

University of British Columbia

EVIDENTIAL REASONING / COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE IN ARCHAEOLOGY ARCL 410 | PHIL 419

Winter 2025, Term 2 – January-April 2026

Canvas course website: <https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/178470>

Instructor: Professor Alison Wylie

Email: alison.wylie@ubc.ca

Class meetings: T/Th 3:30-5:00 pm
in person: BUCH B-302

Office hours: W 3:00-5:00 pm,

Office: BUCH E-276 | 822-6574 | Canvas Zoom

Land Acknowledgement

UBC's Point Grey Campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam) people. The land on which it is situated has always been a place of learning for the Musqueam people, who for millennia have passed on their culture, history, and traditions from one generation to the next on this site.

COURSE OVERVIEW

How do we know what (we think) we know about the past? What counts as evidence of past events, conditions and processes, and as best practices for working with this evidence? These questions have long intrigued philosophers of the historical sciences and practitioners in these fields. In this seminar we will focus on two sets of philosophical issues raised by archaeological practice: the strengths and limitations of reliance on "trace evidence"; and the epistemic implications of the collaborative and Indigenous-led research programs that have taken shape in archaeology in recent decades.

The seminar will begin with readings on the nature of trace evidence and strategies for reasoning with it. Archaeological literature on these topics is juxtaposed with what philosophers of science and science studies scholars have to say about evidential reasoning in the historical sciences. Source texts for this section include *Evidential Reasoning in Archaeology* (Chapman & Wylie 2015) and selections from *Rock, Bone and Ruin* (Currie 2018), as well as classic articles by the logical empiricist philosophers of science who influenced the "positivist" New Archaeology and their "post-processual" critics.

We then turn to critical histories of settler-colonial archaeology and readings that represent contemporary Indigenous-led and community-based collaborative archaeology. Some critics of collaborative practice object that it inevitably undermines the integrity of archaeological inquiry while others ask whether archaeology can ever be successfully reconfigured as an anti- or de-colonial practice. At the same time those who work for, or in partnership with, Indigenous communities describe how profoundly their practice has been transformed, and often say they have never done better archaeology.

To untangle the many threads that make up this debate we will read a selection of influential arguments for Indigenous and collaborative archaeology (e.g., from *Transforming Archaeology*, 2014; *Indigenizing Archaeology*, 2024), as well as a sample of critiques that have appeared in the last decade. These 'debate' pieces will be paired with case-specific readings, to include a history of archaeology at Musqueam, "Ĉesna:m, the Marpole Midden, and the Dispossession of Aboriginal Lands in British Columbia" (Roy, 2006), and examples of "braiding" practices from more recent Indigenous engagements with archaeology. We conclude the term with philosophical accounts of the need for and value of community-based, collaborative practice: an article on "Sciences of Consent" by Indigenous environmental ethicist, Kyle Whyte (2021), and selections from *Transformative Transdisciplinarity* by European/Brazilian philosophers of science, David Ludwig and Charbal El-Hani (2025).

Seminar format and requirements

This course will be a reading-intensive seminar with the emphasis on in-class discussion. Requirements include regular reading response posts, in-class presentations, and two short papers.

Students in any field of historical research, as well as Philosophy and science studies are welcome.

Graduate students who would like to take this course for 500-level credit should contact the instructor to make the necessary arrangements before registration closes.

Prerequisites: There are no prerequisites for this seminar but it is recommended that you have some background in an historical science and/or in philosophy of science/science studies.

Texts: Assigned articles and chapters are available online through Canvas course files and the Library Online Course Reserves. One textbook is also available through the UBC Bookstore and also as a PDF on Canvas: R. Chapman and A. Wylie (2016) *Evidential Reasoning in Archaeology*.

Learning objectives: When you have completed this course you will be able to:

- Identify and assess philosophical assumptions about evidence that are influential in archaeology and other historical sciences;
- Critically assess claims based on material evidence in archaeology, history and related fields;
- Constructively engage current debates about Indigenous-led archaeology and the norms of practice that should inform community-based collaborative research.

WEEKLY READING SCHEDULE

Background reading: These are optional! Consider them suggestions of further reading if you're interested in a particular topic, and as useful background for essays and seminar presentations.

Required discussion post: These are responses to set questions in the first and final weeks of the term.

Textbook key: ERA = R. Chapman and A. Wylie (2016) *Evidential Reasoning in Archaeology*.

I. Introduction to the course

Week 1: January 6 and 8

Tuesday: Introductions

Thursday: ERA, "The Paradox of Material Evidence" (pp. 1-14)

Required discussion post: What's the most pressing philosophical question about historical / archaeological knowledge that concerns you? What's at stake, and why does it matter?

