

## Flora Lu Teaching Statement (2010–11)

There are many characteristics of an outstanding teacher, from the ability to incorporate innovative teaching methods to sharp attention to the structure and organization of a course. Of these, however, I believe that three characteristics are central. The first is a great enthusiasm, if not passion, for the topic. The saying that “teaching is not about filling a jug but about lighting a fire” embodies this characteristic. The second trait is the willingness to invest in students and to have a vested interest in their learning. The assistance one provides in the learning experience of others is an important part of his or her legacy as an academic and contribution to a discipline and to society. Third, an outstanding teacher should of course have an extensive knowledge of the material and commitment to share this knowledge with others. Especially in ecological and anthropological studies, one’s work may have important implications to real-world situations and should be made accessible.

As an Ecological Anthropologist, my teaching and research examines the complexities of the human/environment interrelationship through the lenses of human evolutionary ecology, political ecology, human ecology and environmental justice. Many of my students enroll in my courses out of their concern for the present-day ecological crisis. My objectives as an instructor are to (1) convey the importance of interdisciplinary, historically informed approaches to understanding these challenges; (2) problematize the nature/culture divide and other fallacies of dichotomous thinking; (3) demonstrate the similarities as well as differences between human societies in their biological, social and cultural traits; and (4) emphasize the importance of considering issues of equity, power, identity, and hierarchy when understanding and addressing environmental issues. I convey these lessons through tangible examples drawn from my research sites in Native Amazonian communities in northeastern Ecuador and the increasingly urbanized inhabited zones of the Galapagos Islands, both epicenters of conservation concern and socio-political conflict.

### Concrete Tools and Approaches

I believe that students learn and retain knowledge better if they are actively engaged with the material on multiple levels, are held responsible to conveying that information to others, and are given waypoints along their journey of knowledge. To achieve these goals, I utilize such methods as:

- **Lecturing outlines:** when giving a lecture, I begin with a “map” of the talk and the ideas that I will cover in the order I will cover them. This gives students an overview of the lecture and a clearer grasp

of how it will be organized for more effective listening and note taking.

- **Reading objectives:** when I assign monographs, I give students a list of concepts they should be able to define and questions they should be able to answer after perusing the book. This avoids the frustration where students wonder, “What should I be getting out of the reading?”
- **Student-led discussion:** I ask students to pair up and lead class discussion on the assigned reading. Often they are expected to do outside research on related works and present them to the class, then come up with questions to start a more general discussion.
- **Student presentation:** students will either be asked to research and lecture for a class period as a team, or will present their term paper, research proposal, or honors thesis individually. I feel that one of the skills students should hone for their future endeavors is public speaking.
- **Cooperative learning:** another important life skill I try to encourage is the ability to work collaboratively with others. I elaborate more on this in the context of service learning, below.
- **Role play:** when I am teaching common property theory to my class, and need to explain the “Prisoner’s Dilemma,” I ask for students to volunteer to act out this game theory exercise, with them playing the role of prisoners being held for questioning, and me acting as a police detective trying to get them to confess.
- **Visual and interactive materials:** In my lectures, I regularly use Powerpoint slides, graphics, and pictures and show a few minutes of a documentary video to transport my students to another place and time or to put a human face to the concepts I am teaching. This even goes so far as to bring implements; when I lecture about Huaorani hunting, for example, I will often bring skulls of favorite Neotropical prey species as well as my blowgun and demonstrate its power by shooting a balloon across the room (no students have ever been harmed in such a demonstration).

### **Linking Classroom and Community through Pedagogy**

Service learning is a pedagogical model that connects meaningful community service experiences with academic course learning; it has been called “education in action.” It plays an integral role in the way in which I teach my course, “Environmental Justice,” which examines issues of equity, ethnicity, and economic power in environmental decision-making, seeking to uncover why, at the local, national, and international levels, people of color and impoverished communities bear the burden of environmental pollution. I have taught versions of this course at Stanford, UNC, and UCSC, each time adapting the course to reflect local Environmental Justice (EJ) issues and organizations. And at each

institution, I have successfully acquired internal funding (e.g., from the Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education and the HAAS Center for Public Service at Stanford, the Ueltschi Service Learning Grant at UNC, and through CAAD Diversity funds at UCSC). These funds have enabled me to bring community activists to campus and take students beyond campus boundaries to visit an urban gardening project in San Francisco, a working organic farm in western NC, and “toxics tours” of East Palo Alto and Daly City. Since 2000, I have collaborated with a dozen community partner organizations in CA and NC to design and implement service learning projects, from a investigative report on the CA Air Quality Management District and toxic waste facility ROMIC for East Palo Alto’s Youth United for Community Action, to posters and brochures outlining new methods for the treatment of hog waste for the Concerned Citizens of Tillery, NC, whose members are surrounded by industrial confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs). In addition to a variety of deliverables such as reports, posters, blogs and reflection papers, my service learning students have produced a publication (Street Forum) on EJ, hosted three EJ symposia bringing together campus and community folks, started UNC’s first student-led organization on food justice issues (FLO Food: Fair, Local, Organic), and won the Robert E. Bryan Public Service Award (UNC, 2008). At UCSC, for my EJ service learning projects, I have partnered with CASFS (Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems), Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice (San Francisco), and Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition (see syllabus submitted to CTL for my [LALS 164: Environmental Justice](#) course taught Spring 2011).

### **Mentoring**

Finally, some of my most important teaching is not done in front of a classroom, but one-on-one through my advising and mentoring. Drawing on my own experience, I am committed to demonstrating the kind of exemplary mentorship that has been so formative to my career. In the 2.5 years I have been at UCSC, I have advised about a dozen LALS students and have worked more closely with six undergraduates on their senior thesis projects. Let me give you an example of one of these students, Caitlin Doughty (ENVS class of 2010). Caitlin took my LALS 164 course, “Environmental Justice,” in Spring 2009 and audited my LALS 167 course, “Amazonian Societies and the Environment,” that same term. She became interested in the topic of indigenous peoples and petroleum extraction in the Amazon, and I suggested that she undertake independent field research and a senior thesis. With funding from the Freitas Award and Hammett Grant from ENVS, in December of 2009, Caitlin traveled to the Ecuadorian Amazon to conduct her fieldwork in the Huaorani community of Gareno. I accompanied her for the entirety of her fieldwork in the Ecuadorian Amazon to assure her safety, introduce her to indigenous families I have known for almost 20 years, and facilitate data

collection. Throughout the fieldwork, analysis, and write-up, I worked closely with Caitlin, providing her access to data from my National Science Foundation project to complement the information she collected. Caitlin's senior thesis, "Petroleum Extraction, Markets, and Connection to Place: A Comparative Study of Two Huaorani Communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon," won the 2010 Steck Award for Finest Undergraduate thesis at UCSC. In addition, she wrote and is first author on a publication:

Caitlin Doughty, Flora Lu, and Mark Sorensen. 2010. "Crude, Cash and Culture Change: The Huaorani of Amazonian Ecuador." *Consilience, the Journal of Sustainable Development* 3(1): 18-32.