

## **SYLLABUS**

### **PSS 311: Introduction to Agroecology**

**PSS 311**

**Summer 2021**

#### **INSTRUCTORS:**

**V. Ernesto Méndez**

Professor of Agroecology & Environmental Studies & ALC Co-Director

Email: [ernesto.mendez@uvm.edu](mailto:ernesto.mendez@uvm.edu)

**Victor Izzo**

Lecturer, PSS Department and ALC Education Coordinator

Email: [vizzo@uvm.edu](mailto:vizzo@uvm.edu)

**Martha Caswell**

ALC Co-Director

Email: [martha.caswell@uvm.edu](mailto:martha.caswell@uvm.edu)

Agroecology & Livelihoods Collaborative (ALC)

<https://www.uvm.edu/agroecology/>

Plant and Soil Science Department (PSS)

University of Vermont

#### **SUPPORT**

Nell Carpenter, ALC Program Coordinator

[Nell.Carpenter@uvm.edu](mailto:Nell.Carpenter@uvm.edu)

#### **CLASS MEETING TIMES AND LOCATION**

---

Online: May 24 to June 18

#### **ONLINE or FACE-TO-FACE OFFICE HOURS:**

---

- Meetings with instructors are by appointment. They can be by zoom or phone. Please email the instructor directly to setup an appointment.

#### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

---

This 4-week course presents an in-depth overview of research and applications in the field of agroecology, with a focus on principles-based approaches. The course seeks to provide students with both conceptual and practical content, covering the evolution of the field of agroecology, from its origins to the present, as it gains increasing recognition in scientific, policy, social movement and farming spaces. Students will engage in some of the debates agroecologists are now facing, as they grapple with maintaining the core characteristics of the field as it is increasingly applied by a wide diversity of actors. A special emphasis is placed in discussing the different expressions of agroecology as

a science, a social movement and a practice. This embodies thinking of agroecology as transdisciplinary, integrating different knowledge systems in a search for solutions to the current challenges of our agrifood systems. In addition, we will explore the use of participatory action research (PAR) and principles, as an essential approach to agroecological research and practice. We will cover international and domestic geographic perspectives, and examine more in-depth, agroecology and PAR with 3-4 local Vermont farms that are currently collaborating with the ALC.

## **READING MATERIALS**

---

*All readings (e.g. journal articles, news excerpts, fact sheets, etc.) will be provided.*

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES...By the end of this course, students will be able to:**

---

1. Describe the state and evolution of the field of agroecology and engage in the debate on agroecology's dimensions as a science, a social movement and a practice;
2. Understand and apply a principles-based approach to agroecology;
3. Understand opportunities and challenges of applying agroecology and PAR in 3 local Vermont farms.
4. Understand the challenges and opportunities of applying agroecology as a transdisciplinary, participatory and action-oriented approach.
5. Engage in active peer-to-peer learning with classmates and the diversity of professionals attending the face to face portion of the course.

## **WEEKLY LEARNING GOALS**

---

### **Module 1: Agroecological Foundations**

Learning Goals:

1. Understand the origins and evolution of agroecology, and why it is now perceived as a science, movement and practice.
2. Compare agroecological perspectives, also known as agroecologies and identify key examples.
3. Identify the challenges and opportunities of applying agroecology as a transdisciplinary, participatory and action-oriented approach..

***Module Assignment: Reflective Essay (see Blackboard for description)***

---

## **Module 2: Principles-based Approaches in Agroecology**

### Learning Goals:

1. Understand the history of the application of principles in agroecology.
2. Gain knowledge of the different agroecological principles frameworks that are currently being used globally.
3. Learn from a case study 'in progress', which is applying a principles-based approach to agroecology

***Module Assignment: Communication/Outreach submission (See Blackboard for description)***

---

## **Module 3: Co-creation of Knowledge in Agroecology**

### Learning Goals:

1. Understand the concept of co-creation of knowledge in agroecology.
2. Learn about international examples of knowledge co-creation in agroecology.
3. Co-learn with guest lecturers working on international knowledge co-creation in agroecology.

