

ASU's Deer Valley Petroglyph Preserve hosts first anthropology camp for high school students

The P.A.S.T. Academy gives students the opportunity learn about anthropology from experts and gain hands-on experiences

By Megan Martin, ASU News
May 7, 2026

It's a bright, Saturday morning in north Phoenix as four high school students make their way into [ASU's Deer Valley Petroglyph Preserve](#). But they weren't there to walk the trail, visit the museum or learn about the thousands of petroglyphs left there by Indigenous ancestors over the last 5,000 years.

They were there for the final installment of the [P.A.S.T. Academy](#).

The Deer Valley Petroglyph Preserve, along with Arizona State University's [School of Human Evolution and Social Change](#), launched the camp this spring. P.A.S.T., which stands for Pathways in Archaeology, Science and Technology, is aimed at bringing together high school students from across the Valley who are interested in learning more about the science behind archaeology, as well as possible career paths throughout the anthropological approaches.

"The academy immerses young people in the real tools and methods of archaeology, science and technology, giving them skills they'll carry into their future careers," said [John Bello](#), head of the Deer Valley Petroglyph Preserve and assistant museum professional in ASU's School of Human Evolution and Social Change. "But it's about more than career prep. At its heart, the P.A.S.T. Academy asks teens to look at past societies and use what they find to reimagine their own future. Because the lessons buried in history — about what it means to be human, what connects us across time — are exactly the ones we need right now."

Over the course of four Saturdays, students learned about archaeological research in Peru from [Patrick Ryan Williams](#), professor and director of the School of Human Evolution and Social Change, including technological advances such as LiDAR and GIS, as well as collections management from [Christopher Caseldine](#), assistant research professor curator of collections with the school's [Center for Archaeology and Society](#), and museum design from Bello.

But the experience wasn't just from listening to the experts.

"We created the P.A.S.T. Academy because today's teens deserve more than a classroom. They deserve to get their hands dirty, literally," Bello said.

The students put their newly gained knowledge into practice as they designed their own pottery, completed photogrammetry to create 3D renderings of their pottery, and then — after smashing them to pieces — created their own mini museum exhibits to showcase their pottery and some of the information they had learned over the course of the camp.

"They needed to work together to determine how they were going to display their sherds¹, and come up with a title, tone and color scheme for the exhibit," said [Melanie Cady](#), a program coordinator with the Deer Valley Petroglyph Preserve. "This creative group really got into their displays. We ended up putting their work on display in the museum gallery. At first, it was just so they could see how it would look, but they did such a great job we decided to leave their mini exhibits up for the time being."

After the students finished their exhibits, collected their swag bags and their certificate of completion, Alyssa Flores, one of the participating students, made her way back into the museum — with her dad following behind her. She wanted to show him what she had just created.

"I really loved when one of the students brought her dad in to see her exhibit," Cady said.

For the students who participated in the camp, this was an opportunity to learn more about subjects they were already interested in — such as archival work and museology² — but also to connect with people their own age who were also interested in the same things.

"Teens are hungry for genuine, in-person connections with each other and with their communities. That kind of face-to-face engagement is where critical thinking, problem-solving and social-emotional growth actually happen. You can't replicate it on a screen," Bello said.

For this first group, all of the participants were sophomores from different high schools around the Valley.

"It's definitely a really great way to learn more about archival work in museums," said Liam Adney, one of the participating students. "It's a great way to go deeper into the sort of ins and outs of museums. And it's really interesting if that's something you want to do or that you're interested in, specifically just because you get to really see how the process is done."

Adney learned about the P.A.S.T. Academy from his AP world history teacher who knew Liam was interested in how museums work.

"Every time I go to a museum, I'm like, 'OK, how did they curate this? What did they think about what's going into this exhibit?'" Adney said.

For the other students, some came to the camp with an interest in archival work.

"I would love to do archival work in the natural (sciences)," student Matt Toth said. "I'd be really interested in doing it for entomology."

With the first P.A.S.T. Academy successfully completed, Bello and his team are looking forward to the fall semester for their next offering, as they look to make the program a deeper, richer offering for students.

"We're expanding from four to eight or nine sessions, adding richer topics and more time for hands-on exploration," Bello said.

"But the bigger evolution is about ownership. In future programs, participants won't just learn from professionals in archaeology, science and museums; they'll work alongside them," he said. "Together, they'll identify real questions within their own communities and design outreach experiences, like an exhibition, to spark public conversation and drive change."

Interested in the P.A.S.T. Academy?

We are busy planning our next session! Stay informed on what's next for the P.A.S.T. Academy by [visiting us online](#) or submit your information via [this form](#) to be contacted with updates.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

¹ Sherds are broken fragments of pottery or ceramic artifacts, often used in archaeology to study past cultures.

