

Sustaining the Culture and Traditional Ecological Knowledge of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band

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Provost's Sustainability Internship Program
Amah Mutsun Relearning Program
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Abstract

The Amah Mutsun Relearning Program (AMRP) aids the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band (AMTB) in relearning the indigenous knowledge that was lost during colonization, including the knowledge pertaining to culture, ecology, and environmental sustainability. Located at the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum, the AMRP is not only a place for tribal members to congregate and practice their ways, but for students and the wider Santa Cruz community to learn about the consequences of colonization that continue to this day. In order to disseminate this knowledge, my role as a part of this program has primarily consisted of outreach. This has been realized through social media platforms as well as through the creation of an informative documentary. The film is not only made up of interview footage of AMTB members, but also of members of the Waorani tribe of the Ecuadorian Amazon. This form of media is being used as a conversation between the two groups who are sharing their cultural history, as well as the ways in which colonization has affected them. While the AMTB faced colonization during the California Mission Period, the Waorani are currently facing their own by way of oil exploitation and land degradation. This dialogue is bringing together two groups of people in different parts of the world, allowing them to converse and discuss their similarities.

Introduction Problem Definition, Context & Background:

The Amah Mutsun Relearning Program (AMRP) at the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum is a shared effort between the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band (AMTB) and the Arboretum to aid the AMTB in their endeavors of regaining cultural and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), in addition to actualizing environmental sustainability and justice. The AMRP also assists tribal members in relearning the ethnobotany of native Californian plants and traditional resource and environmental management (TREM). The Arboretum provides all of the members of the Tribe with a place to communally gather and implement all of the aforementioned practices, and is a resource for UC Santa Cruz students and the Santa Cruz community to acquire information about “the importance of indigenous cultures and their knowledge, the history and contemporary issues of the AMTB, [...] and California Indian lifeways – and how these relate to contemporary efforts to restore degraded landscapes in California” (“Amah Mutsun Relearning Program,” 2017).

Due to the effects of colonization stemming from the Mission Period, the Mexican Period, and the American Period, the members of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band have lost much of their TEK, as well as their sense of unity as a tribe. Currently, the Tribe is seeking federal recognition for their ancestral land, to regain what was lost during the period of enslavement that was endured (“Amah Mutsun Tribal Band,” 2017). In order to bring back and sustain this knowledge and way of life, it is essential to communicate and practice as many as these traditions as possible, ensuring that they are passed onto future generations. Once again, the Arboretum and the AMRP are allowing this to become a reality, by means of localized projects.

One contemporary approach that the AMRP is taking under the auspices of Dr. Flora Lu involves further learning about the effects of colonization on indigenous livelihoods in differing parts of the world (Lu, Valdivia, & Silva, 2017). Dr. Lu is the Provost of Colleges Nine and Ten

at UCSC, and is an Associate Professor in the Department of Environmental Sciences. Specializing in Ecological Anthropology, her studies focus on the interrelationships between human societies and the natural environments in which they live, more specifically in the Amazon rainforest. Once again, under her backing and that of the Amah Mutsun Relearning Program, a project was developed to disseminate knowledge about this topic.

The efforts between Dr. Lu and the Relearning Program aim to teach the AMTB and the Waorani Tribe of the Ecuadorian Amazon about land loss and its relationship to TEK. A documentary consisting of interviews that were conducted on members of both tribal groups has been created, putting them in conversation, and is thus demonstrating the parallels between their lives. This film is allowing the AMTB to share their stories of colonization and the effects it has had on daily life, identity formation, and TEK, in addition to giving the Waorani advice on how to deal with repercussions of the present-day colonization that they are experiencing by means of oil exploitation and land loss. Both groups have been shown versions of the film, and their reactions have been extremely positive.

Project Description:

- *Goal statement:*

My goal, with the help of Rick Flores, the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, and the staff at the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum, has been to further improve the quality and accessibility of the Amah Mutsun Relearning Program. The primary ways in which this has been and will continue to be accomplished include increasing the visibility of the Relearning Program by means of social media outreach, and enhancing the awareness of the history and present day status of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band through a cultural and environmental context. At this point in the academic year, social media platforms have been developed and are close to being publicized, events involving members of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and the Santa Cruz community have been put on, and a film linking the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band to the Waorani people of the Ecuadorian Amazon has been produced. I hope to continue working with this program even this school year comes to an end, and help to further advance its scope of outreach.

