Biography
Alicia Gorman completed her undergraduate degree at UC Davis and is currently a Ph.D. candidate within the Anthropology department at UC Santa Barbara. Her research interests focus on the construction of social differentiation and inequality in societies without strict social classes. She has field experience in both Peru and California, as well as a background in the application of elemental analysis to prehistoric ceramic pots. Her past work has investigated the use of feasting as a political tool capable of creating a sense of community as well as exclusivity, depending on context. She has also investigated changing ceramic production practices in response to external cultural contact, specifically in the case of interactions between the Wari empire of Peru and the local peoples of the Nasca Valley. Her dissertation research to be carried out in the summer of 2018 will involve the excavation of households at the site of Cerro Tortolita, located on the south coast of Peru. Cerro Tortolita was a religious center with an extensive associated village, making it an excellent candidate for investigating the relationship between religion, politics, and social inequality.

Project Summary
The grant from AIA-OC will provide additional funds for Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis (INAA) of ceramics from Peru, which will form an important component of Ms. Gorman’s dissertation research. Previous investigation within the religious center portion of Cerro Tortolita suggests the presence of elites associated with ritual activities. Ms. Gorman’s research will focus on the village area in order to better understand the interactions and tensions between different factions of society at Cerro Tortolita, as well as to highlight the contributions of “commoners” in creating social structure.

INAA will be used to identify groups of ceramics with shared clay compositions, enabling the identification of households with access to certain fine, possibly prestigious ceramics. The ceramics in question were produced by the neighboring pilgrimage center of Cahuachi, and may have been an item available to all, regardless of social status (as in the area immediately surrounding Cahuachi), or only to a few elites (as has been found in more distant sites). If only a few elites had access to Cahuachi-produced ceramics, those few may be restricted to elites residing in the ceremonial area of Cerro Tortolita, or they may include some households in the village part of the site. Information regarding who had access to these fineware ceramics will support inferences about how objects with religious significance may have acted as part of the social construction of power at Cerro Tortolita.