II. Evidential reasoning: archaeological and philosophical perspectives

Week 2: January 13 and 15

Tuesday: Framing the issues in archaeological terms

- ERA, "Archaeological Evidence in Question" – the "Dilemma" (pp. 15-31)
- Smith, M. A. (1955) "The Limitations of Inference in Archaeology" (pp. 1-7)
- Background:* Binford, L. R. (1962) "Archaeology as Anthropology" (pp. 217-225)
- Flannery, K. V. (1967) "Culture History v. Cultural Process" (pp. 119-122)

Thursday: Responding to the "dilemma"

- ERA, "Archaeological Evidence in Question" – "Reframing the question" (pp. 31-46)
- Clarke, D. L. (1973) "Archaeology: The Loss of Innocence" (pp. 6-18)
- Background:* Routledge (1995) "For the Sake of Argument" (pp. 41-49)
- Wylie, A. (2002) "How New is the New Archaeology?" (pp. 25-41)

Week 3: January 20 and 22

Tuesday: "Received View" philosophy of science

- Godfrey-Smith, P. (2003) *Theory and Reality*: "Logic Plus Empiricism," and "Induction, Deduction, Confirmation" (pp. 19-37 and 40-46)

Background: Hempel, C. G. (1942/1965) "The Function of General Laws in History" (pp. 231-243)

Thursday: Counter-arguments

- Toulmin, S. E. (1958) *The Uses of Argument*, "The Layout of Arguments" (pp. 87-100)
- Daston, L. (1992) "Objectivity and the Escape from Perspective" (pp. 597-618)
- Background:* Wylie, A. (2022): "Humanizing Science and Philosophy of Science" (pp. 256-278)

Week 4: January 27 and January 29

Tuesday: Rethinking philosophy of the historical sciences

- Currie, A. (2018) *Rock, Bone and Ruin*: "Traces" (pp. 63-83)
- Background:* Currie, A. (2019) "Epistemic Optimism, Speculation, and the Historical Sciences," *Philosophy, Theory and Practice in Biology*: [PTP Bio 11.7 \(March 2019\)](#)

Thursday: Inference to the best explanation

- Currie, A. (2018) *Rock, Bone and Ruin*: "Over and Under" and "Ripples" (pp. 85-109, 124-131)

Week 5: February 3 and 5

Tuesday: Capturing data

- ERA "Working With Old Evidence" (pp. 93-136)
- *Background:* Boozer, A. (2015) "The Tyranny of Typologies" (pp. 92-109)
- Hodder, I. (1997) "Always Momentary, Fluid and Flexible" (pp. 691-700)

Thursday: Immutable mobiles

- Latour, B. (1999) *Pandora's Hope*, "Circulating Reference" (pp. 24-79)
- Background:* Wylie, A. (2017) "How Archaeological Evidence Bites Back"

Week 6: February 10 and 12

Tuesday: Triangulation and trading zones

- ERA, “External Resources: Archaeology as a Trading Zone” – C14 case study (pp. 143-164)

Thursday: Scaffolding and epistemic iteration

- Chang, H. (2004) “Keeping the Fixed Points Fixed” (pp. 39-53)
- Background:* Hacking, I. (1981), “Do We See Through a Microscope?” (pp. 305-322)
Leonelli (2015) “What Counts as Scientific Data? A Relational Framework” (pp. 810-821)

Reading week: February 16-20

III. Community-based collaborative practice

Week 7: February 24 and February 26

Tuesday: Reflexivity in theory and practice

- ERA, “Reflexivity Made Concrete” (pp. 201-215)
- These three readings represent very different types of reflexivity: choose one for discussion in class.
- Kimmerer, R. W. (2013) “Mishkos Kenomagwen: The Teachings of Grass” (pp. 156-166)
 - Tuana, N. (2023) “Resources for Transformation” (pp. 5-15)
 - Liboiron, M. (2021) “Land, Nature, Resource, Property” (pp. 48-66)

Thursday: Transforming archaeology

- Atalay, S., L. R. Clauss, R. H. McGuire & J. R. Welch, eds. (2014) “Transforming Archaeology: Activist Practices and Prospects” (pp. 7-28)
- Van Alst, E. C. & C.S.C. Gover, eds. (2024) “Indigenizing Archaeology: Putting Theory into Practice” (pp. xix-xxxi)

Background: Wylie, A. (2015) “A Plurality of Pluralisms: Collaborative Practice” (pp. 189-210)

