That Belongs in a Museum!: Heritage, Conservation, and Repatriation in the 21st Century
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Abstract
In Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, Dr. Jones exclaims "that belongs in a museum!" as an unnamed villain pulls the fictional Cross of Coronado from his pocket. The phrase quickly became the presumed mantra of archaeologists, but 30 years later the issue is more complicated. Today, many objects housed in museums have complex histories. Some of these objects were the spoils of war, some were looted illegally and sold to collectors, and many were taken through processes of colonization. Increasingly, peoples and nations who feel that these objects belong to them are demanding their return and museums are grappling with how to address new concerns about ownership of heritage objects and their conservation. This micro-seminar uses diverse case studies from across the world to consider how museums can and should address mounting concerns surrounding their collections. We will also explore how advances in technology have created new avenues for conserving and repatriating objects. This course might be of particular interest to incoming students interested in archaeology, heritage studies, museum studies, art history, or ethics.

Faculty Biography
Kirby Farah is a lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Southern California. Her research and teaching interests intersect archaeology, ethnohistory and critical cultural heritage, with particular emphasis on issues of community identity and social differentiation and cohesion in the Postclassic Basin of Mexico. She was the director of the Proyecto Arqueológico de Xaltocan-Élite (2014-2016) and recently completed an engaged archaeology project, entitled Middle Postclassic Ritual Spaces and Implements: A Museum Exhibit in Xaltocan, Mexico funded by the Wenner Gren Foundation (2017-2018). In addition to her archaeological research she is also interested in how modern communities in central Mexico create local patrimonies around their archaeological pasts. Her current project combines ethnographic and archaeological methods to investigate modes of commemoration and memory-making in contemporary Xaltocan, Mexico.