Investigating early pottery use through interdisciplinary course-based research

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Proposal Summary: It is not known why people started to produce pottery. Once associated with the advent of agriculture and village life, ceramic vessels are now known to have been produced well before any evidence for food production in many parts of the world. Here, I describe a one-semester long course-based research project that would allow undergraduate students from CUNY Queens College to contribute to this fascinating research question and experience the thrill of an original scientific discovery. Throughout the semester, teams of students would collaborate to investigate the function of archaeological ceramics originating from various spatial and temporal contexts. To do so, they would be initiated to different techniques in materials culture analysis, as well as state-of-the-art methods in organic residue analysis. Students would take part in every part of the research process, from the formulation of research questions to the dissemination of research results. Most importantly, their work would ultimately be integrated into a broader research program that brings together archaeologists and scientists working within a network of international collaborations (http://www.earlypottery.org/).

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