A Six Pack of Skulls

by Rita Wilson, Government Documents Librarian and Ellen Lutz, Science Librarian

If you see groups of students in the library measuring skulls, don’t be alarmed! They’re only anthropology students working on their quantitative skills. And the skulls are plastic casts manufactured by Bone Clones.

It all started last spring when the anthropology faulty liaison, Jamon Halvaksz, mentioned that their departmental QEP project involved comparing primate and hominid skulls. Quantitative Scholarship is UTSA’s first Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), which addresses the need to provide students with “quantitative skills through an enhanced curriculum focused on contextual learning that will help them succeed in this data-rich environment.” (Read more about the QEP)

A concern of the Anthropology Department was that their lab is small with limited hours, so we jumped at the opportunity for UTSA Libraries to support their QEP courses. After all, we already check out blocks, puppets, and laptops; we are open 24/5 and have weekend hours; and we offer group study space for students. We worked with the Anthropology Department to identify which skulls to purchase for the inaugural projects. (Posie even joked that we might have to create a new fund extension of “s” for skulls.)

The replica skulls are grouped by two projects, each in its own portable case: Case 1 contains 6 different hominid skulls, ranging from Ardi (dated ~4 million years ago) to modern Homo sapiens. Case 2 contains male & female mountain gorilla and chimpanzee skulls, with a modern Homo sapiens for comparison. Each case has a record in UCAT searchable under “Bone Clones” or “Primate Skulls” with added entries for the scientific and common names of each skull type. The cases can be checked out at the Front Desk of the John Peace Library, where they’ll be on permanent reserve, and on reserve for individual classes.

We are pleased to partner with the Anthropology Department to help achieve their QEP goals.

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