



Rethinking Archaeology Teaching Paradigms

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Introduction

As a scientific discipline, archaeology is rooted in particular colonial histories that persist into current theory and practice (Marek-Martinez 2021). However, de-colonial and anti-colonial praxis (theory into practice) have begun to re-shape the discipline's dominant norms. Amid this, canonical approaches to teaching archaeology courses in academia rely on teleological and deterministic narratives of human pasts, with little room for questioning just how it is that archaeologists *know what they "know."*

We posit that teaching archaeological knowledge as *situated* within archaeologists' identities opens possibilities for multi-vocal and pluralistic ways of knowing the past. Teaching archaeology *is* the creation of archaeological knowledge (Cobb and Croucher 2014). Accordingly, we teach archaeology courses with an emphasis on epistemological and ontological issues (Quave et al. 2021).

We have designed curricular revisions that present the archaeological sciences as ways of knowing that can be problematized and contextualized. We re-orient archaeology teaching to reflect the multivocal and multidisciplinary field it ought to be, in which competing claims must be assessed with consideration of power differences in broader social contexts. Our archaeology courses present the human past as a model of inquiry into the human future, and one which must center marginalized perspectives on human experiences to overcome the worst impacts of bias and exclusion (Flewellen et al. 2021).

Summary of our shared approaches to revising our pedagogies in archaeology

Problem	Praxis
Assuming a neutral or objective view of the human past is possible	Focus on how positionality impacts epistemology
Presenting archaeology as a list of times and places or promoting teleological band-tribe-chieftdom-state-empire	Organize courses according to socially relevant and urgent themes of (in)equality, wellbeing, climate change, and more
Presenting a positivist, scientific, and/or theoretically homogeneous discipline	Center theories from (multiply) marginalized voices in archaeology and adjacent to archaeology
Introductory courses emphasizing memorization and test-taking, relying on costly texts	Use OER (open educational resources) texts and structure course vis-à-vis UDL (universal design)
Complicating the past requires acknowledging contradictions and inadequacies in knowledge	Rely on active learning to encourage exploration and grappling with contradictions in thoughtful ways



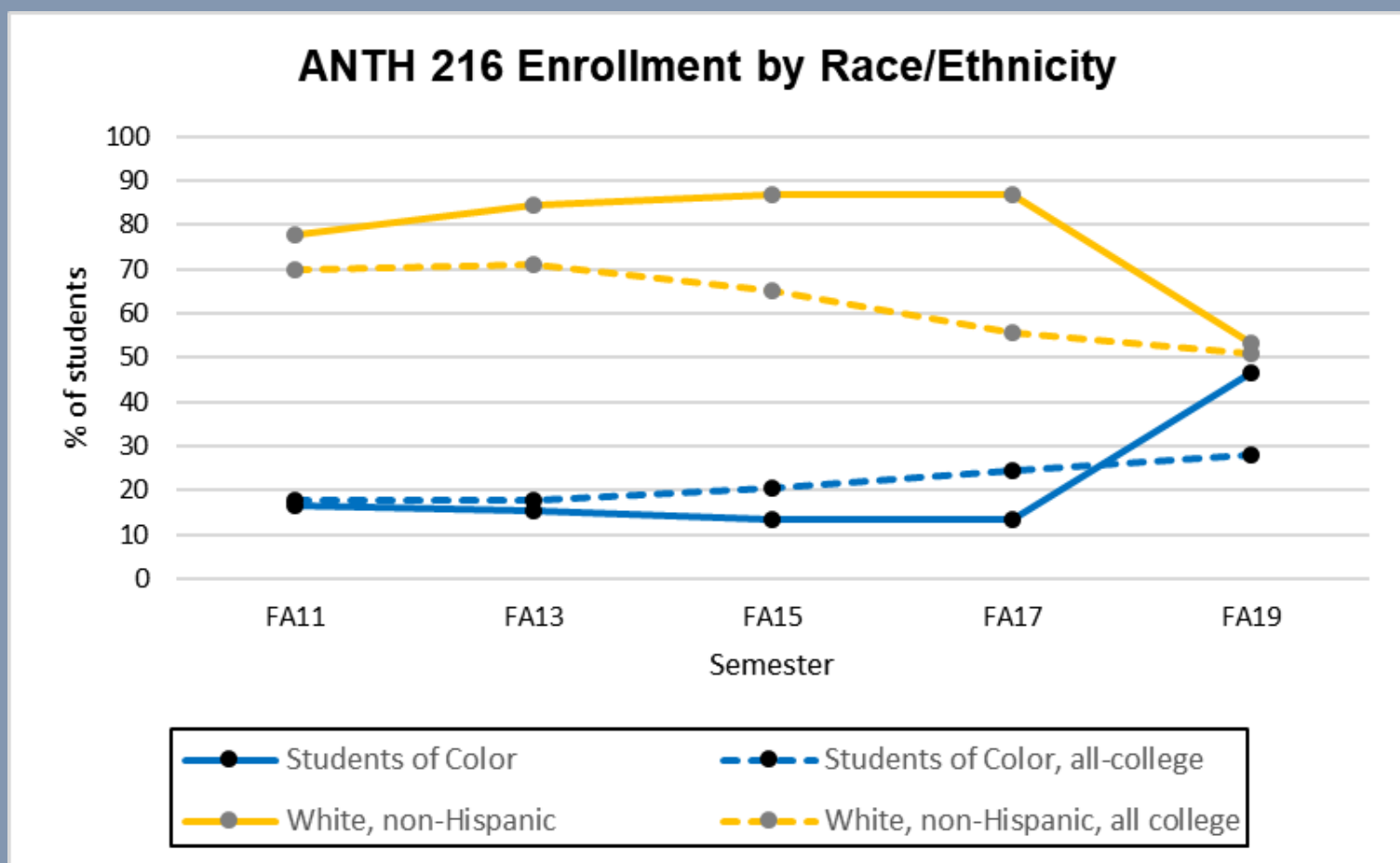
SLAC2 students actively learn on their campus, excavating slag from a midden to answer socially engaged questions about historic environmental management and sustainability.

