

# Lana Martin, PhD

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## Statement of Teaching

I teach Anthropology and Environmental Studies, because courses in these areas can be some of the most exciting intellectual experiences a student may encounter in academia. These courses often facilitate conversations that push students to consider a wider spectrum of possibilities for human society. Further, an education in Anthropology and Environmental Studies prepares students for job opportunities in both the private and public sectors. These curricula impart critical analytical skills and challenge students' personal growth, understanding of themselves and their responsibility to the community, and appreciation for diverse and divergent viewpoints.

My primary goal in the classroom is for students to achieve a deeper grasp of the cultural and historical contexts in which they live, and the contexts from which knowledge is produced in various times and places. In doing so, I aim for students to critically explore, reflect, analyze, and communicate. These personal teaching goals are complementary to the over-arching goals of a social sciences education: that students learn how to interpret and explain structural and environmental factors that shape human behavior and culture; foster a self-awareness of their own cultural and historical situation; and ultimately develop the ability to create, identify, assess, shape, and act upon opportunities in a variety of contexts.

I meet these goals by encouraging students to actively engage in course materials, develop critical thinking skills, and value intellectual diversity. Archaeology is a process; students learn most effectively about archaeology by engaging in the practice. For introductory-level courses, I guide students through creating or identifying material culture, then classifying and describing artifacts in quantitative and qualitative terms. I embrace Alison Wylie's cables-and-tacking analogy<sup>1</sup> as a pedagogical stance; in both introductory courses and specialized seminars, I help students "think from things" by posing hypothetical scenarios for the creation, recovery, analysis, and interpretation of materials at hand.

To deepen engagement of concepts, I shape curricula around improving writing and data analysis skills. In past courses, I observe improvement when I vertically integrate lessons to address common writing issues (e.g., active verbs for agency, superfluous adjectives) and quantitative and statistical methods (e.g., sampling, significance, cluster analysis). My most cherished feedback as a college instructor has been the declaration of social-track and non-major students that: "archaeology was always intimidating, but I actually enjoyed this class."

Learning the processes inherent to anthropological and environmental research holds value for undergraduate students whether or not they continue down an academic path after graduation. Critical thinking skills are essential to becoming an active member of our local, national, and global community. As an instructor of human-environment themed courses, I find ample opportunity to facilitate students' development of reasonable, reflective thinking that is clear, open-minded, and informed by evidence. I aim for students to more clearly distinguish between things observed and

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<sup>1</sup> Wylie, Alison. (1989) "Archaeological cables and tacking: the implications of practice for Bernstein's' Options beyond objectivism and relativism'." *Philosophy of the social sciences* 19(1):1-18.

things interpreted; I assess their progress with how clearly they articulate boundaries between persons and processes observed, the observers, and broader systems. On a more pragmatic level, I believe students need to be able to understand complex visual depictions of data to assess claims made in academia and in popular media. Environmental Anthropology and Archaeology courses provide an ideal venue for teasing apart concepts such as causation and correlation, and I use curricula as a platform for learning how to accurately interpret scale, data values, and axes in visual plots. If establishing the appropriate bin size for plotting the lengths of Neolithic handaxes seems an inane task, I remind students that, at times, presidential elections and state-level propositions are won (and lost) due to public interpretation of simple visualizations of data.

An important part of teaching Anthropology and Environmental Studies is pursuing and nurturing intellectual diversity. As a researcher in environmental archaeology, it is important for me to acknowledge and provide students with a variety of perspectives on course themes. Reconstructions of ancient human impacts on landscapes are especially relevant to real-world problems we struggle with today; for example, I have seen evidence of ancient human-caused deforestation presented in popular media as ethical justification of landscape destruction we cause today. New approaches in historical ecology are prompting conversation biologists, as well as archaeologists, to redefine “baseline ecological health” and reconsider the efficacy of time-honored environmental protection efforts. As a teacher, I strive to support a neutral environment in which students can delve into an objective examination of the social, political, economic, and cultural threads that connect human activities with environmental change. With this “historical ecology” approach, students in my Archaeology of Los Angeles course reported developing a richer appreciation for less-visible groups who built Southern California—as well as the historically-situated perspectives that reduced these groups’ contemporaneous and future visibilities.

Through my own experience as both student and teacher, I have found that a strong sense of shared purpose goes a long way in fostering participation and inclusion, particularly with diverse student populations. I demonstrate my desire for mutual respect by maintaining administrative transparency regarding the purposes of assignments and assessments. Students often gain a deeper appreciation for the writing process when they understand the purpose of a five-page comparison of two journal articles is not so-called “busy work” but an opportunity for them to learn inference and argumentation. (“How are archaeological narratives crafted before making the jump to *National Geographic*? Let’s find out!”) I remind students that even in-class writing assessments are not arcane punitive measures. Papers and essay exams allow me to evaluate students’ integration and creative application of core concepts, but they also enable students to practice efficient argumentation and writing skills that will serve them beyond college.

I actively create a comfortable, collaborative learning environment that encourages students to become well-grounded participants in these critical dialogues. I like to begin a term by articulating my own intellectual background and facilitating group discussion of students’ backgrounds and inclinations. Anthropology has become an intensely multidisciplinary discipline comprised of diverse practitioners; I make sure the student majoring in Political Science knows their academic viewpoint is not only welcome, but instrumental to our discussions. One common thread in comments on my instructor evaluations has been that I am “down to earth” and “approachable.” “clearly care about students.” and am “knowledgeable and helpful, but not arrogant.” I always strive to learn from my peers and students to become a more proficient educator, but I am pleased and encouraged to see that my teaching approach already reflects positively.