

# Reports and Commentaries

## Terevaka.net Archaeological Outreach 2011 field report: Less is more

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Most archaeologists who work on Rapa Nui aspire, over the course of their careers, to get bigger—bigger crews, bigger excavations, bigger research questions, and bigger budgets. However, when it comes to educational outreach, this year's experience has taught us that smaller may be bigger, and less may be more.

The voracious appetite for discovery that has guided archaeological research on the island for nearly a century is often satiated at the expense of archaeological conservation, the island's residents, and the social, political, and economic development of the island as a whole.

The Terevaka.net Archaeological Outreach (TAO) program began with the 'A Pó project on Rapa Nui in 2003 with big ideas as well. Initially, each year was expected to include more Rapa Nui high school students than the previous year. Each class was expected to generate more archaeological data than the last. And over the course of

several years, the program was expected to evolve into a year-round educational mainstay on the island—pumping local students through a cultural awareness curriculum that would rapidly empower a new generation of archaeologists, politicians, entrepreneurs, and conservationists.

Some of these lofty goals have already been met. The education program has now reached more than seventy local students, three of whom have gone on to receive university degrees in archaeology or conservation. Over the course of eight years, the students have undertaken five distinct research projects—ranging from ethnographic interviews to micro-environmental analysis. Their research and data have been published on the Internet ([www.terevaka.net](http://www.terevaka.net)), in international conferences, academic journals, newspapers, film festivals, and popular magazines (Rutherford et al. 2008; Shepardson 2006, 2010; Shepardson & Torres Hochstetter 2009; Shepardson et al. 2004, 2009, 2010; Torres Hochstetter & Shepardson 2005).



Students attending an informational lecture by Dale Simpson Jr. and Britton Shepardson at Ahu Vinapu. Photograph by Rachel Gulbraa.

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Students exiting a cave at Akahanga. From left to right: Program Director Britton Shepardson; students Nicolás Barrera, Toki Hucke, Elizabeth Valdivia, Macarena Terongo, Valentina Wilkins, and Soledad Salinas. Photograph by Rachel Gulbraa.

While the specific research interests of students have changed each year, the goals of the TAO program remain intact. First, our work aims to utilize archaeology as a foundation for education and opportunity within Rapa Nui's island community. Second, our projects promote awareness and expertise in archaeology and cultural conservation. And third, we document, study, and conserve the remarkable treasures of the past that remain on Rapa Nui today.

All three high schools on the island (Colegio Hermano Eugenio Eyraud, Colegio San Sebastián de Akivi, and La Aldea Educativa) welcomed collaboration with TAO, as the standardized Chilean curriculum often neglects to expose students to the history and prehistory of their own island with any depth.

For several years, the outreach initiative has attempted to amplify the one- or two-month annual projects into a year-round curriculum. For financial reasons as well as logistical reasons, however, the year-round approach to educational outreach lacks effectiveness on the island.

In 2011, TAO piloted a new approach to educational outreach: a two-week intensive short-course. Students from the three high schools were invited to participate voluntarily in an experience that would include long days of field research and academic lectures. In order to participate, students had to be willing to sacrifice their two-week winter vacation from their regular school schedule.

Within the first half of the first week, it became clear that the new intensive approach to educational was going to be a success. Students unanimously requested to cancel the one scheduled day of rest during the entire two-week experience in favor of an extra day of field research. And over

the span of the two weeks each one of the ten participating high school students asked permission to participate in the 2012 project as well.

In an unexpected manner, the short and intensive approach to educational outreach generated more momentum for the following year than our efforts at a sustained, year-round agenda had ever produced.

At the same time, the students invested approximately 130 hours of their time studying, discussing, and exploring the culture and history of their own island. The short-course approach offered students roughly the same amount of time as students would receive if their high schools offered one hour per school day devoted exclusively to studying the island for an entire academic year.

During the two-week short-course, students elected to create a framework and foundational database to record popular modern and historic *varua* (ghost) stories on the island. The students interviewed local elders on the island, recorded their stories, and created both audio and visual presentations to accompany those stories which had been substantiated by more than one informant. Students also spent many hours in the William Mulloy Library conducting background research on island legends and the historical context of each *varua*. The preliminary results of the project can be viewed on a website that the students helped to design and create—including all original artwork—[www.terevaka.net/apo/ghosts](http://www.terevaka.net/apo/ghosts) (for the Spanish version, see: [www.terevaka.net/apo/varua](http://www.terevaka.net/apo/varua)).

When students were not working on their research project, they were at the Padre Sebastián Englert Anthropological Museum attending lectures and discussions regarding Pacific Island cultures, Rapa Nui archaeology, and cultural





The staff and students of Terevaka.net Archaeological Outreach class of 2011 in front of Ahu Nau Nau at 'Anakena Beach.

conservation. Also spread throughout the two weeks were days of sightseeing on the island—giving the majority of the students their first opportunity to see many of the archaeological remains that tourists travel from all over the world to see.

The students that expressed interest in participating again in 2012 will not be able to re-enroll as students, but they will all be invited to assist as instructors next year to foster the communication between members of the local island community that will be critical for future conservation, research, and policy design. In the meantime, the TAO initiative celebrates another year of achievement in education on the island.

Perhaps our new-found success in the intensive short-course format will come as little surprise on an island that manages to pack a year's worth of festivity and revelry into just two weeks every February for the Tapati festival. On a more serious note, our experience in 2011 might be of value to research archaeologists and other organizations hoping to plan cost-effective long-term projects on the island. TAO's intensive short-course approach to educational outreach might also provide a feasible model for research archaeologists to dedicate a more substantial amount of energy to the education and benefit of the local community. In the long run, our greatest hope in conserving and studying the archaeology of Rapa Nui lies in the local island community. We must make the modern Rapa Nui culture our highest priority if we are going to continue to claim that we appreciate the island's prehistory. To empower the local community, and to reach our common ultimate goals, it may be important to continue to work with the knowledge that as far as project design is concerned: less may be more.

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