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CONFERENCE PAPER ABSTRACT

NAME OF PRESENTER:	Victoria Herrmann Representative of the Samoan Studies Institute, American Samoa Community College (TBD)
TITLE OF PAPER:	“They Should Know to Keep Them:” The Importance of Documenting Histories of Heritage for Climate Change Adaptation in American Samoa
THEME:	<i>Theme 1: Heritage at Risk – Climate Change and Disasters</i>
<p>PAPER ABSTRACT:</p> <p>This paper will present the findings of 62 in-depth interviews with Territorial and community leaders in American Samoa on the barriers to climate change adaptation for the island. The most common need that interviewees identified is heritage education and documenting histories of cultural resilience, indigenous knowledges, and local tradition. From fishermen to local officials, residents of Tutuila concerned about climate change repeated that the number one priority for preparing the island was not more hard infrastructure, like the sea wall, but more education and outreach about how families can adapt to climate change by learning from their histories, heritage, and indigenous knowledge. While some of American Samoa’s historic and cultural assets are facing unavoidable loss and damage from rising tides, residents are saving at-risk places and landscapes by studying historic building and farming methods to learn best practices of resiliency from past generations. American Samoans are using traditional architecture to build structures that can withstand more heat and storm surges and implementing traditional planting systems that allow crops to thrive despite volatile weather patterns. And they are applying intangible heritage associated with the island landscape to better prepare food systems for hurricanes and other natural disasters.</p> <p>The paper will first provide an overview of what was learned from the 62 interviews on climate change risks to cultural heritage in American Samoa. Then, the paper will highlight three case studies of current projects in American Samoa that utilize cultural heritage and indigenous knowledges as climate change adaptation strategies in (1) building adaptable, resilient homes; (2) using indigenous knowledge about cultivating the natural landscape to create healthy, cultural, climate-resilient diets, and (3) a Participatory Learning and Action Workshop for cultural climate adaptation in Amouli. Importantly, the paper will discuss in all three cases how for most American Samoans the conversation with their past has been cut off. Western lifestyles and American public schooling diminished the role and application of traditional knowledge in culture and everyday decision-making, stymying its transfer from one generation to the next. “It wasn’t imparted to us,” as put by Sandra Fuimaono-Lutu, Deputy Director of American Samoa’s</p>	



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Chamber of commerce. “We need to grab it while it still exists. Grab that indigenous knowledge, capture it, put it in part of the curriculum, and show how it’s aligned with some of the scientific data.” In its conclusion, the paper will broaden the conversation from American Samoa to how the documentation, sharing, and education of memories and histories of heritage can be used for climate adaptation in other US Territories, States, and beyond

BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE PRESENTER:

Victoria Herrmann is the president and managing director of The Arctic Institute. In 2017, she completed a National Geographic Explorers Grant for a research and storytelling project on coastal climate change adaptation and cultural heritage in the United States and U.S. territories. With the support of a J.M.K. Innovation Prize and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, she is creating a skills-based volunteering platform to connect pro adaptation work with under-resourced communities in U.S States and Territories over the next three years. In 2016, Victoria co-convoked an international working group on cultural heritage and climate relocation as part of the Pocantico Call to Action with USICOMOS, where they presented at COP22 and other international forums. She is currently on the steering committees of the US National Adaptation Forum and the Keeping History Above Water conferences.