

Sam Sweitz – Personal Statement

Research Interests

I am currently an Associate Professor of Anthropology and Archaeology at Michigan Technological University, where I have been teaching for the past eight years (including an initial one year appointment as a post-doctoral associate). I am an anthropologically trained archaeologist interested in the impact that the global historical process of industrialization has had on past individuals, societies, and environments and the meaning and relevance of those changes to contemporary people. I am particularly interested in issues related to the evolving articulations created through colonialism, the rise and spread of a capitalist world-economy, and the social, economic, and political processes of globalization. I apply a range of multidisciplinary approaches drawn from anthropology and across the social sciences in order to interpret societal organization and change within the context of the increasing global articulation of individuals, cultures, and environments that has characterized the modern-era. In particular I am interested in how these processes, when viewed from the evolutionary perspective of an archaeology that draws from mixed anthropological methodologies and integrated theoretical frameworks, might inform and provide equitable solutions to contemporary societal issues.

In recent years my research agenda has come to reflect a contemporary archaeological approach, i.e. the application of traditional, empirically based archaeological methods and practices to understanding and explaining the contemporary world, informed by a critical social theory that integrates diverse social science approaches in order to critique and change social circumstances through historically informed solutions to local social problems. Essential to such an approach is recognition of the local social mechanisms that have influenced and insured long-term flexibility and adaptability in response to changes in economic activities, market structures, and government policy at the regional, national, and international levels over the long-term. The diverse viewpoints that comprise past and contemporary “local” stakeholder perspectives (intersected by historically informed conceptions of gender, class, ethnicity, race, etc.) need to be explored as fundamental factors in the construction of social knowledge, practice, and identity, the understanding of which is fundamental to identifying and implementing sustainable and equitable solutions to “local” problems. Ultimately, my

work in archaeology is predicated in the belief that our past informs our present and that locally sustainable futures (economically, environmentally, and culturally) are only possible if they honor and build on the experiences and strengths of the past, as a way to empower individuals and communities in the present and future.

I am currently collaborating on a National Science Foundation sponsored investigation, which represents the approach I have described above. Our NSF- Partnerships for International Research and Education (PIRE) project is broadly interested in bioenergy development and sustainability in Latin America and involves scholars from multiple academic units at Michigan Tech, along with researchers from 15 universities and institutions from the United States, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina. The growing global demand for sustainably produced bioenergy and biofuels in many ways has reinvigorated the long-standing articulations between agribusiness and consumers in the global north and ecosystem services and human populations in the global south, echoing earlier plantation systems and dependent relationships that have developed during the modern-era. As the Socioeconomic subteam leader and Mexico case study lead, the five year NSF grant includes my development of a research project in Yucatán utilizing archaeological research (framed in a community archaeology approach), along with ethnohistorical, ethnographic, and participatory action research methodologies in direct partnership with local communities to evaluate issues of sustainability related to land tenure, labor rights, water rights, and the security of local food systems from an evolutionary historical perspective, as part of a larger program to understand the complex social issues related to proposed and ongoing sustainable bioenergy initiatives in the region.

More widely, my research interests revolve around two broad and interrelated lines of inquiry that guide a larger unified program of research focused on the development and spread of global articulations in the modern-era. The first area of inquiry examines the archaeological and historical record to reveal how the local is articulated with larger global processes associated with the rise of a capitalist world-economy. My research examining this historical perspective has incorporated archaeological, ethnohistorical, and documentary evidence to examine how particular sites represent the increasing interconnections between people and places within a globalizing world. This approach is best represented in my recently published book, *On the Periphery of the Periphery: Household Archaeology at Hacienda San Juan Bautista Tabi, Yucatán, México*, which examines archaeological

and historical evidence related to the rise of the hacienda system in Yucatán as part of international commodity chains and the institution's impact on the socioeconomic lives of Mayan laborers.

