



CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY STANISLAUS  
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

## NEWS RELEASE

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MEDIA CONTACT: James Leonard  
(209) 667-3884  
[jleonard1@csustan.edu](mailto:jleonard1@csustan.edu)

### **Anthropologist Honored for Use of Technology in Teaching**

*CSU Stanislaus Professor Uses Digital Technology to Tell Stories of Asian Cultures and Create Unique Learning Opportunities for Students.*

TURLOCK, Calif. — December 4, 2012 — Anthropologist [S. Steve Arounsack](#) is using Web-based maps, graphics and videos to educate undergraduates about secret bombings over Laos during the Vietnam War. He's using smartphones and laptops to allow students in Turlock to learn nearly firsthand about Asian rituals. His students are designing conceptual mobile applications to restore political, natural or social capital for cultures both local and international.

Arounsack, a professor at California State University, Stanislaus, was recently recognized for his innovative use of technology in teaching, as he was named one of four recipients of this year's [Sony Electronics Faculty Award for Innovative Instruction with Technology](#).

The award, presented by the California State University in partnership with Intel Corporation, is given to four CSU faculty members each year and provides each with an electronics package valued at \$2,300 to use in their teaching.

"We try use technology in an innovative way to understand students' needs; many of them have limited resources," Arounsack said. "How do we use it in a way that's meaningful, but at low or

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no cost? How can we leverage to the best of our ability, with an appropriate use of resources and in an innovative way?"

Arounsack said the award package — which includes a laptop computer, a digital camera capable of photography and video, and an e-reader — will be useful in his classroom and especially in the field, where students often use their own phones for capturing photos and video.

This semester, Arounsack has current and former students in South Korea, Laos and Indonesia, and their presence is benefiting students on campus as well. Students in the field can communicate with those on campus through live video using services like Skype, allowing students to learn in ways that were not possible as recently as a decade ago.

"It gets to the principles of anthropology — spending time on the ground getting to know a culture," he said. "We can ask a shaman there in real time what a specific ritual is. It's much more authentic."

Arounsack was born in Laos and grew up on Maui until his family moved to the Valley. He earned a bachelor's degree in biological sciences and a master's in interdisciplinary studies at CSU Stanislaus before getting his Ph.D. in ecology at UC Davis.

One of Arounsack's most recent projects involved the creation of a "virtual village" that emulates what a visitor might see in a typical Lao village, where unexploded bombs from the Vietnam War have caused thousands of deaths in the decades since.

Using [high-quality video interviews and an innovative Web design](#), Arounsack shows elders recounting the bombings they witnessed, children discussing the risks of playing with unexploded weapons, and experts removing the dangerous devices. Unlike a traditional research paper or documentary film, Arounsack's approach allows viewers and instructors to learn and teach at their own pace while highlighting various sections of the village.

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The use of visual media in education is finding increasing acceptance within traditional academic circles, and Arounsack said he sees clear advantages in interactive, digital learning.

"It's an evolving thought process, but one that's becoming more widely accepted," he said. "A big goal of mine is to be able to communicate cultural knowledge, but to make it palatable to a wider audience."

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