Rutgers University
Paleoecology & Archaeology 070:582

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Spring 2009

Course Topic:
Taphonomy & Zooarchaeology

Syllabus

1. Introduction: The place of taphonomy and zooarchaeology in paleoecology and archaeology
2. Issues in and goals of taphonomy and zooarchaeology; ecological taphonomy
3. Inference in taphonomy and zooarchaeology
4. Taphonomically relevant properties of bone
5. Mammalian bone assemblages, paleoenvironments, and an introduction to paleoecology
6. Bone modification: Interpreting fragmentation, fracture patterns and surface modification
7. Bone accumulation and dispersal
8. Taphonomy and ecology of carcass acquisition
9. Individual reports on term projects

Weekly Assignments: You will receive a weekly reading list accompanied by several issues to guide readings and discussion for the following week. Each week, individual students will be responsible for initiating discussion on one of the issues, following key points and data (e.g., tables, figures) they organize on a fully referenced handout prepared for the class. All students, however, are expected to be conversant in all discussion issues.

Term Project: One of two types of projects can be pursued during the semester:

1) Develop a taphonomic perspective on some aspect of past hominid behavior or paleoecology encoded in fossil vertebrate assemblages.
2) Critique the zooarchaeology of a particular time period and region, characterizing the state of the art and how a taphonomic perspective might be employed to improve it.

The project will be completed in four stages:

1) Submit a two page prospectus on October 13 that defines the scope of your topic succinctly, identifies its components, and evaluates the adequacy of available literature on the topic.
2) Submit an exhaustive, partially annotated and structured bibliography on November 3.
3) Present a paper on your topic to the class and lead a discussion during the last one or two meetings of the semester.
4) Submit a 4,000 - 5,000 word, scholarly, double-spaced paper by December 15.