Colantoni: Sure. As an undergraduate I was a French major and I also took some archaeology classes. It always happens that people ask me how I got into what I am currently doing, and the answer is: nepotism. My mother is an archaeologist. So sometimes when I was a kid, I would go and see the work that she was doing. When I was in college, I took archaeology classes for fun, and since it was enjoyable, I realized maybe that’s what I should do for a living. And after that, I did some slightly different things than what most people who study classical archeology would do: I got a Masters degree in anthropology and new-world archaeology. I worked for two years for the National Park Service doing archaeological work, writing reports, doing excavations at sites in Florida, South Carolina, the US Virgin Islands, and then after that, I spent the year as a student at the University of Rome. That was a great experience, and I really enjoyed being in Italy and actually studying the ancient monuments in the context where you can read about it in your textbook and then go and actually see what you were reading about. After this, I went on to get a PhD in classical archaeology at the University of Michigan, where I wrote a dissertation on early Roman religion, looking at the physical evidence for Roman religious practices in a time period for which we don’t have written sources. There are later written sources, like Livy and various other authors who write about the history of early Rome but are removed by about six or seven centuries. So what I did was to try to look at the material remains from that time period and to talk about what was happening then based on contemporary evidence, rather than trying to use the later tales of the beginning of Rome.

Colantoni: Okay, so what kind of research are you doing now, and what kind of research have you been involved in, in the past?

Colantoni: Okay, well, I’m working on looking at the physical remains from Rome in the 7th or 8th centuries B.C., and using those physical remains to create a narrative about what was happening in Rome at that time, particularly focusing on religion, but also other things. For example, there is a site in Rome that is the earliest evidence for a temple there. And at this site, the people who excavated this site studied the bones found there and were able to establish that a lot of the animals that were sacrificed there were newborn. For me, when thinking about working on religious life in early Rome, one of the things that I am interested in is the religious calendar. Ancient Rome had a religious calendar that, in a lot of ways is similar to our own calendar, where the year was divided up into months, with certain festivals falling at the same time each year. These festivals helped create a rhythm to the year in the same way that today we have Valentine’s Day and the holiday season in December. However, we don’t know how far back that calendar goes. In studying this site where they have evidence of offering of animals, baby animals are born at roughly the same time every year. And so, I make the argument that because they are sacrificing baby animals, at the site, long before we have evidence for the Roman calendar, there was already some kind of annual festival that was taking place when Rome wasn’t really a big city. So, from the beginning, Rome had a religious calendar. That’s the kind of thing that I’ve been working on. The other thing that I’ve been doing is running an excavation in Italy at a site an hour outside of Rome. It has remains from the prehistoric period all the way up to the present. Most of the remains, at this point, are a part of a Roman villa, but we still need to do some more excavation to find out about that. I’m actually working right now on selecting students for a group to go this summer, taking a class for credit and excavate the site. This will be a part of my research also.

Colantoni: I went to Italy off and on as a kid because of the work that my mom does as an archaeologist. I just like Italy; it’s a fascinating place. The modern culture is interesting as some of the ways in which modern and ancient culture connect, but there are clear differences between the ancient Romans and Italians today; it would be wrong to think that people in Italy are just quaint modern versions of antiquity. But it’s a place where for thousands of years, civilization has really thrived and produced incredible artwork and literature. I really just enjoy learning more about it. When I went
as a student, when I went to the University of Rome for a year, that experience for me was really defining in that it made me realize that this was what I wanted to focus on. I actually had studied other things, like when I was an undergraduate studying French, I had actually focused on Roman France, because the Romans had conquered most of the Mediterranean world including Gaul, which is now France. There are a lot of really interesting Roman remains in France. That really tied together my two majors and is actually something that I hope to get back to at some point. But having spent the year in Rome was, for me, something I found to be very inspiring.

**JUR:** Why do you think it is important to research this and what do you think are the impacts?

**Colantoni:** I will say, maybe not specifically the things that I’m researching on but the methodologies that I use and the things that I teach, deal with the contrast and relationship between texts and physical remains, whether it’s art or archaeological remains. The ability to analyze physical evidence and visual evidence and to create a narrative using that, in contrast with textual sources and words and ideas that are expressed in that way is a skill that I use in my research and is something that I try to teach in my classes. It is also something that is really relevant to the modern world. So much of what we deal with is not just text anymore, but very visual image-based, and it’s really important for someone to be able to assess images and propaganda in the modern world to be able to understand what’s happening around them. So while I’m dealing with the ancient world, it’s very much the same kinds of skills that are relevant to the modern world. I think that for me, and for students, it’s a good exercise to be able to sharpen those skills while dealing with something that’s a little bit removed from you, but is also interesting. It’s important to be able to use those things in your everyday life and know your position in the everyday world, and make the most of things around you.

**JUR:** How can students at the University of Rochester get involved in this sort of research?

**Colantoni:** Well, they can come see me. This is an area that the University has a new program in, the program of archaeology and architecture. There are a couple of different directions in which that goes, depending on if the student is more interested in the engineering side of ancient structures—you may know Professor Renato Profaccio who is in the engineering department and looks at ancient structures from a very technical standpoint. Then there’s also David Walsh in the art history department who focuses more on architecture, and I focus more on the archaeology side of things. So if a student is interested in these areas, coursework for the new program would definitely be a way to get involved. Also, I am doing that summer program with excavations in Italy, and that would be a way for someone to get a really firsthand experience excavating and seeing ancient objects firsthand. They can learn to interpret ancient objects as they come out of the ground, not just read a textbook and have somebody tell you that this is what is significant about something, and rather, experience these things for themselves. So I think that if a student is interested in that then he or she should look into this new program. Obviously there are other ways beyond that that someone could get involved depending on their level of interest, but that would be a starting place.