The second, integrated area of inquiry examines past social formations as a way of informing contemporary debates regarding present and future social issues. My research in this area incorporates the use of ethnography, action research, and critical social theory in order to examine topics related particularly to contemporary industrial communities, including the construction and negotiation of working-class identities, industrial heritage, and place, as well as issues related to cultural, economic, and environmental sustainability in both evolving industrial landscapes, as well as post-industrial landscapes. This perspective is at the heart of the Central Aguirre Research Project I am currently directing in Puerto Rico and part of the NSF project I am developing in Yucatán. As I briefly mentioned above, this Yucatán project will utilize anthropological and archaeological methodologies in direct partnership with local communities to evaluate the impact of renewed agro-industrial production and issues of local sustainability contextualized within the long-term historical circumstances that have shaped local social systems and stakeholder perceptions related to key socio-economic issues related to the environment and land-use. This work will incorporate and extend the archaeological and historical research I previously conducted at Hacienda Tabi, Yucatán related to the development of inequalities and exploitation engendered by the articulation of local communities within global networks.

As a scholar I have balanced my personal research interests with collaborative efforts dedicated to programmatic growth and the strengthening of existing research programs within the Department of Social Sciences, as well as across academic units at Michigan Tech and among our international partners (e.g. NSF-PIRE and NSF-RCN funded Pan American bioenergy sustainability research). As a result I have coordinated my research interests and activities between departmental projects, such as the West Point Foundry Project in Cold Spring, New York and our local Cliff Mine Project here in the Keweenaw (both projects having significant public archaeology components), with research related to my area expertise in Latino cultures of Latin America and the Caribbean, particularly in Yucatán, Mexico and in Puerto Rico.

Teaching and Service

Michigan Tech is a research university oriented toward the STEM fields. The Department of Social Sciences ensures that students across disciplines develop critical thinking and communication skills informed by a holistic, cross-cultural, and culturally relativistic, multidisciplinary approach. In my position as an Associate Professor of Anthropology and Archaeology I contribute specifically to our undergraduate majors, in Anthropology, History, and the Social Sciences, as well as to our graduate programs in Industrial Archaeology (MS), Industrial Archaeology and Heritage (PhD), and Environmental and Energy Policy (MS and PhD). More broadly, I also teach multidisciplinary and general education courses presenting the varied methodological and theoretical frameworks of the social sciences, reflective of our diverse degree programs within the Department of Social Sciences, to students across the university.

In my current position as an Associate Professor of Anthropology and Archaeology I contribute specifically to our undergraduate majors, including Anthropology, History, and the Social Sciences, as well as our graduate programs in Industrial Archaeology (MS), Industrial Archaeology and Heritage (PhD), and Environmental and Energy Policy (MS and PhD). These efforts include funded research and discovery-based learning opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students in the form of MS and PhD theses, undergraduate Anthropology senior theses, classroom research projects, and summer field schools associated with local, national, and international based research projects, including my ongoing work in Yucatán and Puerto Rico. I am currently serving or have served over the past seven years as an advisor or committee member on 17 Master's and Doctoral committees in the Department of Social Sciences, as well as in the Humanities Department and the Department of Geological and Mining Engineering. In addition, I have served as an advisor on 6 undergraduate Anthropology Senior Theses since the inception of this degree requirement in 2008.

I have developed a series of undergraduate lower division survey and upper division seminar courses designed to contribute to diversity through global literacy and global learning for both Social Science majors and students across campus. These courses include *World Peoples and Environments*, *Prehistory and Archaeology*, *Latin American Culture and History*, *Global Change in Culture and Society since 1400*, *Method and Theory in Archaeology*, and *Global Issues* (formerly taught as *World Cultures*). In addition to these

courses I actively mentor undergraduate students as an advisor for anthropology senior theses and I serve as the faculty advisor to the campus Anthropology Society.

At the graduate level I teach the *Historical Archaeology* seminar required of all Masters Students (and recommended for PhD students) in the program and I have mentored eight students through individually developed directed study courses. I am currently serving or have served as an advisor (3) or committee member (14) on 17 Master's and Doctoral committees in the Department of Social Sciences, as well as in the Department of Humanities and Geological and Mining Engineering. I have directed four field seasons of research in Puerto Rico that to date have resulted in a Master's thesis (with one in progress), an Anthropology Senior Thesis, and five publications that are either in print (2), accepted (2), or are in preparation (1), as well as a book manuscript on this research that is currently in preparation. I have also been conducting ongoing research in Yucatán since 1996, a program of research that will be expanded as the result of recent NSF funding. In addition, since my appointment I have collaboratively taught our department's annual archaeology field schools, which serve both our undergraduate and graduate students, as well as students from other departments and from other universities. I have co-directed the field school with Dr. Timothy Scarlett for the last three field seasons at the local Cliff Mine Site and I previously collaborated on the departmental field school, the West Point Foundry Project (2005-2008) in Cold Spring, New York.