- *Project objectives:*

An overarching goal for this year was to increase the visibility of AMTB and all things related to it throughout the Santa Cruz community and across the UCSC campus. Some of the objectives planned in September have been accomplished, while others are in progress or are going to be reevaluated and undertaken at a later date. The creation of more of a social media presence and the improvement of outreach is an integral part of this plan. While initially this was mainly viewed as the establishment and launch of a Facebook page, it has now been discovered that establishing a “presence” and developing the reach of the program’s mission does not need to solely be through online platforms; it can be accomplished through outreach and networking in person. I had envisioned that the Facebook would be up and running right away, but this has

not been the case. While my mentor, Rick, and I are much closer to publishing the finalized page, it still has not gone live yet. It has been a very lengthy process collecting all of the information we want to provide the public, as has been receiving consent and following all necessary protocols. We also view this as an ongoing project that has the potential to take off in the future, and since we had more pressing projects to get done and other deadlines to meet, we were not so rushed with this form of outreach.

Through the PSI class, objectives such as expanding the use of the program within UCSC departments and classes as well as tabling at campus-wide events have been realized. Other goals, such as redesigning the flyer for the AMRP, and working with grant agencies and writing grants are projects that will be taken on in the future, perhaps with the next AMRP intern. Despite not having completed all of the objectives that we had planned, my mentor and I do not see this as a loss or defeat. This is because we were able to accomplish ones that we considered to be pivotal; objectives that we viewed as very connected to the work that ended up taking place. For example, we met with various tribal members, such as Chairman Valentin Lopez, and coordinated events with the tribe as a whole. The Wellness Gathering that we were graciously invited to in April was the most influential and significant event of this year's internship. This meeting that members hold approximately once a month gives them a chance to get together to learn about their history, culture, and practices, in addition to discuss any problems or upcoming happenings.

At this gathering, Rick and I had the chance to meet and speak with everyone, but more importantly, we presented the documentary or film that we created. This film was the focus of my internship, and many hours were dedicated to creating it. In fact, it was actually the continuation of a project that I began in 2015 under Dr. Flora Lu and her research team, one of

the members being my mentor, Rick Flores. Moreover, this film has directly been a way to increase cultural awareness within a sustainable context or dialogue. As previously stated, it is connecting two indigenous tribes that live in different parts of the world, yet have something pivotal in common: colonization and its effects on peoples' ways of life. The bulk of the work that I began in 2015 concerned transcribing and translating the Waorani interviews that Dr. Lu's team had conducted in Ecuador the year prior (in addition to data analysis), and continued through this year with the transcriptions of the Amah Mutsun interviews conducted by Rick. While this may seem like a straightforward and simple task, it requires hours worth of work—quarters worth of work. The subsequent step in this process was to choose which portions of the interview footage would make sense to use, and was followed by the actual editing process (which even included conducting more interviews and recording voiceovers in Spanish). By the end of May 2017, versions of the film were shown to both tribes; a version in English to the Amah Mutsun and a version in Spanish to the Waorani. Once again, Rick and I presented the Amah Mutsun with the film at the Wellness Gathering, while Flora did so to the Waorani when she traveled to Ecuador.

- *Impact/needs statement:*

As a whole, the AMRP assists the members of the AMTB in regaining and relearning some of the cultural and ecological knowledge that was lost during colonization. It also teaches the public more about those who inhabited California before its current residents, and the history and present-day status of the Amah Mutsun. The primary project that I worked on this year while interning for the AMRP, the film, is teaching both indigenous groups involved about their stories of colonization, and the environmental consequences that

have come of it. Hopefully the advice that the Amah Mutsun give the Waorani empowers them, and helps them to overcome their colonization in some way, shape or form.