Prior results

Not only have we documented the types of changes made to archaeology courses aligned with the above values, but we have also tracked the outcomes of the changes. Thus far, we have studied course revisions and their results at small liberal arts colleges (SLACs). All research has been subject to IRB oversight.

At SLAC1, we found that students' understanding of the field of archaeology and their place in it became more complex, applied, and socially engaged. Specifically, students were better able to articulate how some populations are harmed by archaeological research and could see archaeology's possibilities for better contributing to the future (Quave et al 2021). We hypothesize that continuing to transform students' understanding of archaeology in this direction will lead to more diverse participation in archaeology than what the field has historically seen (Heath-Stout 2020, White & Draycott 2020).

We also found at SLAC1 that the course revisions pre-empted a notable shift in the demographics of students continuing on to intermediate-level archaeology courses. More students of color began enrolling, including more women of color.



Increasing retention of students from systemically excluded and historically underrepresented identities has the potential to reshape ways of knowing in the discipline.



A student at SLAC2 discusses Indigenous ways of knowing the past during a community archaeology day organized within the course

These students recognize that they are asking epistemology-focused questions in their classes now. They report that writing a Wikipedia article about archaeology instead of taking an exam helped them see the stakes of public communication about the past; they indicate that they were motivated to convey archaeology accurately and accessibly.

Even students not planning to continue in archaeology said that the course helped them to think about larger contexts of knowledge production in their own major, as something they hadn't thought about in their prior years as an undergraduate.

Anecdotally, the instructor notes an increase in the number of students from multiply marginalized identities (especially BIPOC women) taking her course; she has not quantified this trend yet.

Challenges, resistance, & current solutions

Students at both institutions at times observed some variation on a theme that "this is an ethics course; not an archaeology course." The faculty did not explicitly frame the course as being about ethics, yet students came to this conclusion themselves. Some also expressed confusion that the course was not taught in chronological order. These challenges seem to stem from a gap between what students perceived archaeology to be before taking the course and what they encountered. Our current strategy is to explain the epistemological focus of the course and what's at stake, as well as to incorporate texts that support our approach.

We have found it difficult to motivate students to complete interviews and surveys without compensation or without being tied to a course requirement. Similar course revisions and analyses at a midsize public university enrolling 80 students (Lelièvre & Reid 2022) and at a large public university enrolling hundreds in the course (Hutchings & La Salle 2014) used reflective student writing responses assigned as coursework. Faculty can make the surveys and interviews part of their assignments instead. And we are seeking funding to compensate students for their time and effort.

Applying the epistemological focus beyond the initial studies

Those of us developing textbooks and workbooks can prioritize contributions to OER resources (see Soluri & Agarwal's biological anthropology supplementary text) and write introductory texts that undo the paradigm of "mainstream" versus "alternative" ways of knowing. Not only can we choose texts that produce the archaeology we want to see, but we can also create them.

Another major challenge is how to scale up these course revisions for those teaching at larger institutions. It can be difficult to undo the lecture mold when teaching hundreds of students. We hope to gain insights from those teaching larger course sizes on how they have already addressed these issues in those contexts. And we hope to collaborate with other institutions to pilot experimental methods that fit the values we espouse. We are also seeking funding for all of the above for both archaeology and biological anthropology introductory courses.

