STUDENTS ASK THE QUESTIONS: Geography ADT with Student Host Elizabeth Soto & Professor Dafna Golden Episode 131

00:00:00 **Liz**

For those of you listening at home, I definitely have had my share of challenges. I took an oceanography class and it was chemistry, biology, physics, all in one. And it definitely touched a little bit of everything, which is the beauty of geography. Like it's not only just like studying the earth, it's studying the oceans, it's studying different components, it's studying people. It's that cross-section, beautiful cross-section of being able to study a little bit of everything.

00:00:28 **Christina**

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

00:00:30 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, and you're listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:00:33 **Christina**

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak - by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

00:00:50 **Sun**

We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC, from the classroom to completion.

00:00:55 **Speaker 1**

And I know I'm going to achieve my goals and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

00:00:59 **Speaker 2**

She is a sociology major and she is transferring to Cal Poly Pamona! Psychology major, English major-

00:01:05 **Sun**

From transforming part-time into full-time.

00:01:09 **Speaker 1**

I really liked the time that we spent with Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter.

00:01:15 **Christina**

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

00:01:18 **Speaker 1**

To think of the natural environment around us as a library.

00:01:20 **Christina**

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC. But most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi Mt. SAC, alumni, and producer of this podcast.

00:01:32 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, Learning Assistance Faculty and Professional Learning Academy Coordinator.

00:01:37 **Christina**

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:01:38 **Christina**

If you're curious about geography and the way it intersects between science and the humanities, our guest student host, Elizabeth Soto, guides us through an insightful conversation with Mt. SAC geography Professor, Dafna Golden.

00:01:55 **Christina**

Elizabeth is a native Pomonian, a former Mountie, and a first - generation college student. She transferred to UC Santa Barbara in the fall of 2019 as a geography major, and graduated spring of 2021 with a BA in sociology. She hopes to pursue a career in student affairs, where she can work with underrepresented college students moving forward. Here's Elizabeth's conversation with Dafna about your choices when pursuing geography at Mt. SAC.

00:02:27 **Liz**

Hello, and welcome back to the Magic Mountie Podcast. My name is Liz Soto, pronounced, she, her hers, and I will be your interviewer for today. I'm a former Mountie and currently wrapping up my last quarter as a sociology major at UCSB. And today, we're going to dive into the world of geography with Professor Golden. Welcome Professor Golden. I'm really excited to have you here today. How are you?

00:02:48 **Dafna**

Thank you, Elizabeth. I'm excited to be here with you today. My name is Professor Golden. I've been teaching geography at Mt. SAC for 20 years, and I'm excited to share information about this discipline with you.

00:03:00 **Liz**

Thank you for being here. I'm really excited to have you here. I have not only taken classes with you, but I've also had the opportunity to study abroad and take some classes abroad with you too, which is amazing. It was an amazing experience and I'm really happy to kind of break down like the four walls that were traditionally in when we're in classrooms and really get out there and really doing research.

00:03:20 **Liz**

One of the first questions that I have prepared for you is I'm really interested to see why you got into geography for the first place. And what really led you to Mt. SAC.

00:03:32 **Dafna**

Thanks Elizabeth. When I first announced to my parents that I was going to major in geography, they were really nervous about how it was going to translate into a successful job because geography can be kind of an obscure discipline.

00:03:43 **Dafna**

But with the GIS skills that I developed during my academic career, I had such an incredible career working on really interesting projects. I've worked for the National Park Service, mapping the movement of mountain lions and coyotes, working on building a digital Atlas of Native American cultures and an inventory of vegetation and animal habitat.

00:04:09 **Dafna**

I worked with an architect creating a green map for the city of Santa Monica and exploring new park planning for the city of Los Angeles. So, there's a lot of diversity in geography, and I'm really happy that I chose that as my major.

00:04:27 **Liz**

Thank you for sharing. And I know you touched a little bit about like your research before becoming a professor. What was the biggest difference between these two roles; being a professor and then also being out in the field, and how has that changed over time?

00:04:41 **Dafna**

When I first graduated with my master's degree in geography, I had a job offer with the National Park Service as a GIS technician. So, I could have chosen to continue in that field, but at the same time, I had a job offer to teach at Mt. SAC. And it was a difficult decision, but I decided to go into teaching because I knew that I would be able to continue working with GIS and moonlight on projects that I would find interesting as I taught, and that I could incorporate the projects of GIS into the classes that I teach.

