

Osteological Analysis of Rediscovered Teaching Skeletons at Fairmont State University

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Human skeletal remains are important teaching tools in natural science courses. Many teaching skeletons at universities tend to be forgotten and stored away as they become damaged and are replaced with plastic models. Today, controversy over the ethical acquisition and treatment of skeletal material directly affects many museums and educational institutions. Skeletons tell us a substantial amount of information about each individual and how they lived, giving us an insight into different populations and lifestyles. An unknown number of teaching skeletons were discovered disarticulated, damaged, and stored in a backroom at Fairmont State University. As we do not know the exact means by which these teaching skeletons were acquired these individuals should be analyzed, repaired, and stored properly. For this project, we determined the minimum number of individuals (MNI) and completed standard osteological analyses for each individual. The MNI discovered was 44 while only 16 had enough bones to complete a standard osteological analysis. Standard osteometric and macroscopic analyses were performed on the individuals using Data Collection Procedures for Forensic Skeletal Material 2.0 and the Modified Istanbul Protocol. Age, sex, ancestry, height, metabolic bone disease, and potential cause of death were determined using standard paleopathological techniques. Preliminary results show that all individuals are over 20 years old, 3 individuals between 20-35 years, 3 between 35-50 years, 2 35+ years, and 6 20+ years old. Two individuals were of indeterminate sex, 3 probably male, and 5 probably female. Nine individuals were of Asian ancestry.