or in another? Do trained archaeologists work within their home country or in another? Is there an ethical obligation to work on the archaeology of “your own” past?



**Fig. 2:** Education levels necessary to become an archaeologist among various countries, indicated by degree obtained

**Survey Response: Archaeological Careers**

The question was: “In what field(s) do archaeologists work in your country?” (see figure 3)

Follow-up questions to ponder considering the survey results: Should archaeologists be involved in the government? Should archaeologists be involved in politics? Would it be a benefit or a hindrance if archaeologists only remained in the private sphere, or conversely only in the public sphere?

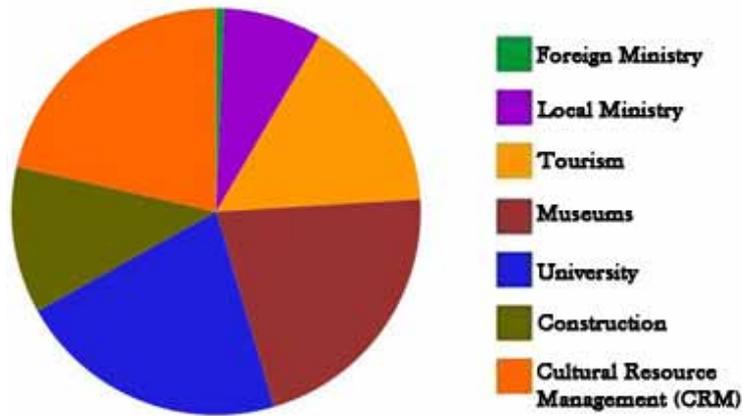


Fig. 3: The distinct fields that archaeologists work within different countries

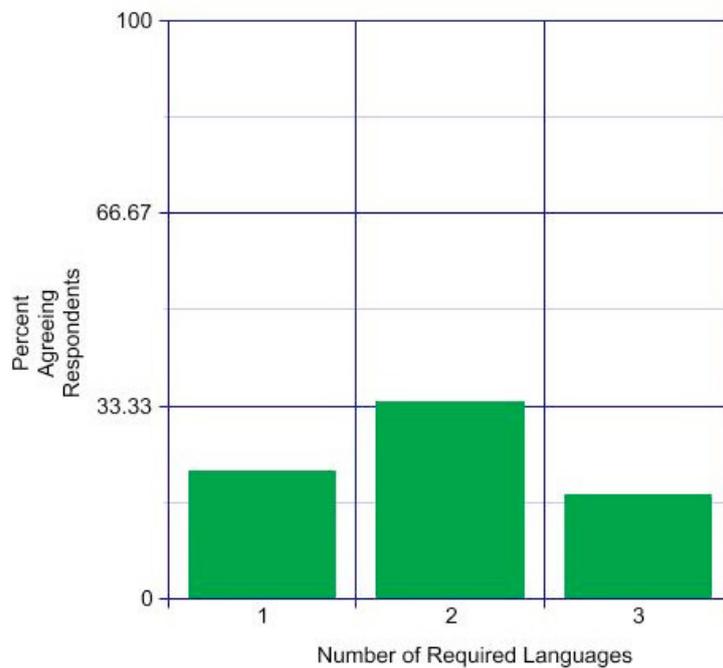


Fig. 4: The number of modern foreign languages (1-3) required to become an archaeologist in different countries (listed by percent)

**Survey Response: Languages**

The questions were: “How many modern, foreign languages are required to complete the necessary degree to become an archaeologist in your country?” (see figure 4)

