

# Trial by fire: Lessons from the 2015-2018 BAKOTA NSF-REU field school

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Funded by the National Science Foundation, Research Experience for Undergraduates program (NSF-REU) and the Central European Institute (CEI) at Quinnipiac University, the Bronze Age Körös Off-Tell Archaeology (BAKOTA) project has overseen a four-year research and training program for international undergraduates. In this poster, we reflect on the successes and challenges of our work from 2015 to 2018, and provide suggestions for academics interested in applying for this type of funding.

## REU Students:

23 American undergraduate students over three field seasons

## University affiliations:



22% 1<sup>st</sup> generation college students



10 : 13

48% from underrepresented groups

61% Primarily Undergraduate Institutions/Community Colleges

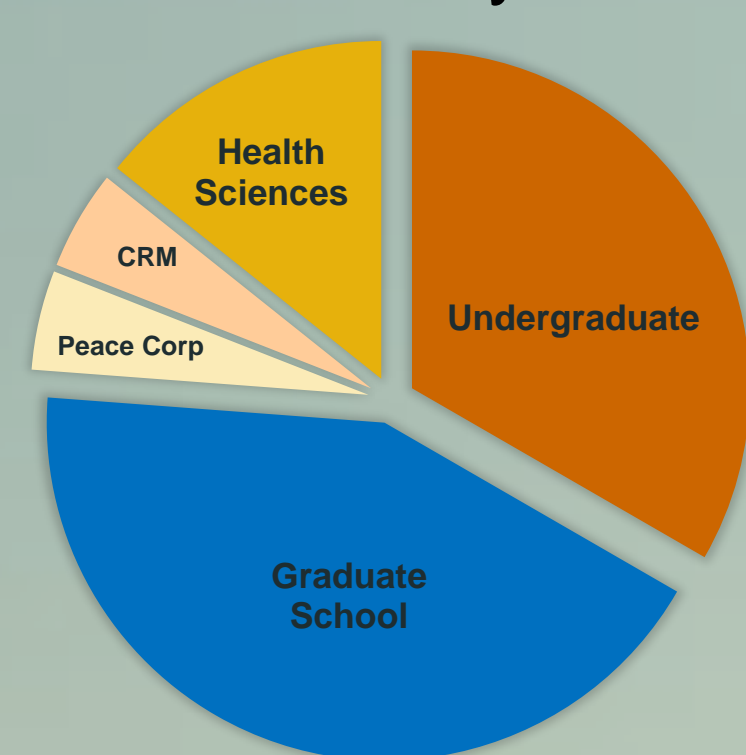
## International Students:

8 students from Hungary, Romania, and Poland (sponsored by the CEI)

## Majors:

Anthropology  
Religion  
Computer Science  
Biology  
Chemistry  
Justice Studies  
Diagnostic Imaging  
Occupational Therapy  
Math  
Philosophy  
Statistics  
Biochemistry

## Where are they now?



## Mentorship:

4 directors, 8 mentors, 6 graduate students, 6 volunteers

## The BAKOTA Team:



2015



2016



2018

## Family: 2 babies



## Outcomes To-date

- 3 peer-reviewed publications
- 3 SAA poster sessions
- 12 conference papers
- 5 museum presentations in the local community
- 4 community presentations in Hungary (for property owners and the city of Vésztő)
- 9 newspaper and TV interviews

