As a young scholar and instructor in the field of anthropology, specifically archaeology, I have had a number of noteworthy experiences related to the topics of compliance and research ethics education in the university setting. The goal of archaeology is to reveal, interpret, and preserve the (mostly) unwritten parts of the past. Most often, the goal of archaeology education is to instruct students on the cultural practices of former peoples, the methods archaeologists use to determine those practices, and the importance of understanding diverse modern and past peoples today. For some practitioners, archaeology education also includes learning about the modern impacts and professional ethics of archaeological research.

Archaeologists have been thinking about ethics at a profession-level since at least 1960. In recent years, archaeologists have given heightened attention to ethics as archaeologists have begun to recognize the implications of their practices for living peoples and to wrestle with the many new roles archaeology is asked to play in a global and multicultural world. The history of the discipline of archaeology has created a mixed-blessing in relation to ethics: ethical problems of the past have lead to extensive discussions of ethics in the present. Colonial and imperial archaeologists mistreated or ignored Indigenous populations and were not aware of the impacts of their work. World-wide looting of archaeological sites encouraged archaeologists to act as stewards of the past and fight for preservation, but sometimes in opposition to the wishes of local populations. In attempting to deal with these and many more ethical issues related to archaeology, a plethora of ethical codes, principles, and statements have been developed by numerous archaeological organizations. Several books have been written on ethics
in archaeology and case-studies are debated yearly at national meetings by graduate student teams in our own version of the “Ethics Bowl.”

Still, even with these resources, there remain serious issues in terms of archaeology ethics education in the university. In this short essay, I will briefly mention four issues I have experienced: where archaeological ethics fit in traditional curricula, what the most important topics of ethics education in archaeology are, how we help students think through ethical dilemmas, and how we move beyond compliance and into more engaging instruction on ethics.

1) SHOULD ARCHAEOLOGY RESEARCH ETHICS BE TAUGHT IN INTRODUCTORY CLASSES?

The number of universities offering undergraduate and graduate level courses in “Archaeological Ethics” is on the rise. However, the number is still quite small in comparison to the overall number of courses in archaeology offered in colleges and universities across the country. Introductory Archaeology courses reach tens of thousands of students every semester. These courses often lead students through a sweeping review of world prehistory and archaeological methods, where instructors might have a single week to discuss the entire ancient Maya civilization. Most students in these courses will not be anthropology majors or go on to practice archaeology. Should these students be introduced to archaeological ethics? Is there room in the syllabus for ethics?

My answer to these questions is “yes,” and I believe most archaeologists today who are aware of archaeological ethics would also say “yes.” The discipline of archaeology and the lives of people in the past are generally poorly understood by the general public (thanks to movies like “Indiana Jones” and “Apocalypto”). People also do not understand the difficult colonial history that has led to contentious (but also collaborative) modern contexts of archaeological research. If archaeology is to continue in the future, it must be seen by the general public as an important, relevant, ethically-justified, applied science. As many archaeologists have said in the past, archaeologists cannot afford to be “lost in the past.” Instead, we must acknowledge and openly discuss the fact that the practice of science cannot be divorced from its politics.

I also believe that the more students are introduced to diverse sets of professional research ethics, and the more they are forced to consider the implications of all academic research on modern living peoples, the
better equipped they will be to handle ethical dilemmas in their own lives and to form opinions on broader practices in society. Although students in introductory classes may not ever have to decide whether or not to excavate and study human remains, or decide who should be the “owner” of a cultural property, many of the greater themes of archaeological ethics (respect, accountability, stewardship, intellectual property) will be important to students in any future work they may undertake.

The question of how these themes should be approached and taught in classrooms leads me to my next two observations.

2) **What are the Most Important Topics of Research Ethics in Archaeology?**

As I mentioned in the introduction, there are a variety of important topics under the umbrella theme of “archaeological ethics.” The issues facing archaeology today include (but are not limited to): Indigenous rights, the illicit antiquities trade, development, heritage tourism, media portrayals of archaeology, media portrayals of the past, gender equality, public education, intellectual property, and archaeology during times of armed conflict. In most archaeology classes, there is not sufficient time to discuss each of these issues to the depth that they require. Thus, archaeologists are faced with a choice of which issues to address in collegiate classrooms. In my own classes, I have been frustrated by the inability to deal with all of these issues. For example, when discussing an archaeological site that is also a popular tourist site, I would like to discuss the ethics of heritage preservation, but I worry about veering to a tangentially related topic and having the students lose focus on the historical information being presented.

I believe this is an issue that many departments might have as universities move beyond compliance education and towards research ethics education. For archaeologists, compliance education might mean learning about appropriate cultural property laws and the minimal standards of appropriate professional behavior established by some professional archaeological organizations. But, research ethics education would (and should) address much more, including the history of ethics in archaeology, the ethical justifications behind laws and professional codes of conduct, as well as examples of the myriad ethical dilemmas in archaeology. Additionally, research ethics education in archaeology classes could also include topics outlined in Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) training, including mentor/mentee responsibilities,
ethics of collaborative research, responsible authorship, and ethical issues related to data acquisition, management, and ownership.

