

SYLLABUS

PSS 311: Introduction to Agroecology

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Summer 2020

INSTRUCTORS:

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SUPPORT

Ava Murphey, ALC Program Coordinator

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CLASS MEETING TIMES AND LOCATION

Online: May 18 to June 12

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

Recommended text:

Méndez, V.E., C.M. Bacon, R. Cohen and S.R. Gliessman (Eds.) (2016). *Agroecology: a transdisciplinary, participatory and action-oriented approach*. Advances in Agroecology Series. CRC Press/Taylor and Francis.

**Other 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.

COURSE STRUCTURE

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.

Assignments:

1. View video lectures (2).

2. Online discussion on YellowDig, Monday-Thursday, based on readings and/or other course material.
3. *Reflective Essay*. Students will choose a topic of interest and develop a reflective essay that integrates the learning accomplished through the week (3-5 pages). Specific guidance and instructions will be provided. Due by Sunday May 24, at 11:59 pm.

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.

Assignments:

1. View audio lecture (1-2).
2. Online discussion forums, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, based on readings and/or other course material. This includes 3 individual posts, and 3 replies to peers' posts.
3. View and comment on video.
4. *Assignment*. Students will choose a topic of *burning* interest covered in the first 2 weeks of class and develop and upload a powerpoint or other format that you would use to teach the topic to your peers. Minimum of 10 slides. Alternatives to powerpoint (other presentation formats such as podcasts or videos) might be acceptable, but please check first with instructors. Due by Sunday May 31, at 11:59 pm.

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.

Assignments:

1. Monday:
 - Check in
 - Guest lecture #1
 - Read set 1 articles, and discuss online

2. Tuesday:
 - Guest lecture #2
 - Reading from Guest lecturer
 - View lecture or recording and discuss online.
3. Wednesday:
 - Guest lecture #3
 - Reading from Guest lecturer
 - View lecture or recording and discuss online.
4. Thursday: Develop and post questions/comments for Guest panel
5. Friday: Moderated Guest Panel
 - Course participants engage in moderated dialogue with guest panelists
6. Weekend: COVID 19 assignment

Module 4: Context matters – from theory to practice

Learning Goals:

1. Connect previous theoretical conversations with relevance to decision-making in our own lives and local food systems.
2. Explore agroecology in practice on three Vermont farms.
3. Engage in active peer to peer learning with classmates and farmers.
4. Consider the viability of agroecology for food systems transformation in the Vermont context and in your context.

Assignments:

1. Monday:
 - View videos
 - Afternoon context/COVID discussion (live/online)
2. Tuesday:
 - View farm videos (profile and farm tour)
 - Farmer panel (live/online)
3. Wednesday:
 - View farm videos (profile and farm tour)
 - Farmer panel (live/online)
4. Thursday:
 - View farm videos (profile and farm tour)
 - Farmer panel (live/online)
 - Final reflection
5. Friday:
 - View videos
 - Course synthesis (live/online)

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, Blackboard 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 [5 points]; and 2) an additional posting responding or commenting on another student's comment [5 points]. Students will do 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 Essays

After completion of each module, students will be required to prepare a reflective essay on the content of the module that also integrates their previous knowledge and experience. Guidance will be provided on how to work on these essays.

GRADING SCHEME

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

1. Discussion board commentary & reply (30 pts X 3 weeks)	90 points
2. Weekly assignments/reflections	40 points
3. Overall course participation (includes participation, quality of engagement, attendance, enthusiasm, etc.)	20 points
Total	150 points

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.