## Student output

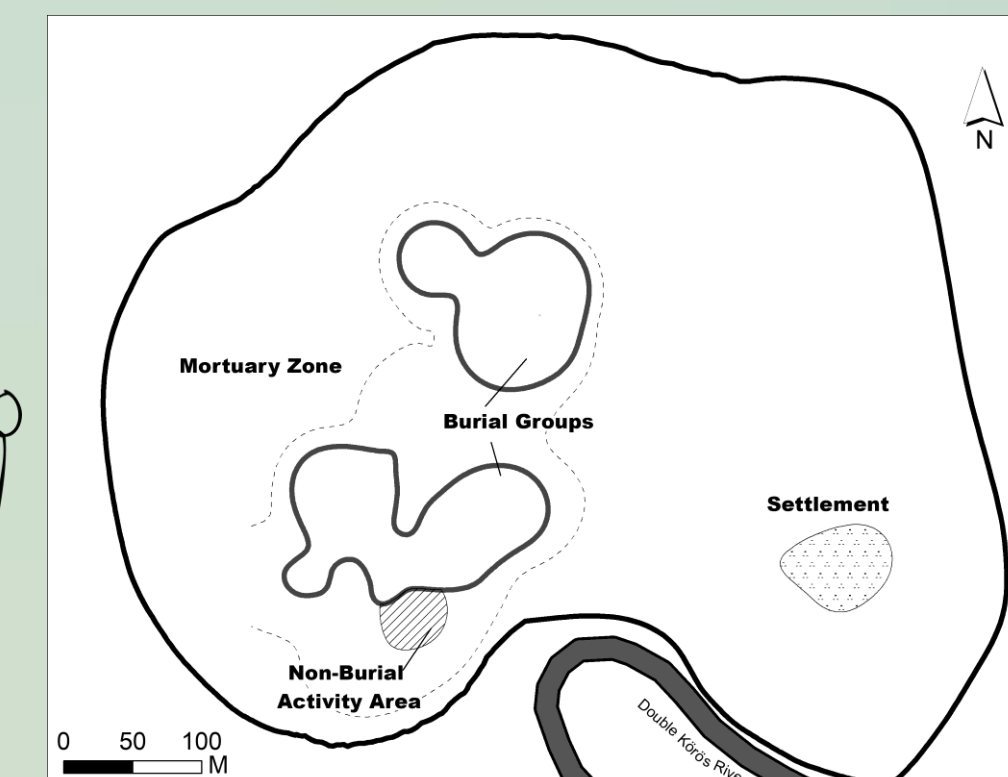
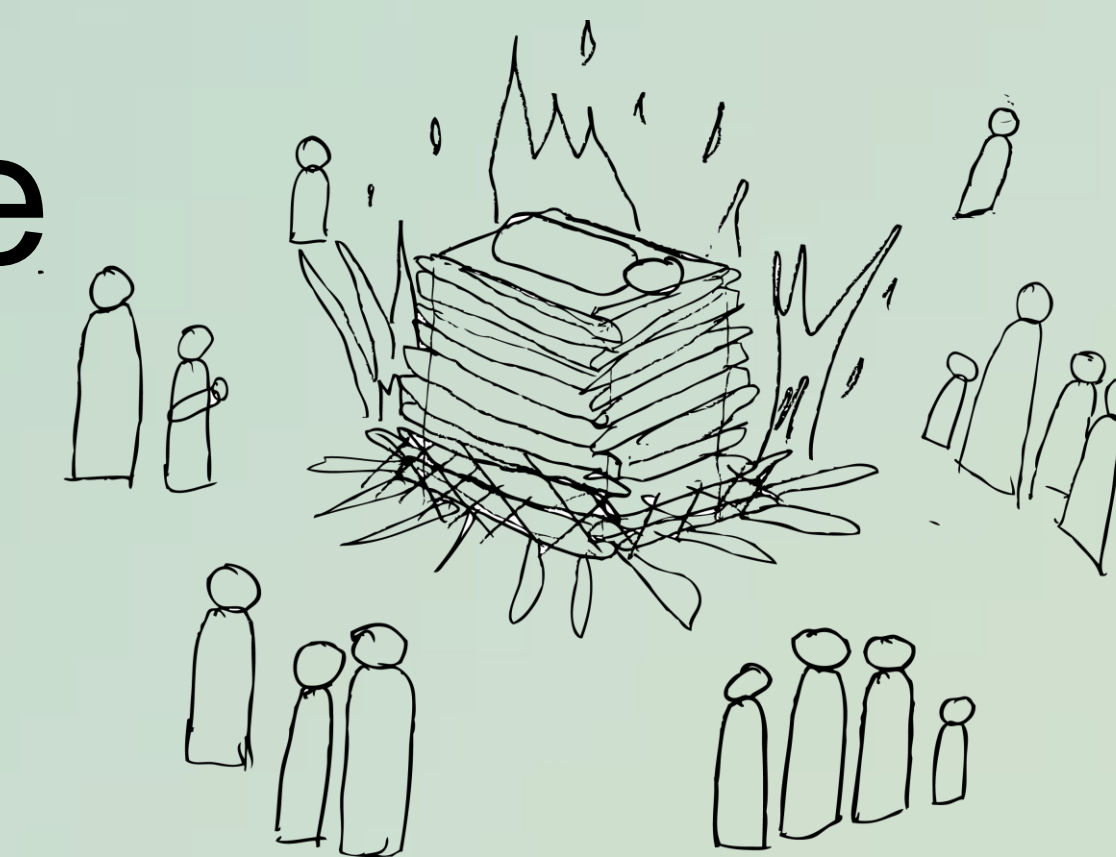
- 29 research posters
- 37 student blogs
- Two undergraduate theses
- 7 student presentations at local conferences

## Infrastructure

- Website (*bakota.net*), Facebook page
- Code of conduct
- Field training manual
- Beastly Filemaker Pro relational database

## Mortuary Site

- Three body treatments
- 2500 dead estimated
- 80 excavated
- Two burial areas
- 280 years of intensive use
- Very long-term traditions in body burning and ceramic styles—cemetery used for over 1000 years)
- High representation of sub-adults
- Near egalitarian normative treatment



Proposed activity areas for Békés 103



Cremated human bone from a burial



Reconstructed funerary ceramics

## At the Regional Scale

- Only known cemetery within 100 km
- Cemetery used by multiple settlements (people coming from over 8 km away to bury their dead)
- Little evidence for exchange outside of the local area

## Lessons Learned

### Structure & Logistics

- Mentors provide very high value additions to the learning experience.
- Modeling a diverse and gender balanced research team at all levels (directors, mentors, graduate students, and students) creates a positive context for learning and collaboration.
- Its is very helpful to have mid-level management (graduate students and experienced volunteers) who provide near-peer mentorship for students and help with daily logistics. Ideally, these people will come back over several years to provide continuity and reduce director/mentor workload.
- Community engagement and public outreach are very meaningful for all parties involved.
- Providing a code-of-conduct, training, and open discussion about appropriate behavior is essential for creating a safe working environment for all participants.
- The best technology can fail – be ready to go back to the basics (strings and line levels!)

### Expectations & Outcomes

- Long-term project research success is not the goal of student participants.
- Getting students from hypothesis to publishable research in a field season, or even a year, is unfeasible. We have worked with several of our REU students for multiple years, and even then, undergraduate led publications is a real challenge.
- When mentors and students are spread across multiple US states and countries, mentorship and communication outside of the field season is a challenge.
- An REU can start the research process, but not complete it – creates threads, but doesn't knit a sweater. Forces structure, but doesn't allow the delivery.

### Work/life Balance

- A supportive management team and family environment can help directors do childcare simultaneously, but abilities and expectations must be reasonable and transparent at the beginning.

### Acknowledgments

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