

PSS 6110 – Introduction to Agroecology
Online Course – Fall 2023
Tuesdays, 12-2pm ET from September 29-December 12, 2023

“Families, communities, collectives, organizations, and movements are the fertile soil in which agroecology flourishes. Collective self-organization and action are what makes it possible to scale-up agroecology, build local food systems, and challenge corporate control of our food system. Solidarity between peoples, between rural and urban populations, is a critical ingredient.”
– Declaration Nyeleni, 2015

CLASS MEETING TIMES AND LOCATION:

Fully online, weekly synchronous dialogue sessions on Tuesdays, 12-2pm ET (over Zoom)
Zoom link: <https://uvm.edu.zoom.us/j/88025669316>

ONLINE OFFICE HOURS: By appointment

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course seeks to provide students with both conceptual and practical content, covering the evolution of agroecology, from its origins to the present, as it gains increasing recognition in scientific, policy, social movement, and farming spaces. We will explore some of the debates around application, the risks of cooptation, and agroecology’s potential for moving us closer to full transformation of our current food systems. Through examples of agroecology in practice, the design of thriving farming-systems, cultural and political dynamics related to agroecology and more, this course will facilitate a solid foundational understanding from which to pursue agroecology as researchers, activists, policymakers and/or practitioners.

Learning Objectives –

1. Apply systems theory to consider agroecosystem and food system dynamics across contexts
2. Deconstruct the idea of a human/nature divide
3. Explore the foundations of agroecology, honoring its roots in Indigenous and peasant knowledge traditions
4. Compare tools for understanding and engaging with agroecology across science, movement, practice, and policy
5. Contextualize learning by connecting concepts both to our immediate foodsheds and wider food systems
6. Co-create a learning community in which each of us are able to show up as creative, active contributors to the space

COURSE STRUCTURE

Each of us arrives at this course with something to learn and something to teach. Because we also believe we learn best when we take part in creating learning not just consuming content, we will ask each of you to step into shared facilitation of our learning.

Course content will include readings, audio files, videos, and guest lectures, in addition to exercises and small group activities. All weekly course content will be made available on Brightspace (UVM's online learning platform) at a minimum of one week prior to class. This is UVM's first semester using Brightspace, so we'll be figuring it out together. If you are looking for answers to questions or additional support start with this [Brightspace guide for students](#) and reach out if you can't find what you need.

As mentioned above, our weekly synchronous sessions will be held on Zoom. The best way for us to overcome the challenges of online courses is to expect some glitches with the technology and navigate them with good humor.

Both through the online discussion board space, and during our synchronous dialogue sessions we will encourage active engagement with the material. We will build a culture of generous and authentic inquiry where we maintain curiosity and probe for understanding. We will create space for each of you to process course material both individually - in your discussion board posts and responses to your peers, and in community as we lean away from debate and lean into dialogue.

COURSE SCHEDULE

MODULE 1 – Agroecological Foundations (4 weeks – Aug 29th - Sept 19th)

- ⇒ Introductions, intentions, and commitments
- ⇒ Agroecology's place in a full field of alternatives
- ