

My name is Julie Wesp, I am a junior in the College of Arts and Sciences, and I am seeking funding from the Beyond the Book scholarship program to further my research experience during the summer of 2007. I came to the University of Miami because I was interested in Latin America. During my first year as a Latin American Studies major my interests turned specifically to culture and languages. I started taking anthropology classes and decided to double major. Last year I had the opportunity to study abroad in Mexico City. While I enhanced my language skills, I also experienced life within a culture that is fascinated with their ancient ancestors. In the United States, we tend to distance ourselves from the original inhabitants rather than study them and appreciate their accomplishments. This difference in attitude caused me to take an interest in archaeology. While the University of Miami offers good courses in archaeology, the experience of being in the field is invaluable. I have been offered the opportunity to join Dr. Traci Ardren, associate professor in the Department of Anthropology, at her current research site of Xuenkal. This field experience will give me significant knowledge and experience in the discipline of archaeology and help me decide if it is a career I want to pursue.

The *Proyecto Arqueológico Xuenkal* (Xuenkal Archaeology Project) is a 5 year project designed to map and excavate the ancient Maya site of Xuenkal. Located in the modern Mexican state of Yucatan, Xuenkal is one of the largest city-states north of the Chichén Itzá polity. Preliminary data from the first 3 years of the project indicate that Xuenkal was occupied before the rise of Chichén Itzá, but was then controlled by the powerful polity during the transition from the Late Classic Period to the Terminal Classic Period (approximately 800 AD – 1000 AD). Xuenkal is located in an agriculturally rich region of the Yucatan Peninsula and may have been the supplier of food stuffs to other sites. Additionally, the site's location served as a strategic link to the salt trading communities on the north coast. So far investigations conducted as part of the project include: mapping a .55 sq km region of the site; excavation of defensive constructions built during the Terminal Classic Period; excavation of residential structures; and analysis of ceramics recovered during salvage excavations.

Now in its 4th field season, the *Proyecto Arqueológico Xuenkal* will enable me to learn field skills such as mapping and excavation and then use the data and materials recovered to examine how the site was influenced by the neighboring urban center of Chichén Itzá. This large Maya site dominated the central region of the Yucatan peninsula, but it remains in question whether or not control over outlying sites such as Xuenkal was crucial to their success. The project will continue excavating both the defensive features and residential structures. The material culture recovered from both parts of the site may offer evidence as to how much control the Chichén Itzá polity had over Xuenkal. The defensive structure was built during Chichén Itzá's height of power in the Terminal Classic Period (900 – 1100 AD). Further materials recovered during the excavations may indicate why Xuenkal suddenly needed protection, since the site had been successfully occupied for many years without any defensive structures. Perhaps it was the Chichén Itzá polity that commissioned the structures as a technique to maintain control of Xuenkal and consequently the rest of the northern region of the peninsula. Similarly, materials to be recovered from excavations of the residential structures may give insight into the amount of control Chichén Itzá had over the elite class and the entire site. The analysis of pottery sherds already recovered indicates an increase in pottery stylistically classified as originating from Chichén Itzá. This season's excavations at residential structures may help to prove or disprove the preliminary data. Finally, the 2007 mapping of the site will help visualize Xuenkal's proximity to agriculturally rich land. Without natural resources, such

as rich farm land, there would be no reason for Chichén Itzá to control the site or the region's wealth. Thus, each of these field activities will help to determine Xuenkal's natural wealth and the subsequent interaction with the neighboring site of Chichén Itzá.

I will have the opportunity to participate in each of these three research activities—excavation of defensive features, excavation of residential areas, and regional mapping. Under the supervision of Dr. Ardren and her co-director, Dr. Kam Manahan of Kent State University, I will evaluate my ideas about the role Chichen Itza played in the history of Xuenkal based on data recovered during the 8 week field season from May 20th to July 15th, 2007. In addition I will participate in the related research activities of the 5 graduate students already involved in the *Proyecto Arqueologico Xuenkal*. I believe funding from the Beyond the Book scholarship program is crucial to my full participation in the summer fieldwork activities at Xuenkal and I anticipate that this experience will help me come to a decision about any future studies at the graduate level.