Review Questions for Archaeological Theory and Method

1. Be certain that you know the meaning and significance of terms in bold print on the lecture outline I’ve posted. Where appropriate, think about a few examples of each one.

2. How might an artifact’s context change from primary to secondary? Which is more useful for archaeologists and why?

3. What are the three kinds of attribute that form the basis for most artifact classifications? (Review the examples from class by examining some of the bottles and cans in your own habitation site). Why is there no such thing as a single, correct classification of a set of artifacts?

4. Compare relative and absolute dating methods. What is the half-life of carbon-14? Of potassium-40? Briefly explain how radiocarbon dating works. Which method is useful for dating periods of time less than 40,000 – 50,000 years? Why? What is a calibrated radiocarbon date? What is the basis for the calibration?

5. What do comparisons of carbon-12 and carbon-13 isotopes in human skeletons tell us about the lives of ancient people? What kinds of distinctions do different ratios of these isotopes allow us to make. [Note: you do not have to memorize the specific ratios presented in the text.]

6. What can be learned from examinations of human skeletons (in addition to the information provided by the isotope ratios in the previous question). Make a list that includes the specific evidence used to make the determination (e.g., age at death by examination of state of epiphyses).

8. Discuss the four main goals of archaeology. What is meant by the form of the past, determination of function, cultural process, and meaning? What sorts of questions are answered by pursuing each of these four goals?