First essay due: Midnight (11:59), Friday, February 27

Week 8: March 3 and 5

Tuesday: Addressing the challenges

- Atalay, S. (2014) “Positivism, Objectivism and Rigor in Activist Archaeology” (pp. 45-60)
- Background:* Welch, J. R. & N. Ferris (2014) “We Have Met the Enemy and It Is Us” (pp. 91-114)
Welch, J.R. & N. Ferris (2014) “Beyond Archaeological Agendas: In Service of a Sustainable Archaeology” in *Transforming Archaeology* (pp. 215-238)

Thursday: Critiques of real-world archaeological practice

- La Salle, M. & R. M. Hutchings (2016) “What Makes Us Squirm” (pp. 164-180)
 - Martindale, A. *et al.* (2016) “Archaeology as Partnerships in Practice: A Reply” (pp. 181-204)
- Background:* Connaughton, S. P. (2025) “Reimagining Archaeology” (pp. 141-178)

Week 9: March 10 and 12

Tuesday: Contention about oral histories

- Henige, D. (2019) “Oral Narratives of the First Nations of British Columbia” (pp. 54-77)
- Menzies, C. and A. Martindale (2019) “Reply to David Henige” (pp. 78-107)

Thursday: The collaborative continuum

- Colwell-Chanthaphonh, C. & T.J. Ferguson (2008) “The Collaborative Continuum” (pp. 1-32)
- Background:* Wylie (2019) “Crossing a Threshold: Collaborative Archaeology” (pp. 570-587)

Week 10: March 17 and 19

Tuesday: Genealogies of colonial practice in archaeology

- Roy, S. (2006) “Who Were These Mysterious People: C̓esna:m, the Marpole Midden, and the Dispossession of Aboriginal Lands in British Columbia” (pp. 67-95)
- McMillan, R., D. Weis, M. Amini (2019) “Splitting Obsidian” (pp. 1-10)

Background: Ritchie, P. M. & R. Hatoum (2020) “Creation and Legacy of Silences in Anthropological Traditions: Coast Salish Genealogy, Leadership, Territoriality” (pp. 1-26)

Thursday: ‘Imbricating’ oral narratives and archaeology

- Gauvreau, A, and D. McLaren (2016) “Stratigraphy and Storytelling” (pp. 303–25)
- Background:* Gero (2007) “Honoring Ambiguity/Problematizing Certitude” (pp. 311-327)

Week 11: March 24 and 26

Tuesday: Residential schools

- Harris, J., A. Maass, and A. Martindale (2017) "Practising Reconciliation" (pp. 12-17)
 - Simons, Martindale, and Wylie (2021) "Bearing Witness" (pp. 21-31)
- Background:* Nichols, K. L. (2021), "The Brandon Indian Residential School Cemetery" (pp. 43-55)
Martindale, A., et. al (2024), "Signal Interpretation of Burials in GPR" (pp. 337-351)
McCue, D., Kuper Island, 8-part series, [CBC Podcasts](#)

Thursday: *Horizontal, long-term relationships*

- Angelbeck, B., and C. Grier (2014) "From Paradigms to Practices: Pursuing Horizontal and Long-Term Relationships with Indigenous Peoples for Heritage Management" (pp. 519-540)
- Background:* Atalay, S., J. Shannon, J. G. Swogger (2017) "Journeys to Complete the Work," NAGPRA Comics

Week 12: March 31 and April 2

Tuesday: Knowledge integration and partial overlaps

- Ludwig, D. and C. El-Hani (2020) "Understanding Knowledge Integration and Its Limitations" (pp. 3-20)
- Background:* Ludwig, D. and C. El-Hani (2025), *Transformative Transdisciplinarity*, "Communities in Action" (pp. 337-379)

Thursday: Consent and animacy - changing the starting point for philosophy of science

- Whyte, K. (2021), "Sciences of Consent: Indigenous Knowledge, Governance Value, and Responsibility" (pp. 117-130)

Week 13: April 7 and April 9

Tuesday: Paths we choose

- Ludwig, D., and C. El-Hani (2025) "Another (Philosophy of) Science is Possible" (pp. 380-412)
- Hatch, M., et. al (2023), "Boundary Spanners: A Critical Role for Enduring Collaborations Between Indigenous Communities and Mainstream Scientists" (pp. 1-14)

Thursday: Wrap-up

Required discussion post: Here are two questions for discussion in the final seminar meeting; focus on one or the other or consider how they're connected.

- Revisit your answer to the question posed at the beginning of term: What do you now understand to be the crucial issue raised by contention about evidence in archaeology or other historical sciences, and why does it matter?
- What do you see as the most significant challenge(s) faced by advocates of collaborative practice in archaeology, and how are they best addressed?