One specific course I have designed will serve as an example of how I link my scholarly interests, larger program of research, teaching/mentoring, and curriculum development. *Global Change in Culture and Society since 1400* is an upper division undergraduate seminar that explores themes representing the increasing interconnectedness of world cultures and economies after 1400 from the perspective of the social sciences. These themes include imperialism and colonialism, dependency and underdevelopment, agency and resistance, neo-colonialism, and globalization, among others, themes which are examined using theoretical approaches such as the *Annales* School and total history, world-systems theory, colonial and post-colonial discourse, practice theory, critical social theory, and others frameworks that social scientists employ in examining the Modern-era. The content and approach of the course incorporates discovery-based learning to encourage students to understand the relevance of the historical past in understanding contemporary issues and their own role in the modern world-system in which all exist.

In this course I frequently draw upon historically particular examples taken from my own research projects involving Michigan Tech graduate and undergraduate student-collaborators, with examples ranging from historical to contemporary social examples distributed across the Americas. Students in the course develop an ability to formulate ideas, organize arguments, and communicate varied perspectives through a variety of skill building exercises that range from leading in-class reading discussions, writing response papers, making presentations of research, completing essay exams, creating annotated bibliographies, creating discussion questions and comments, take home essay exams, and research papers. This is one of my favorite courses to teach and I am always pleasantly surprised by the connections students are able to make between aspects of the historical past and their own lives.

Although much of the feedback I receive from students concerning my effectiveness as a professor is anecdotal, I think there are several informal measures that suggest students view me as being an effective teacher and advisor. First, in the seven years I have been a tenured / tenure track member of the Department of Social Sciences I have been asked to serve as an advisor or committee member on 23 graduate and undergraduate committees. Second, over the same period of time I have taught 15 directed study or directed readings courses, for both graduate and undergraduate students, designed to explore specific topics on which my expertise was valued by the student. Third, when our undergraduate anthropology majors organized an anthropological society on campus they asked me to serve as their faculty advisor, which I was honored to accept. When I combine these observations with the numerous conversations I have had with undergraduate and graduate students from both within and outside the department, I am encouraged by their expressions of appreciation for the subject matter, level of instruction, and their overall learning outcomes they feel they have achieved. These anecdotes primarily reflect my teaching effectiveness within the department and among our majors.

At the university level I am involved with the continuing development and assessment of our university global literacy and global learning initiatives, both within the general education curriculum and as part of university-wide learning goals. In service to this mission I am currently the Coordinator of the Global Issues Steering Committee, in charge of the development, administration, and assessment of the new Global Issues course; a course designed to introduce students to the fundamentals of cultural awareness, knowledge, and engagement, serving as the

cornerstone of a newly revamped university general education curriculum. Furthermore, I am currently the Chair of the Global Learning Committee, the committee responsible for developing a university-wide initiative for introducing and assessing global literacy pathways within the curricula of all departments and programs at the university. The global literacy and global learning initiatives are at the core of the university's diversity mission, working toward the promotion and development of qualities, aptitudes, and abilities that enable students to acquire a critical understanding of their own cultural rules and biases, as well as those of other cultures, related to history, politics, economy, values, beliefs, and practices.

I am also currently a member of the Department of Social Sciences Web Development Committee. I have served on search committees for two faculty positions and a Department Chair search. At the university level, I have also participated as a reviewer for the Research Excellence Fund – Seed Grant Proposal review committee, a program which funds promising faculty research initiatives across the university, and as a cognate reviewer for the Strategic Faculty Hiring Initiative in Water and Transportation. Previously I served as the department representative on the Graduate Faculty Council for four years. Outside the department and university, I am a member of the Communications Editors' Advisory Committee (CEAC) of the Society for Historical Archaeology, serving as special liaison to the Public Education and Interpretation Committee (PEIC). I have also served as a referee for manuscripts from the University Press of Florida, *IA: The Journal of Industrial Archaeology*, and for Freeman Publishing