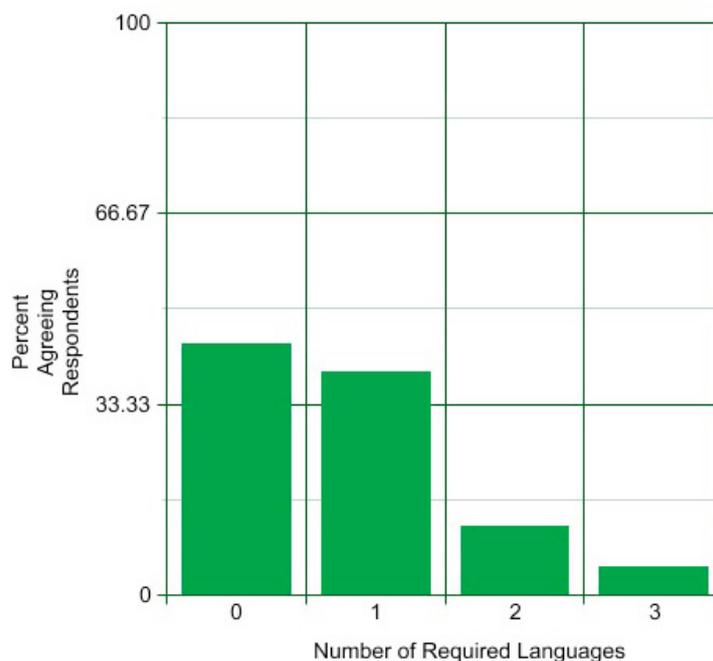
“How many ancient languages are necessary to attain the level of education required to become a professional archaeologist in your country?” (see figure 5)

“What specific languages do you need to know how to speak to be an archaeologist in your country” (please check all that apply)? The survey respondents indicated that the most important languages (in alphabetical order) were: Arabic, English, German, Spanish and other.

“What specific languages do you need to know how to read to be an archaeologist in your country?” The survey respondents indicated that the most important languages (in alpha-

betical order) were: Arabic, English, French, German, Spanish and other.

Follow-up questions to ponder considering the survey results: Does the prevalence of English in archaeology facilitate more diverse academic relationships? Or does it hinder communication with local and international communities? Is there less incentive to learn the local language because English is so widely used? Are the language requirements in your country too little or too much?



**Fig. 5:** The number of ancient languages (0-3) necessary to become an archaeologist in various countries (listed by percent)

## Conclusion

The discussions, personal and online interactions, and survey outlined above are only the beginning of conversations amongst the Next Generation of archaeologists and cultural heritage specialists. In the short term, the presentation of this project in a session at WAC Ramallah and networking personally with local archaeology students and emerging cultural heritage specialists in the West Bank encouraged Palestinian students to join the project. This session, and the subsequent lunches and group outings, provided a means for Israeli, Palestinian and other students to meet, network and become colleagues to facilitate collaboration on projects of mutual interest now and in the future.

However, the project's ultimate goals go beyond one single region's concerns. The project aims to level the playing field between archaeologists around the world by co-opting democratic technologies such as social networking sites. Our mission is more important than ever as politics and technology continually create a fluid field in which archaeologists must work. Ethical decisions must be made constantly, and these choices impact our practice both now and in the future. By enabling conversations about these dilemmas now, we help future leaders develop an early awareness of the complexities involved. As current students and

young professionals join their chosen field, armed with greater social capital than emerging practitioners have had in the past, everyone can engage colleagues in coordinated efforts otherwise impossible in the absence of those relationships.

The conversation continues online and in-person at upcoming international conferences. You are invited to participate in the dialogue and to support the Next Generation. Join our discussion online at the following address: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/LAS/religion/arc/next-gen> (or search for us within Facebook: "The Next Generation: Students discuss archaeology in the 21st century"). Please also invite your friends, colleagues and fellow excavators from the field. By networking with one another now and engaging each other in substantive conversations about topics that affect our current and future work, we will be more prepared to lead our discipline into the future.

### **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank the following: The University of Southern California, the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture, the WAC Ramallah Organizing Committee, Lynn Swartz Dodd, Bruce Zuckerman, Georgiana Nikias, and all those members of The Next Generation that contributed to the online discussions and surveys.