Second essay due: midnight (11:59), Friday, April 17

REQUIREMENTS

This is a reading-intensive seminar. The requirements emphasize close reading of the assigned texts and active engagement with them. In addition to reading responses and an in-class presentation, two short essays are your major assignment for this seminar. Detailed assignment guidelines will be posted on Canvas; what follows is an overview of these requirements and the grade distribution.

Seminar participation

Active, informed participation in seminar discussion is an essential component of the course.

= 10% of the final grade

Seminar presentations

Presentation groups will be responsible for initiating seminar discussion in one class meeting a week, beginning in **Week 3**. Plan to give a 15-20 minute analytic (rather than descriptive) presentation on an issue raised by the assigned reading(s) that you would like to discuss with the seminar group as a whole. This is an opportunity to raise questions about key terms or concepts and about the context of debate to which authors are responding, as well as to assess the claims they make. It is also an opportunity to put these terms and concepts to work in the analysis of a concrete example drawn from your own areas of interest and/or expertise.

- The presentation schedule will be finalized in the second week of classes; sign yourself into a presentation group through the “people” tab on Canvas by **Friday, January 16**.
- **Pre-circulate a short handout of roughly one page** outlining the focal issues and example(s) you will discuss by **9:00 pm the night before your presentation**.

= 20% of the final grade

Reading Responses

Everyone is required to post at least **five reading responses** during the quarter. These should be roughly a page long, and should focus on a particular issue, concept, or argument in the assigned readings that you find intriguing, problematic, or in need of explication. As with the seminar presentations, raise questions and introduce examples you would like to discuss in the seminar.

- **Two required posts:** Everyone is required post on set questions in **Week 1** and **Week 13**.
- **Three additional posts:** Choose **any three other weeks, except the one in which you give your in-class presentation**, for these three posts. You are welcome to post more often; your Reading Response grade will be based on your best 5 posts.
- Posts are due by **9:00 pm the night before the seminar** in which the reading(s) you choose will be discussed.
- Be sure to read one another’s posts and come to class prepared to discuss them. Although not required, **online comments are welcome!**

= 25% of the final grade

Term papers

Two short essays are required.

1) A short expository/analytic essay on a topic, concept, argument, or theme discussed in readings assigned in the “Evidential Reasoning” section of the course.

5 pages long (1250 words)

due online by **midnight** (11:59) on **Friday, February 27**

2) A longer, thesis-driven essay on a topic or issue discussed in the “Community-based Collaborative Practice” section of the course

6 to 7 pages long (1500-1750 words)

due online by **midnight** (11:59) on **Friday, April 17**

= 45% of the final grade: 20% for the first essay and 25% for the second.

COURSE POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

Please see the “**UBC Policies and Course Guidelines**” PDF / wikipage on Canvas for a more detailed summary of campus-wide policies on academic conduct and concessions. This summary links to relevant UBC offices and resources. What follows is a brief summary of policies that are especially relevant for this seminar.

- *Plagiarism will not be tolerated:* See the UBC definition of “plagiarism and patch writing” included in the Canvas summary of course guidelines and policies and posted on this UBC “[Academic Integrity](#)” website.
- *Gen-AI guidelines:* These will be discussed in the first week of the term and then posted on Canvas. Please review the UBC guidelines on this “[GenAI tools](#)” webpage.
- *Late assignments:* Please contact the instructor as soon as you know that you may need to submit an assignment late or arrange to make up a missed assignment within the timeframe of the term. If you are an undergraduate in the the Faculty of Arts, see their “[Academic Concession](#)” website for general guidelines; it includes a “**self-declaration form**” that you can use to arrange in-term concessions.
- *Deferred standing:* If you anticipate that you will not be able to complete the course requirements by the end of the examination period, **April 25**, you will need to apply for “deferred standing.” This must be adjudicated by Arts Academic Advising and will be granted only in cases covered by the UBC “academic concessions” policy: medical circumstances, compassionate grounds, or conflicting responsibilities. Contact the instructor as soon as you know you may need an academic concession that extends beyond the end of the term.

Grading policies

Assignments will be assessed on the standard UBC mark-to-grade conversion scheme outlined in the UBC Calendar: <http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,42,96,0#217>

Low stakes assignments – discussion posts – will be graded on a 5-point scale, as follows.

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|-----|---------|-------|
| √++ | 95-100% | A+ |
| √+ | 85-95% | A/A- |
| √ | 75-85 | B+/B |
| √- | 65-70 | B-/C+ |
| √- | 55-65 | C/C- |