² The academic and theoretical study of museums, their history, societal roles and methods.

Main image



The first cohort of the P.A.S.T. Academy work on creating their mini museum exhibits, based on work and knowledge from their previous lessons. Photo courtesy of the School of Human Evolution and Social Change

Gallery



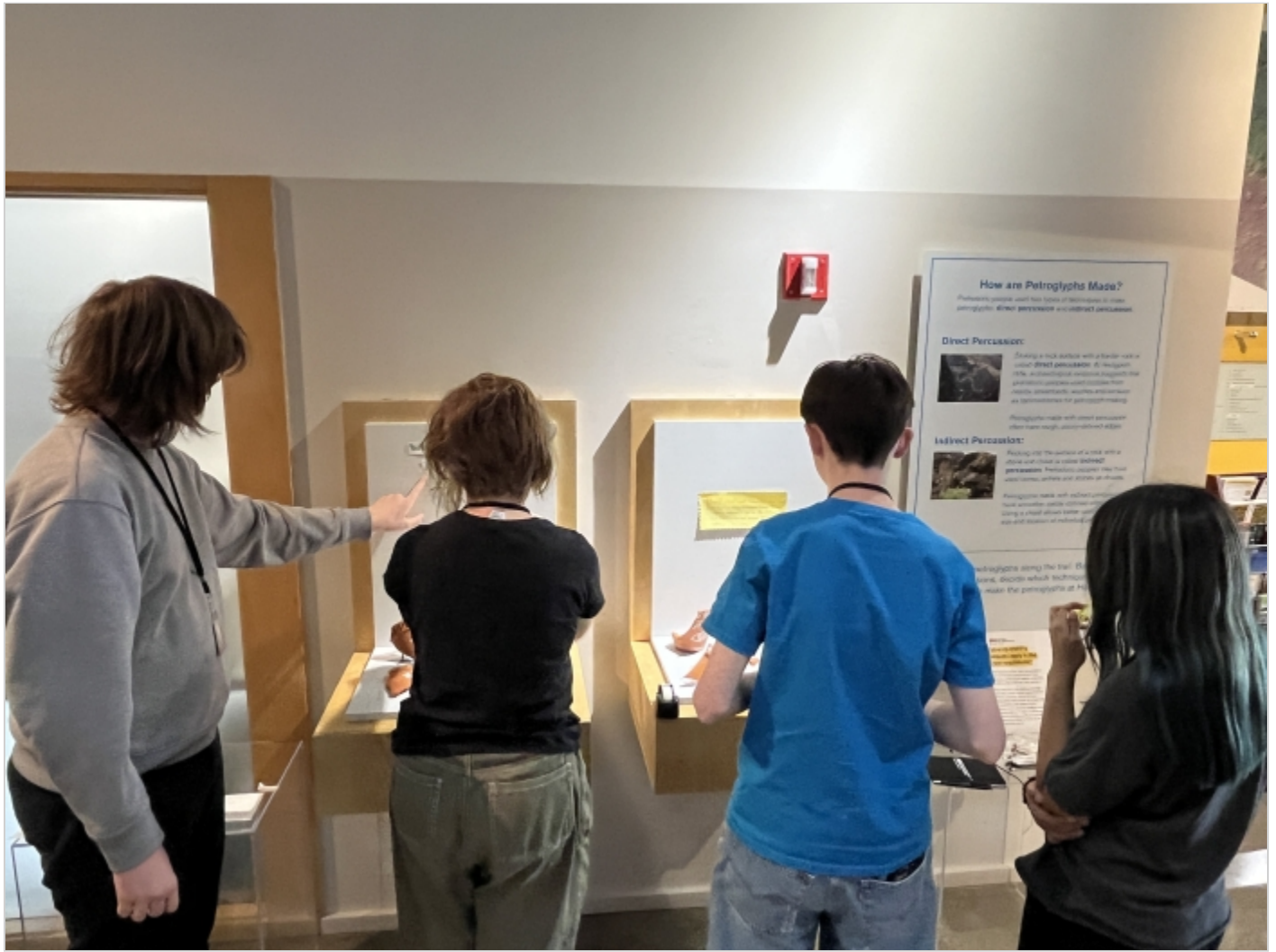
John Bello explains the ins and outs of what goes into designing a museum exhibit. Bello is the head of the Deer Valley Petroglyph Preserve, which includes a 47-acre nature preserve featuring thousands of petroglyphs and a working museum.



Melanie Cady, a program coordinator with the Deer Valley Petroglyph Preserve, talks with the students about different types of museum exhibits.