***Module Assignment Prepare questions for invited panel and engage with speakers during the Friday Synthesis***

---

## **Module 4: Context matters – from theory to practice**

### Learning Goals:

1. To bring together the material from the course and reflect on what agroecology means to you.
2. To understand why agroecology is effective and where it can take us.
3. To get a sense and a virtual experience of what agroecology looks like in practice, in Vermont

***Module Assignment: Prepare questions for invited practitioners/stakeholders and attend the daily farmer forums.***

## WEEKLY WORKFLOW

---

Specific schedules and work plans for each week, including the description of assignments and submission dates, can be found on Blackboard. Any changes to schedules will be announced to the entire class and modified directly in the module schedule table(s).

### ***Weeks 1-3 (May 24th – June 13th)***

For the first three modules students are expected to attend synchronous virtual meetings with the entire learning community on Mondays and Fridays (12pm-2pm EST). Monday meetings will set the stage for the upcoming week's agenda. These meetings will act as a forum for students to ask questions related to upcoming assignments and provide a context for the week's material. Fridays will serve as a community learning space to facilitate the collaborative synthesis of the week's content and conversations.

- Online asynchronous discussions will occur Tuesday-Thursday through an online discussion board. Students will post discussion posts and responses on content provided in each module. Discussion prompts will be posted in the YellowDig discussion area.
- Assignment submission timelines will vary depending upon the needs of the assignment but we will be sure to provide you ample time to complete each assignment.

### ***Week 4 (June 14th- June 18th)***

- Synchronous virtual discussion/interviews with select farmers and practitioners will occur daily (12pm-2pm EST) during this week.
- There are no formal assignments to be submitted during this week.

## STUDENT ASSESSMENTS

---

### **1. Online Discussion**

The discussion board will engage students in written dialogue about the readings and other materials. Prompts will be provided for each of the week's discussion topics, which can be readings, lectures or others. Students will use the online, Yellow Discussion Board to share their responses to the prompts and each other's commentary, as follows: 1) a response to **at least one of** the prompts provided by the instructor for each reading; and 2) an additional posting responding or commenting on another student's comment. Students will do an average of 3 responses and 3 replies per week. Comments and responses should be professional and respectful. We will not tolerate the use of rude language or personal attacks on classmates. Students who fail to follow this rule will lose the remaining commentary and response points for the course.

### **2. Module Assignments**

After completion of each module, students will be required to complete assessments and/or submit assignments related to the course content and also integrates their previous knowledge and experience. Guidance will be provided at the beginning of each module to best prepare students to maximize the utility of these assignments.

## GRADING SCHEME

---

The course evaluation will be based on a total of 150 points, separated into the following:

- |  |     |
|--|-----|
| 1. Discussion board commentary & reply   | 50% |
| 2. Weekly assignments/reflections  | 25% |
| 3. Overall course participation<br>(includes participation, quality of engagement, attendance, enthusiasm, etc.) | 25% |

---

**Total**                      **100%**

### **ACADEMIC HONESTY**

Academic honesty is expected of all students. The University of Vermont has a very strict policy concerning academic honesty and plagiarism. Please see the statement on academic honesty <http://www.uvm.edu/~uvmppg/ppg/student/acadintegrity.pdf> .

### **PLAGIARISM**

Plagiarism constitutes a violation of Academic Honesty and warrants failure on an assignment and/or failure in the course. Plagiarism of ANY sort - e.g., copying part or all of a fellow student's report, copying from original references, texts, or websites - will NOT be tolerated. The consequences of plagiarism or cheating range from a score of zero on the assignment or exam, to filing a complaint with the University's Coordinator for Academic Honesty which can result in expulsion from UVM.

### **COURSE CONTENT IS THE PROPERTY OF THE INSTRUCTOR**

Consistent with the University's policy on intellectual property rights, all teaching and curricular materials (including but not limited to classroom lectures, class notes, exams, handouts, and presentations) are the property of the instructor. Therefore, electronic recording and/or transmission of classes or class notes is prohibited without the express written permission of the instructor. Such permission is to be considered unique to the needs of an individual student (e.g. ADA compliance), and not a license for permanent retention or electronic dissemination to others. For more information, please see the UVM policy on Intellectual Property, sections 2.1.3 and 2.4.1 C.