Perhaps a solution to the question of “what are the most important topics of research ethics?” is to not necessarily focus on the teaching of topics, but instead on teaching the processes and methods of ethical decision making. If students are equipped with the tools to identify facts and stakeholders, utilize moral philosophy and applied professional ethics (including professional codes and principles), think through constraints and alternative solutions, and arrive at negotiated solutions, then they will be better able to address any ethical issue in archaeology. But, is it within the purview of archaeology faculty (most of whom do not have backgrounds in ethics) to teach these methods? If not, how can we ensure that students will leave the university with this knowledge? These are difficult questions that should be discussed by faculty in university departments.

3) HOW CAN WE MOVE STUDENTS BEYOND THE INITIAL STAGES OF ETHICAL THINKING?

I have found that it can sometimes be difficult talking about research ethics or working through case-studies in the classroom when students have different approaches to ethical thinking. Some anthropology students are extreme cultural relativists who think that whatever another culture wants to do is ethically justified. Others are adamant in arguing for what they consider “traditional American values,” which is often whatever set of values they were taught as children. Some students are adept at making compromises and in considering a variety of viewpoints and evidence when making ethical decisions, while others do not understand the differences between reason, ethics, religion, superstition, and other epistemologies. For example, when discussing the sensitive topic of the treatment of human remains in relation to archaeological practice, I have had students say things like: “I don’t have the same superstitions about the treatment of human remains as Native Americans do.” These differences in ethical thinking can lead to disjointed conversation and, in some cases, students feeling upset that their point of view is not being heard or appreciated.

I have always thought that diversity in classrooms was a good thing. But, when dealing with sensitive ethical topics, the diversity I just discussed has frustrated me. I wonder sometimes if it is acceptable to tell students what my ethical stance is on certain issues, especially when I
disagree with their opinions or can tell that they do not have the proper knowledge-base to make informed decisions. However, I do not necessarily want a class-full of students who agree with me, and do not want to teach research ethics the same way I might lecture about the ancient Maya.

Perhaps a solution to this issue is to have more discussions and articles about teaching-methods for research ethics. Archaeologists need to find an effective way to teach students to critically analyze ethical dilemmas and draw evidence in order to make informed decisions. We could certainly stand to learn from colleagues in other departments, such as philosophy, about these methods.

4) IRB APPROVAL AS “ETHICAL ENOUGH”

Finally, one additional view I would like to share comes from being a graduate student with interests in ethics, and not an instructor. In this panel, we are discussing what we have experienced in our work environments that would be helpful to think about as universities move beyond compliance education and more toward research ethics education. In my own anthropology department, this shift in focus is visible in how people approach research ethics in classes on anthropology methods, and during research. Most anthropologists must obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Subjects permissions to conduct their work. Most often, ethnographic or anthropology-laboratory work falls under the “Expedited Review” process, meaning that the researcher must create a study-information-sheet but does not need to obtain written consent for research. Thus, to obtain permission from the IRB, one must pass the on-line test on working with human subjects and submit the information-sheet for approval. The issue I have experienced related to this discussion is that many of my colleagues feel that they are knowledgeable about professional research ethics and practice ethical research methods because they have received IRB approval. Instead of engaging in conversations to discuss or even challenge professional ethical codes or ethics epistemologies, most students and instructors when discussing ethics instead talk about what to do to get IRB approval.

In this case, I feel that IRB approval (or compliance) might be a type of “crutch” to lean on in terms of ethics education. As a comparative example, most archaeology graduate students do not need to go through the IRB approval process because we are not working with living
populations (although this is certainly debatable and some archaeologists have begun to argue that all archaeologists should be forced to seek IRB approval). Thus, IRB compliance is not usually discussed in classrooms or in advisor/advisee conversations. Instead, ethics is discussed in a more conversational, applied, and philosophical way in classrooms. Instead of learning what archaeologists “need” to do, we discuss what archaeologists “ought” to do, and the challenges that exist in trying to determine the most ethical archaeological practice. But, these conversations are not required and do not take place in every classroom. Thus, some archaeologists begin their work having only informally considered research ethics.

There must be a compromise between these two extremes. In my own opinion, having studied research ethics in a class should not excuse a researcher from having their project reviewed by an IRB. And, IRB approval should not equated with a complete understanding of ethical responsibilities. In many ways, research ethics education and IRB compliance seem to be complementary parts of research ethics practice in the university setting.

As ethics education becomes a more common element of anthropology curricula, archaeology faculty will need to address the questions posed above, as well as many other issues. For young career faculty and instructors, these issues may be most pressing as we struggle to consider the future of our respective disciplines and train the next generation of practitioners in university classrooms. I look forward to these discussions and debates, and to learning from the experiences and resources related to these issues available in other disciplines.