LARIS BIO

Paul Laris is Professor and Chair of Geography. He has been a faculty member of the Geography Department for 18 years. Paul studies and teaches about human-environmental relationships in the geographic tradition. He is keenly interested in the relationships between human use of fire on the landscape and its long-term consequences. He has conducted research in the savanna of Mali and the sage scrub environments of the coastal of southern California. He is the author of dozens of articles and book chapters. Paul’s research has been funded by NASA, National Geographic and the National Science Foundation. He teaches courses on environmental change and environmental field methods.

Paul runs ***The*** ***Savanna Lab*** whose mission is to drive research and contribute to a more complete understanding of ecosystems in which both woody and grassy vegetation co-exist. Our aim is to solve what Sarmiento once called the “savanna conundrum;” that is, what enables both vegetation forms to thrive within the same geographic space? We seek to understand which factors contribute to shifts in the amounts and types of trees, shrubs and grasses on the land by contextualizing the role of human disturbances such as fire and grazing in shifting the balance of woody and grassy plants.

Paul works with students conducting research on long-term vegetation changes in California. A particular focus has been on former ranch lands in Point Mugu State Park and River Ridge Ranch. One goal of this work is to understand how past land uses—grazing and disking of the land—have influenced recent changes in native and non-native vegetation cover. Paul’s future research seeks to use UAVs to collect high resolution imagery on vegetation as well as gas emissions of Methane from savanna and grassland fires.  