Tiffany Tchakirides (MA ’02, anthropology) digs deeply into her work. Literally, and digitally.

She works at Shell, one of the world’s leading oil and gas companies, as an exploration and geophysics workflow advisor. She was previously a seismic processing geophysicist for Shell’s deepwater exploration imaging team in the Gulf of Mexico and a geophysicist and seismic interpreter for the Latin America team.

Tchakirides, who also holds a PhD in geophysics from Cornell University, came to DU for her master’s degree to study ground-penetrating radar (GPR) under Professor Larry Conyers. GPR is a highly specialized technology that enables users to avoid potentially harmful excavation by instead digitally viewing the land beneath the earth’s surface.

“I wanted to understand the subsurface of archaeological sites in a more holistic and less invasive way than by traditional archaeological excavations alone. When I first learned of GPR, I knew immediately that I had found the integrated research path I desired. I chose to attend DU to work with Professor Conyers, who literally ‘wrote the book’ on using GPR in archaeology,” she said.

After four years of field work in the Gulf of Mexico and Brazil, Tchakirides now serves as an advisor at Shell to coach and mentor geoscientists in the use of the oil company’s proprietary imaging and interpretation software.

“It is fairly unusual for a geophysicist to have a social science background. My training in the social sciences – anthropology – has set me apart from my colleagues and has allowed me to forge strong relationships with key stakeholders in the business and earn their respect as a trusted technical advisor,” she said.

Tchakirides landed her job at Shell by first serving as a summer doctoral intern. When she was nearing the completion of her doctoral dissertation four years later in 2009, she got recruited to Houston for Shell Recruitment Day, a day-long interview with a technical presentation. She had a geophysics job offer one day later.

Within six years of working at Shell, which operates in more than 70 countries and employs approximately 93,000 people, Tchakirides has received the Best Presentation Award by Shell’s geophysics community. She has also had her technical work published on Shell’s Global Geophysics Knowledge Base and incorporated into Shell’s global geoscience courses.

To help more people outside of her field understand archaeological and geophysical activities, Tchakirides is a docent at Houston Museum of Nature and Science. She gives tours, helps train future docents, gives technical presentations of archaeological significance and write articles for the HMNS volunteer newsletter.
“Volunteering at HMNS is a wonderful way to stay connected to the archaeological community, if only on the weekends,” said Tchakirides. “Plus, it’s just fun.”

“Sometimes I meet young people on HMNS tours who are interested in studying what I’ve studied,” she said. “I encourage students to think broadly about the opportunities available to them, no matter what degree they are pursuing, because the skills developed at college will provide them with many opportunities for success in their future endeavors.”