Liam Adney works at creating some of the content to be featured in his mini museum exhibit.



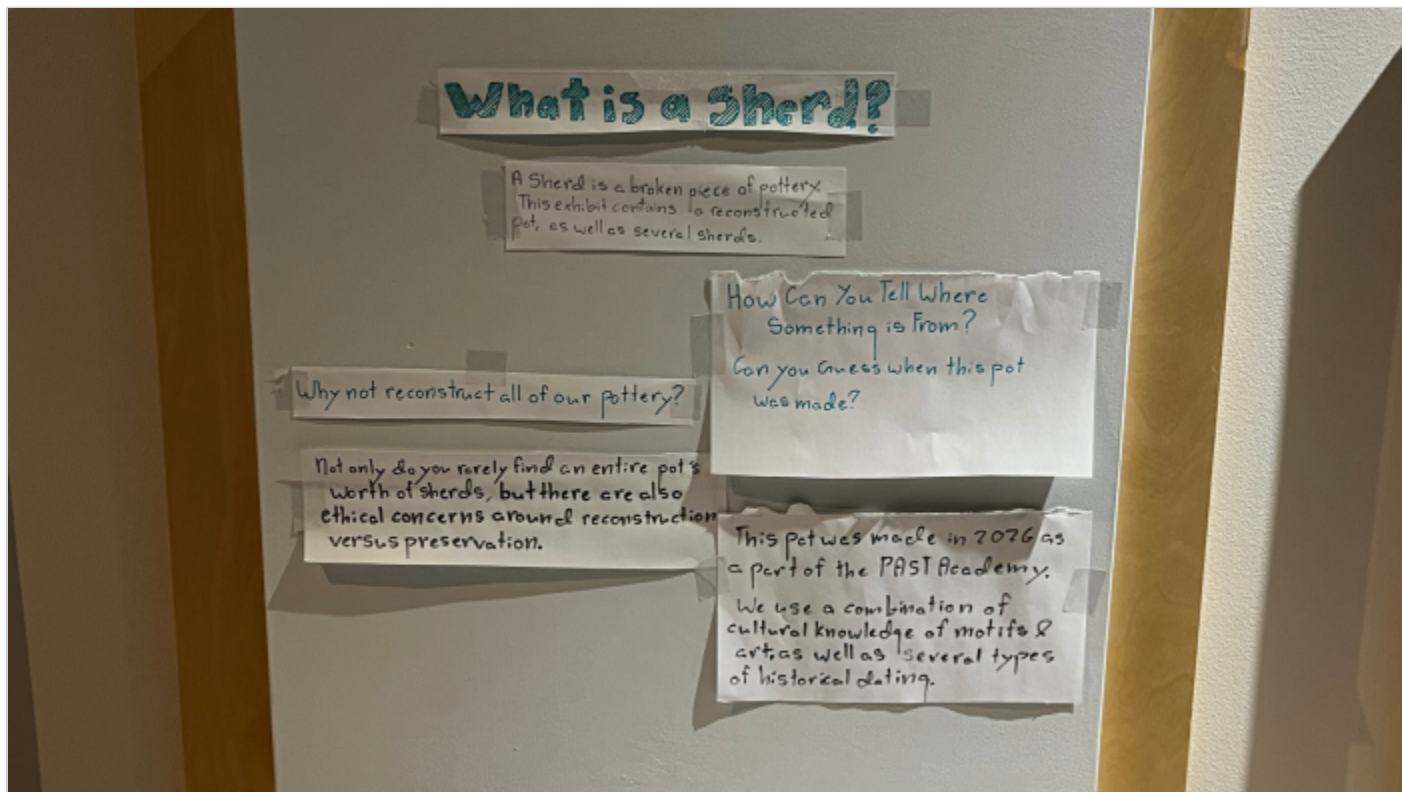
The students teamed up to put together two mini exhibits, featuring pottery they had designed as part of a previous class and the information they have learned throughout their time in the academy.



The finished exhibits featured their pottery, as well as informational cards, showcasing some of the information they have learned throughout their experience.



An up-close look at some of the pottery. The students broke their pottery into sherds as part of a demonstration of the difficulty archaeologists have when it comes to piecing together artifacts.



This team of students, including Craig Wilhelm and Matt Toth, focused their exhibit on explaining sherds to their visitors.



Matt Toth (left) and Liam Adney work on putting together each of their exhibits.



Following the completion of the academy, Alyssa Flores (right) brought in her dad so she could show him what she was able to create.



The first cohort of the P.A.S.T. Academy poses with their completed exhibits and certificates of completion alongside John Bello (far left) and Melanie Cady (far right), who guided students throughout the academy and developed its curriculum and programming.