

Bridging Academia and Descendent Communities: Dr. Montgomery's Vision for Archaeological Practice

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Toronto, Ontario May 11, 2025 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - Dr. Lindsay M. Montgomery, Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Toronto, is building a new, community-focused path in the field of archaeology. Through over a decade of dedicated research and collaboration, she has redefined what it means to engage ethically and effectively with Indigenous communities. At the heart of her work lies a

commitment to decolonizing archaeological practice and building lasting academic-community partnerships.

Reconstructing Archaeology: From Colonial Foundations to Collaborative Futures

For much of its history, archaeology has been grounded in Eurocentric worldviews that often overlooked, misrepresented, or outright excluded Indigenous voices. Traditional methodologies prioritized objectivity and data collection over lived experiences and cultural knowledge. Dr. Montgomery's research actively challenges these outdated paradigms, instead proposing a vision of archaeology rooted in respect, reciprocity, and responsibility.

Her work calls on archaeologists to recognize the discipline's colonial legacy and interrogate the structures that continue to privilege Western epistemologies. Instead of maintaining a gatekeeper role over the interpretation of cultural materials, Montgomery emphasizes the necessity of collaboration with the very communities whose histories are being studied.

In her own words, archaeology must transition from a practice "done to" Indigenous and descendant communities to one "done with" and "guided by" them.

From Consultation to Collaboration: Reframing Relationships

One of Dr. Montgomery's key contributions is her framework for reimagining how archaeologists engage with Indigenous and descendant communities. In her widely cited work, she outlines the shortcomings of consultation-only models, which often limit community involvement to perfunctory feedback or approvals. Instead, she advocates for collaborative research designs in which Indigenous partners are equal stakeholders from the project's inception to its conclusion.

Her approach shifts the power dynamics of archaeological research, granting Indigenous communities meaningful agency over how their heritage is interpreted, managed, and preserved. This model not only aligns with principles of social justice but also leads to richer scholarship that reflects diverse ways of knowing.

A notable example is her long-term collaboration with Picuris Pueblo in New Mexico, where she has worked alongside Tribal leadership to co-design research that aligns with community values. This includes implementing Indigenous data sovereignty—ensuring that archaeological information is governed, accessed, and stored in ways that respect tribal authority.

Championing Indigenous Data Sovereignty

Data sovereignty has emerged as one of the most critical—and often overlooked—aspects of anti-colonial archaeological practice. Dr. Montgomery has been a vocal proponent of this movement, arguing that control over data is fundamental to Indigenous self-determination and capacity building. In many academic and governmental settings, data extracted from Indigenous lands is housed in repositories far removed from the people to whom it belongs.

Montgomery advocates for changing this status quo. Her projects prioritize agreements that return jurisdictional authority over data to tribal councils and community representatives. She encourages archaeologists to rethink their relationships to digital archives, field notes, and material culture—proposing new protocols that center community agency.

By integrating data sovereignty into the core of archaeological work, Montgomery is helping to build a future where Indigenous communities not only contribute to research but control how their cultural data is stored, accessed, and disseminated.

Addressing Structural Barriers: The Role of UNDRIP in Canada

Dr. Montgomery has also engaged deeply with how Canadian institutions can operationalize the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Although adopted by Canada, UNDRIP remains unevenly implemented, particularly within heritage and academic sectors.

Her scholarship exposes the gaps between rhetorical support for Indigenous rights and the institutional barriers that persist within archaeological practice. She urges cultural institutions and funding bodies to go beyond symbolic gestures and embrace structural reforms—such as reworking archival access policies, co-authorship standards, and research licensing procedures.

According to Montgomery, meaningful implementation of UNDRIP requires not only a reallocation of decision-making power but also a fundamental reimagining of archaeology as a discipline that serves Indigenous futures rather than colonial pasts.

Culturally Humble, Trauma-Informed Methodologies

Another vital component of Montgomery's work is her focus on trauma-informed archaeological practice. Recognizing the intergenerational trauma caused by settler colonialism—including the residential school system—she calls for research frameworks that prioritize community well-being over academic output.

Working in partnership with Indigenous scholars and Western-trained therapists, Montgomery has developed methods that integrate emotional safety, cultural humility, and care into fieldwork. She advocates for community-driven consent processes and ongoing dialogue, particularly in projects involving sites of cultural sensitivity.

These principles are not only ethical imperatives but also methodological strengths. By attending to these emotional and cultural dimensions of , Montgomery hopes to build trust and foster healing through archaeological research.

Teaching the Next Generation of Archaeologists

As a professor at the University of Toronto, Dr. Montgomery brings this transformative vision into the classroom. She mentors undergraduate and graduate students in ethical research design, Indigenous-led scholarship, and activist approaches to heritage work. Her courses often feature guest speakers from Indigenous communities, and she encourages students to question disciplinary norms.

Through experiential learning opportunities and community-engaged fieldwork, Montgomery equips her students to become practitioners who center justice, equity, and collaboration in all aspects of their work. Her mentorship is shaping a generation of archaeologists committed to doing better—both scientifically and socially.

Expanding the Conversation: Recent Publications

Montgomery's latest scholarship continues to push boundaries. Her recent chapter in the edited volume *Archaeology, Heritage, and Radical Populism* examines how liberal and populist discourses intersect

within cultural heritage practices in North America. She critiques both liberal multiculturalism and right-wing populism for failing to dismantle settler colonial power structures.

Instead, she advocates for an anti-colonial and abolitionist approach to archaeology that addresses structural racism and capitalism as well as Black and Indigenous disempowerment. This chapter reinforces her commitment to disciplinary transformation and is already generating important conversations across academic and policy spaces.

The Broader Vision: Archaeology in Service of Justice

Dr. Lindsay Montgomery is not just rethinking archaeology—she’s rebuilding it. Her work makes a compelling case for reorienting the discipline toward justice, accountability, and reconciliation. In doing so, she offers a model for how academia can engage meaningfully with the most urgent social and political issues of our time.

From international conferences to Indigenous community centers, her voice is helping shape a new consensus: that archaeology must be collaborative, inclusive, and responsible to the people whose histories it touches.

As settler-colonial institutions reckon with their legacies and responsibilities, Dr. Montgomery’s work offers a powerful roadmap for change—one built on partnership, respect, and the enduring power of Indigenous knowledge.

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