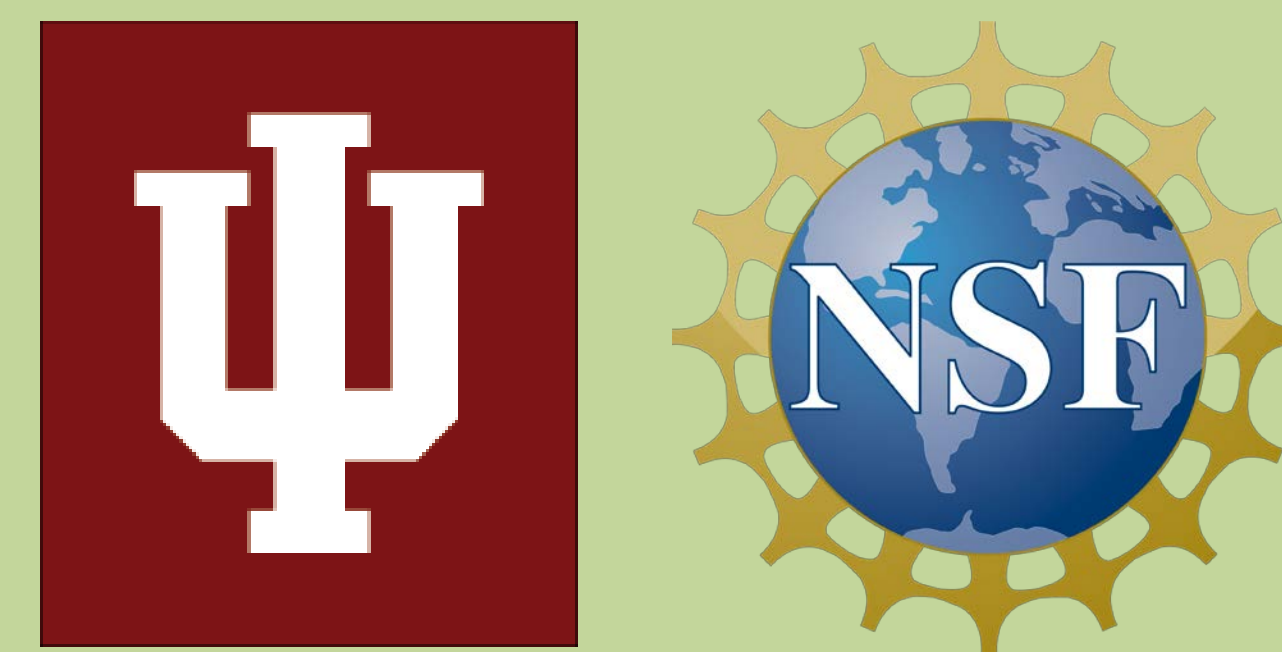


# Anthropology education in the age of NAGPRA: Where we stand and where we might go



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## The Learning NAGPRA Project

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was signed into law in 1990, but over twenty-five years later debate remains among anthropologists about who needs to be taught about NAGPRA and why.

In 2014 and 2015, researchers from Indiana University received National Science Foundation funding through their Cultivating Cultures of Ethical STEM initiative for two phases of a project to study how repatriation is taught and learned, and to work toward interventions to improve the resources available.

The first year of the project focused on studying the current state of NAGPRA teaching and training, while the second phase has prioritized working collaboratively with tribal cultural experts, educators, cultural resource management archaeologists, and students to develop educational materials.

## Research Design

The Learning NAGPRA Project has four research initiatives to explore different aspects of NAGPRA education and training from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders and at different points in the educational process.

These include:

- Conducting and analyzing interviews with educators, students, and repatriation professionals
- Distributing online surveys to students and faculty in Anthropology and Museum studies programs and analyzing responses using SPSS and QDAMiner
- Collecting course syllabi and textbooks from programs for textual analysis on content coverage and position
- Organizing a comparative teaching study working with educators at 5 universities and colleges around the U.S. to look at the strengths and challenges in various teaching approaches to NAGPRA in different course contexts and at the beginning and end of the semester

## Connect with Us

We are conducting anonymous interviews with educators, students, and repatriation professionals. If you would be interested in sharing your thoughts on NAGPRA education, please connect with us:

Email: [Irnagpra@Indiana.edu](mailto:Irnagpra@Indiana.edu)  
Twitter: [@LearningNAGPRA](https://twitter.com/LearningNAGPRA)



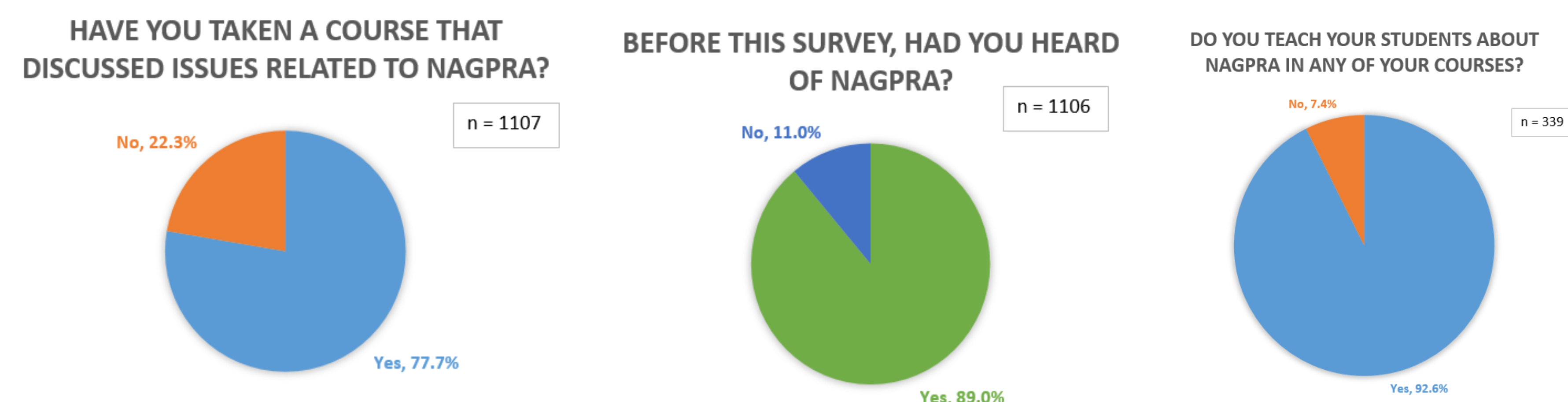
For more information, please visit our website:

<http://learningnagpra.indiana.edu>

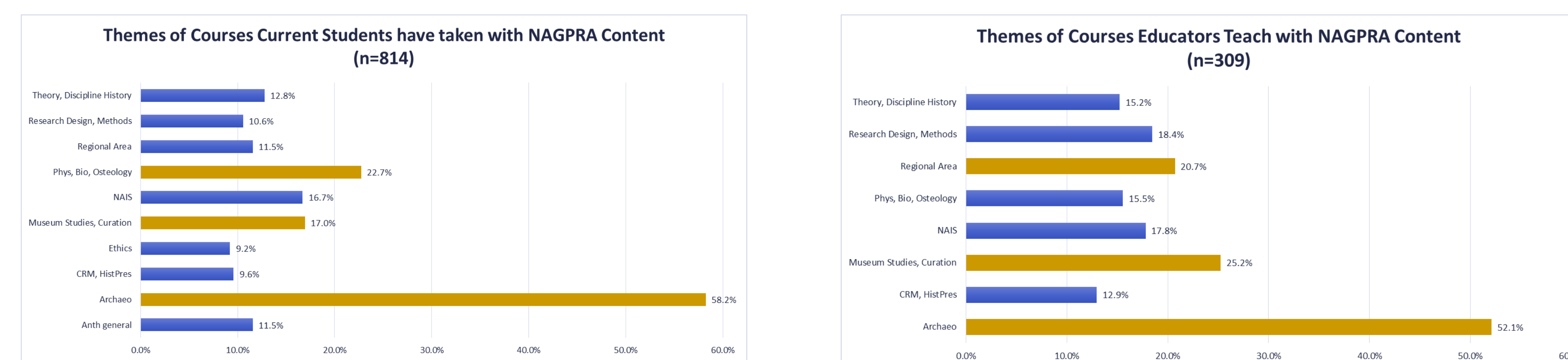
## Survey Findings

The online survey for educators and a separate online survey for students were sent to Anthropology and Museum Studies programs at U.S. universities and colleges for two data collection periods in 2015 to reach respondents in the Spring and Fall semesters. Together, we collected data from **347 educators** and **1175 current students**, which were grouped into the themes of: demographic information, disciplinary education, NAGPRA education, and NAGPRA and the future.