Project Timeline:

Fall 2015: Began research with Flora Lu and her team

- Transcription of Waorani interviews
- Translation of Waorani interviews

Winter and Spring 2016

- Research and data collection
- Dissemination reports

Fall 2016: Became an intern for the Amah Mutsun Relearning Program through the Provost's Sustainability Internship Program

- 10/8: Attended 2nd annual Santa Cruz County History Fair and tabled for the Amah Mutsun Relearning Program
- Transcription of Amah Mutsun interviews
- Networking: getting to know tribal members, those involved with the Environmental Studies department and those involved with the Amah Mutsun Relearning Program and the Arboretum
- Social media outreach: Facebook planning
- Research and working towards updating/bettering the program as a whole
- Weekly meetings with my mentor

Winter 2017

- Began film editing
- Finished film editing (first version for the Amah Mutsun)
- Networking: getting to know tribal members
- Social media outreach: Facebook planning
- Research and working towards updating/bettering the program as a whole
- Weekly meetings with my mentor and peer/tribal member volunteering with the film

Spring 2017

- 4/2: Attended Amah Mutsun Wellness Gathering in Fresno and presented the film/conducted more interviews
- Created more versions of the film (second version for the Waorani and edited and updated the previous version)
- 5/5: Flora traveled to Ecuador to present the film to the Waorani
- 5/26: Event/tour at the Arboretum with tribal members and staff of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History
- Weekly meetings with my mentor

Project Stakeholders, Student & Mentor Roles:

The following organizations, people, and grants were all involved in my internship and final projects in one way or another (they are not listed in any specific order). I would like to thank them for their contributions and support. Without them, the work undertaken during the last two years would not have been possible.

- University of California, Santa Cruz
- Amah Mutsun Relearning Program at the UCSC Arboretum
- Provost's Sustainability Internship (PSI) Program
- Amah Mutsun Tribal Band: Chairman Val Lopez and the members interviewed and featured in the film
- Waorani Tribe and the Gareno and Guiyero communities: the members interviewed and featured in the film
- Dr. Flora Lu: Provost of Colleges Nine and Ten and Associate Professor in the Environmental Studies Department, creator and facilitator of project linking the Amah Mutsun and the Waorani
- Rick Flores: Steward of the Amah Mutsun Relearning Program, mentor for the PSI Program, Graduate Student in the UCSC Environmental Studies Department, researcher
- Sherine Ebadi: Graduate Student in the UC Berkeley Geography Department, researcher
- Julisa Lopez: Undergraduate Student at UCSC and Amah Mutsun Tribal Band member
- Research sponsored by the National Science Foundation (NSF) Cultural Anthropology Research Experience for Graduates (REG) grant

Measurable Results:

Metrics for Success

Category #1: Amah Mutsun-Waorani Movie

- Over 20 interviews translated and transcribed
- 100 hours completing all components (transcriptions, analysis, editing footage over a two-year span, since this has been an ongoing project)
- Over 50 tribal members (both Amah Mutsun and Waorani) have viewed this video, in addition to various Ecuadorian organizations and researchers

Category #2: Social Media Outreach and Networking

- # of likes on the Facebook page TBD, once the page goes live
- 5 events were either put on by or involved the Amah Mutsun Relearning Program
- Over 100 people that attended events

Category #3: Outside Research and Publications

- 50 hours of research this current academic year and last academic year (this has been an ongoing project)
- 1 publication acknowledges my contributions to this project (*Oil, Revolution, and Indigenous Citizenship in Ecuadorian Amazonia* by Flora Lu, Gabriela Valdivia, and Nestor Silva) in addition to my acknowledgment in the film itself

References

(n.d.). Retrieved May 28, 2017, from <http://amahmutsun.org/history>

(n.d.). Retrieved May 28, 2017, from <http://arboretum.ucsc.edu/education/relearning-program/>

Lu, F., Valdivia, G., & Silva, N. L. (2017). *Oil, revolution, and indigenous citizenship in Ecuadorian Amazonia*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Appendix A
Amah Mutsun-Waorani Movie: Introductory Slide

**Cross-Cultural Attitudes about Colonization and
Traditional Ecological Knowledge: From Coastal Prairies
of CA to Rainforests of Ecuador**



A conversation between the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band of
California and the Waorani of Ecuador