00:05:19 **Dafna**

And so, I feel like I had the best of both worlds and that I'm really lucky to have been able to pursue all of my interests.

00:05:29 **Liz**

Yeah. Thank you for sharing. Yeah, I think that's definitely really interesting to see how you have incorporated both like areas into what you're doing now. Just for some background, when we were studying abroad together, you had us out looking for like ... really like getting down and dirty in the field. And I really appreciated that. So, there's definitely still opportunities to like go out and be one with nature, even if we're in a traditional classroom. And I really appreciated that in all of the courses that I was taking with you.

00:05:59 **Liz**

And so, thinking about folks who are interested in going into geography, from the time where you were doing research, or you have been a professor, have you seen that field really transform and how has it transformed in different ways or have you anticipated the way it has transformed?

00:06:16 **Dafna**

Well, since I started, GIS was just beginning and not many people knew what that was. By the way, GIS is an acronym that stands for Geographic Information Systems. And the easiest way to explain it is that it's a computer mapping system.

00:06:32 **Dafna**

In 1997 when I started working with GIS, if you typed GIS into a search engine, you would have come up with something completely different, like something about veterans because of GI, and not the geographic information specific information.

00:06:53 **Dafna**

So, it's changed a lot because GIS has become much more robust and part of the regular vocabulary and people know what it is now. And they know that it doesn't just belong to geographers. GIS is multi -disciplinary and fits in with a lot of different disciplines and research areas. And so, I think that that's been one of the biggest changes.

00:07:21 **Liz**

I know you talked about how geography can really impact different fields. So, like I know political is one area that geography is still very prominent in. And I know as a sociology major, like we very much still use geography and sociology as well in the program at Mt. SAC. How has that come together in the coursework and in the course offerings?

00:07:43 **Dafna**

So, that's a really good question. And we're really just starting to change our scope in what we're looking at in geography and emphasizing. So, issues surrounding equity are really coming to the forefront and we're riding along with that and trying to tailor all of our classes to address those important issues. In fact, I'm taking a sabbatical next year where I will be working on developing GIS specific modules that can help faculty and students look at equity issues using simple GIS tools.

00:08:22 **Liz**

Thank you for sharing your thought. Yeah, I feel like when I took classes there, it was very scientific. And even when I transferred to UCSB, it was like computer programming and it was very intense. And more of the courses that I did enjoy were like, how is garbage distributed across America? Like such random topics that are offered at the four-year university.

00:08:43 **Liz**

And thinking again about like the student at Mt. SAC and really what they can gain from the program, what should a student really expect when entering these classes and how should they prepare beforehand?

00:08:56 **Dafna**

It's a really good point, Elizabeth, because GIS is really technical and it has a high learning curve. So, I think that students should expect that the fun stuff is going to come a little bit later and to just kind of trust in the process that in the end, there's a lot of fun that you can have with geography.

00:09:17 **Dafna**

But at the beginning, there is a lot of learning that you have to do to establish those basic skills. And I think that the other thing that students need to keep in mind is that because geography is so diverse, that it's hard to pinpoint for a student just entering into the discipline, what that's going to look like at the end.

00:09:43 **Dafna**

And I encourage students to keep an open mind and go with the process because it's going to take them in different directions depending on their personal interests. So, that's some of the best advice that I can give students, is keep an open mind and just keep at the hard work with the technical stuff.

00:10:06 **Liz**

I definitely agree. For those of you listening at home, I definitely have had my share of challenges. I took an oceanography class and it was chemistry, biology, physics, all in one. And it definitely touched a little bit of everything, which is the beauty of geography. Like that it's not only just like studying the earth, it's studying the oceans, it's studying different components and studying people, which is why I really enjoyed it.

00:10:30 **Liz**

It was really like, if you're trying to decide ike maybe what I go into in terms of STEM field, and even like humanities, it's that cross-section, like beautiful cross-section of being able to study a little bit of everything.

00:10:41 **Liz**

And thinking about the job market as well for students who do plan to pursue geography, do you think there has been maybe some pushback, thinking about like the political impacts and economic impacts, especially in a COVID and pandemic era? Are there pushbacks for folks who are interested in pursuing the field?

00:11:02 **Dafna**

So, I have a really good pulse on the market industry for GIS, which has easily been able to weather the pandemic, the tumultuations. So, the GIS labor market looks really positive, especially because that could easily transition to an online format. And a lot of employers just had their employees working from home.