Before taking our survey, 11% of students had never heard of NAGPRA (out of 1105). Of those students who had never heard of NAGPRA, 23% were introductory-level undergraduate students beginning their school year. However, 22% of those who had never heard of NAGPRA were graduate students. And while around 70% of students are interested in NAGPRA-related internships or jobs after graduation, 41% consider their higher-education coursework as covering somewhat less or far less than what they needed and over 26% thought their NAGPRA education had been minimally or not at all comprehensive. Improvements to breadth and depth of the NAGPRA teaching can be and need to be made.



The majority of educators who responded to our survey do teach about NAGPRA in one or more of their classes (92.6% compared to 7.4% out of 339). We asked students and educators to write in the titles or topics of courses they had taken or had taught that covered NAGPRA. Based on these responses, we coded each respondent with taking or teaching NAGPRA-related courses in different themes. The list of themes included: anthropology (four-field), archaeology, art, bioarchaeology, CRM or Historic Preservation, cultural anthropology, current issues, ethics, field school, law or policy, medical or health, museum studies and curation, Native American and Indigenous Studies, physical or biological anthropology and osteology, regional area studies, research design or methodology, teaching, and theory and disciplinary history. Only those themes that appeared more than 9% in student or educator responses are included in the charts.



After coding we see that the majority (58% students, 52% educators) are discussing NAGPRA in archaeology-themed courses. Around 90% of those students had taken a university/college course about physical anthropology, biological anthropology, or osteology, so it is disappointing that only 22% of students reported discussing NAGPRA in those course themes.

Similarly, we see that of the educators who took the time to respond to our survey, only 15% of them teach about NAGPRA in a physical or biological anthropology or osteology themed course. NAGPRA education, however, is not just an issue for archaeology, and physical and biological anthropology can do more (Kakaliouras 2008). Copies of student and educator survey questions are currently available on the project's website.

Because the law is over 25 years old, some educator respondents expressed the opinion that NAGPRA professionals would not be needed after processing the current collections of repositories. This reflects a troubling finding from the student survey that students were least likely to recognize that NAGPRA included inadvertent discoveries made on federal and tribal lands. Construction and development projects will continue to unearth cultural resources, and educated professionals will need to be aware that NAGPRA is part of a package of cultural resource laws that applies in these fieldwork situations.

## Learning NAGPRA Collegium

This research data has been used to inform the discussions of the 2015 and 2016 Learning NAGPRA Collegium workshops, held at Indiana University Bloomington, and the formation of four working groups developing different educational materials. The Learning NAGPRA Collegium utilizes a workshop format that brings together students, educators, museum professionals, tribal cultural specialists, and members of professional organizations.

The first two Collegium meetings were held at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana while the third and final Collegium meeting will be hosted by the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico in August 2017.



Learning NAGPRA Collegium 2016 Participants

There are four working groups, with two developing different educational modules for use in higher education classrooms, one focusing on case studies relating to NAGPRA and repatriation, and the final group preparing training materials for working professionals.

## Conclusions

Teaching about NAGPRA presents valuable opportunities to address such fundamental issues as forming research questions, the stages of research design, the steps of the consultation process, and the benefits of collaboration for developing innovative research questions and methodologies. NAGPRA compliance is similar to working with source communities to understand their heritage in that both types of relationships can unfold in a myriad of contextually-specific ways and require consistent communication about whose needs and values are being met during the process.

Although NAGPRA is a piece of United States legislation, the issues it raises about respecting cultural beliefs in framing research questions and methodologies are found all around the world. How we treat the dead and respect the living are fundamental human questions, and teaching ethics and legal rights cannot be left to the last week of class or final chapter of the textbook.

## References & Acknowledgments

Kakaliouras, Ann. M. 2008. Toward a "new and different" osteology: a reflexive critique of physical anthropology in the United States since the passage of NAGPRA. *In* Opening archaeology: repatriation's impact on contemporary research and practice. Thomas W. Killion, Ed. Pp. 109-129.

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