Appendix B Outreach and Networking: Pamphlet/Flyer for the Relearning Program

CULTIVATING NATIVE WISDOM — FOR THE FUTURE GENERATIONS

THE AMAH MUTSUN RELEARNING PROGRAM

The **Amah Mutsun Relearning Program (AMRP)** at the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum is a collaborative effort between the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band (AMTB) and the Arboretum to assist the Tribe in their efforts of cultural revitalization, recuperation and relearning of dormant cultural knowledge, and environmental justice. This unique process of relearning combines science, research of Smithsonian ethnographer John P. Harrington's interviews with Mutsun elder and tribal matriarch Ascension Solorzano, and other Mutsun members, in the late 1920s, oral histories of Amah Mutsun tribal members, and knowledge and information from surrounding California Indian tribes with similar cultures.



Tribal youth learn plant identification

The **AMRP serves multiple purposes**. First it assists in these efforts to relearn indigenous knowledge particularly as it pertains to traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), traditional resource and environmental management (TREM), and the ethnobotany of California native plants. Our California Native Conservation Gardens (CNCG) provide a place where Tribal members can relearn plant identification and uses of native plants while incorporating TEK and TREM into the growing and management of the plants which the Tribe can then sustainably harvest for cultural practices. Second, the CNCG serves as a research garden where TREM practices can be tested and the results of this research can be used to inform other collaborative projects in the area, such as the restoration work at Quiroste Valley Cultural Preserve and Pinnacles National Park; and to inform land owners and managers about the best practices to manage cultural resources for healthy and resilient ecosystems. Third, the AMRP will use interpretation and events to educate UCSC students and students of all ages, and the general public about the importance of indigenous cultures and their knowledge, the history and contemporary issues of the AMTB, ethnobotany, TEK and TREM, and California Indian



Deergrass burn at Pinnacles National Park

lifeways – and how these relate to contemporary efforts to restore degraded landscapes in California. Finally, the AMRP collaborates with the Amah Mutsun Land Trust (AMLT) and our project partners who work as allies and in solidarity with the AMTB in their efforts to restore and conserve indigenous cultural and natural resources within their traditional territories, steward their lands and waters, research TEK, and educate their tribal membership and the broader public.

While the groundwork has been laid for the Relearning Program to become a reality, there is still much to be done. Working from a comprehensive plant list provided by the Amah Mutsun, plants are being identified in the Arboretum's existing collections and collected in wild habitats. Infrastructure for the CNCG such as irrigation lines, pathways for visitors, and deer fencing need to be installed as a foundation for further development. Interpretation and educational events are being considered as methods for sharing these resources with generations to come. Funding for all efforts of the Relearning Program is being sought from public and private donors, and grant opportunities. Without the involvement of the greater community, this inclusive and unique program cannot thrive to its fullest potential as a resurgence of cultural knowledge and ecological awareness.

“A loss of species is a loss of culture.”

Valentin Lopez,
Chairman, Amah Mutsun Tribal Band



Work & Learn Gathering at the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum

The **research and educational value of this program are immense** in terms of recuperating dormant cultural knowledge, incorporating TEK into contemporary land management practices, and future collaborative efforts in conservation and preservation. Please join us in supporting the Amah Mutsun Relearning Program at the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum today!

Together, we can make a difference in the lives of all of our future generations — the people, the plants, the earth.

Join us in creating the Amah Mutsun Relearning Program at the UCSC Arboretum today!

Make a Donation. Visit the Arboretum's online donation form (arboretum.ucsc.edu/donate) and in the box that says “Notes or Special Instructions for your Gift” specify that your donation is for the Amah Mutsun Relearning Program.

The **AMRP** is stewarded by Rick Flores, Curator of the California Native Plant Collection, Associate of the Amah Mutsun Land Trust, and Ph.D. student in the Environmental Studies Department at UCSC.

Contact us via email: rflores@ucsc.edu

All photographs: Rick Flores



<http://arboretum.ucsc.edu/education/relearning-project>
<http://amahmutsun.org/>

Appendix C

Outside Research and Publications: an Acknowledgment in Dr. Lu's Most Recent Book

