IU SOUTH BEND FACULTY RESEARCH GRANT
FINAL REPORT

“Creating the First Global Cuisine: Subsistence Patterns of Taíno and European Populations in 15th Century Hispaniola”

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Through funding from this grant, I was able to continue reconstructing the first sustained interactions between the Old and New Worlds at the site of La Isabela in the Dominican Republic. Around the ruins of the first European town in the Americas are a number of previously unexplored villages of the indigenous people of the area, known as the Taíno. I worked with two students from IUSB, along with personnel from other universities and governmental organizations, to conduct test excavations on three of the most promising sites.

One site, known as Cruxent’s Shore Site, was completely inundated with water from a storm surge during most of the field season. We could sample only a small portion of the area and were unsuccessful in excavating any diagnostic artifacts. This site had artifacts visible on the surface, and deserves study when conditions permit. Another site, Loma de Vipa, turned out to not be a culturally constructed hill. The negative result of our survey was still beneficial, in that we are creating the first regional map of indigenous settlements in the area. We needed to identify whether or not the site had evidence of human activity.

The final site, however, contained substantial material and is an ideal candidate for further excavation. We systematically mapped, documented, and removed artifacts such as ceramic vessels, shell and stone tools, and faunal remains. The majority of these materials were curated at the national archaeological museum, but I was granted permission to transport 20 of the fragments from domestic ceramic vessels back to my laboratory on this campus for analysis to be conducted later this year.

The collaboration among the students and myself was fruitful, and resulted in a co-authored paper to be presented at the 123rd Annual Meeting of the Indiana Academy of Science. We are also intending to submit a paper to a peer-reviewed journal on Caribbean archaeology. We recovered a substantial amount of information regarding the cultural chronology of two Taíno subgroups (the Chican and Meillacan series). Long thought to be separate cultural groups, we found data to support a co-existence between the people. It appears that the pottery decoration styles that have defined the groups are more likely to be the result of smaller scale social differentiation. If confirmed through research at other sites, this will cause a shift in the dominant paradigm regarding the cultural chronology of the area, and add to the knowledge about the causes and effects of human migration.