Current research

In 2022 we began surveys and interviews with students in introductory and intermediate-level archaeology courses at SLAC2. Those courses adopted similar pedagogical strategies as the revised course at SLAC1. Preliminary results indicate enhanced student understanding of what's at stake with archaeology and how it can be leveraged as a social good.

Next steps

We are currently seeking funding to expand partnerships (e.g., community colleges, minority-serving institutions, & larger universities)



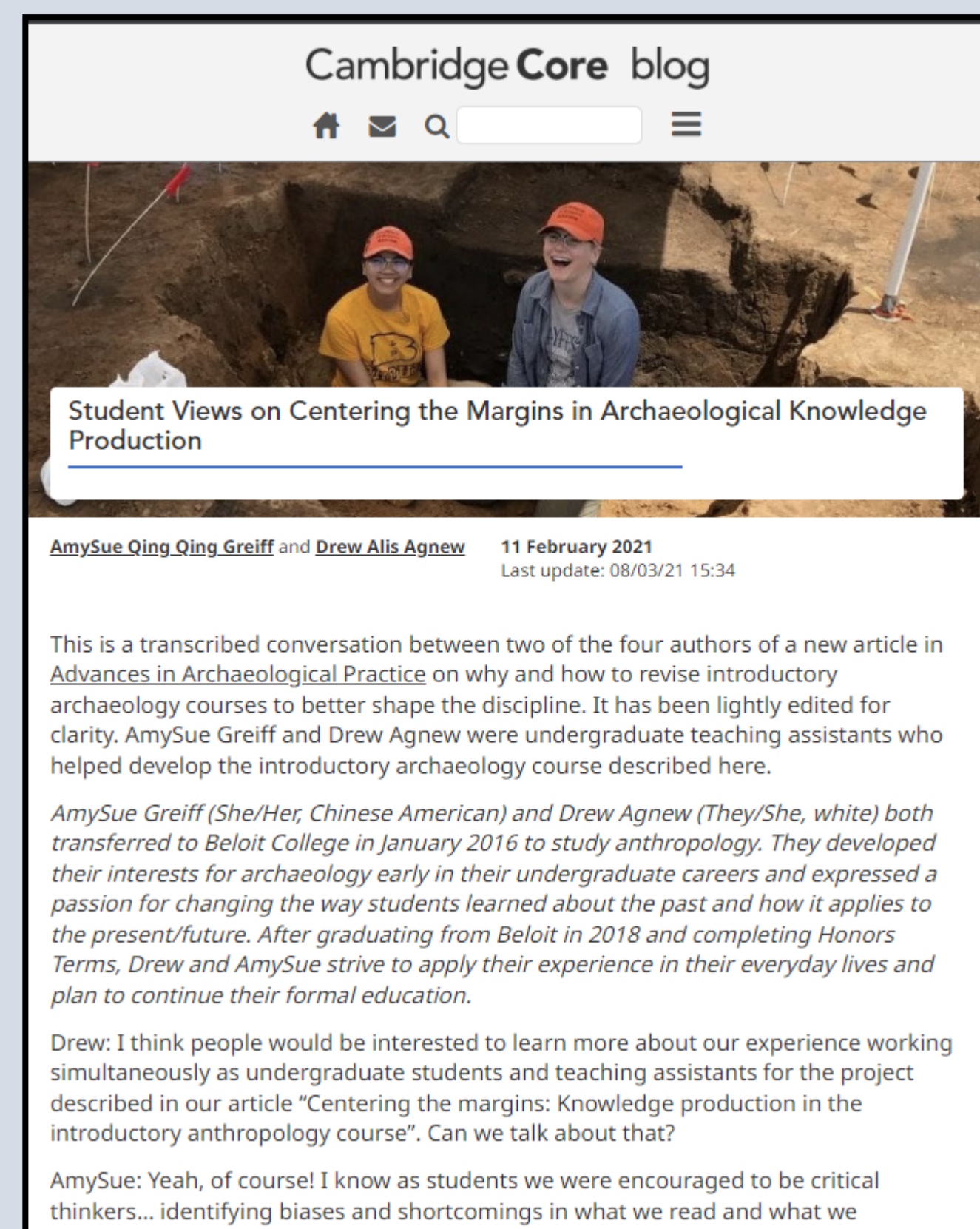
Funding would compensate faculty and undergraduate mentees from underrepresented backgrounds to co-create materials and systematically study the impacts of revisions



As we teach archaeology and as we write archaeology, we choose how to tell the (not single) story of the past.



Scan this QR code to find our pilot study in *Advances in Archaeological Practice*, with a large collection of supplementary materials



Co-creation of curricular materials with undergraduates are one route to campus-specific revisions that can re-orient archaeological knowledge production. We are seeking funding to compensate students and faculty in these partnerships (Greiff and Agnew 2021).



Follow this QR code to **sign up for project updates and/or collaborate with us**

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