00:11:26 **Dafna**

So, there's a really positive outlook and employment for GIS is still really growing. For geography, it's a little bit harder to assess the employment outlook because there aren't a lot of jobs with the title of geographer. Although that does exist, most geographers don't get employed as a geographer with that job title. So, geographers get employed in a lot of different areas with various job titles. And it's not as clear to me how that market has weathered the storm.

00:12:08 **Liz**

Thank you for sharing. I feel like the pandemic has really taught us a lot in terms of like what's available and how things have really transformed in terms of job descriptions across all industries and disciplines as well, where things are kind of like getting meshed together just for like capacity reasons as well. And so, thank you for sharing your insight on the job market.

00:12:29 **Liz**

I do want to touch a little bit about what you said previously taking your sabbatical, which congratulations. I know you love to be outside of the classroom. I really applaud you. I think you're one of the few professors who really does that for not only yourself, but for students as well. And thinking about equity, what are some components that you are interested in introducing into the field of geography?

00:12:52 **Dafna**

I really want students to be able to see that exploring data is accessible and relatively easy. And they can look at local issues in their local communities and understand those issues from a data-driven perspective, and not just having someone else tell them what to think, but to see that those issues are supported by real data and how to analyze it from drilling down and seeing relationships between things.

00:13:30 **Dafna**

So, I think it's really important that students become familiar with analyzing spatial data and having access to those tools.

00:13:44 **Liz**

So, in addition to being able to take courses and to transfer as a geography major, I know the geography department also offers certificates for students who may not want to go on the traditional track and just kind of want to get straight into the field. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

00:14:01 **Dafna**

So, Mt. SAC is launching a brand new GIS certificate program, which entails 20 units and involves coursework specifically in GIS and remote sensing. So, these courses in completion of the certificate program will lead directly to employment because it was developed in close association with industry leaders in GIS who have advised on exactly the skills that they want from GIS students.

00:14:36 **Dafna**

And so, students completing the GIS certificate can be confident that they'll have the skills that employers want. And I'm really excited about the launching of the certificate program. These courses will become available in fall 2022. And I think it's going to be a really successful program.

00:15:00 **Liz**

Thank you for sharing a little bit of insight. I'm really excited to see what the certificate is going to look like out in action, and really see how students really take advantage of that

00:15:10 **Dafna**

And to help promote the certificate program in fall 2021, we have a lot of events planned to advertise geography and GIS. It's focused around National Geography Day, which is in November, but throughout the semester, we'll be doing different activities like flying drones and doing a geocache, which is like a scavenger hunt on campus. And we're going to be working really hard on getting the word out about geography and GIS to the students at Mt . SAC.

00:15:46 **Liz**

That sounds really exciting. I'm a kind of geocaching and really getting in the field again. Like getting out there, really being one with not only nature, but like being able to put everything that we learned into play.

00:16:00 **Dafna**

Yeah. There's some really exciting developments and we want to get students involved and see how geography can translate into real world applications. And it can be fun.

00:16:14 **Liz**

Can you talk a little bit about translating what we learn in the classroom into the real world? How might a student take a certificate and really take off in a career in that area?

00:16:23 **Dafna**

So, having the certificate in GIS gives students the skills to apply spatial analysis in a lot of different areas. So, it's really applicable and it can go in a lot of different directions. But the exciting thing is that there's jobs for that. And each job is going to be different, but they all involve using GIS.

00:16:48 **Dafna**

But one project might have somebody working with how the community differs in terms of languages. And another project might involve looking at the distribution of wildlife. So, there's a lot of diversity in the applications, but that's the fun part about GIS is that you're always recreating the specific applications.

00:17:15 **Dafna**

And the other great thing about having a GIS certificate is that although entry level positions are about 20 to $25 an hour, GIS analysts can earn around 80 to $90,000 a year. So, there's a very strong salary support for GIS trained professionals

00:17:38 **Liz**

And Professor Golden, if students are interested in finding out more about the geography program and the certificates that you have to offer, how can they get in contact or connect with you?

00:17:49 **Dafna**

So, students can visit the geography webpage at Mt. SAC, and they can also email me directly at dgolden@mtsac . edu, and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

00:18:02 **Liz**

Thank you so much for being here and sharing all of your knowledge. I'm really excited to have you here and all the wisdom that you have shared with us today. And thank you all at home tuning in to the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:18:15 **Dafna**

Thank you.

00:18:18 **Christina**

Thank you for listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast, and don't forget to share your favorite episodes.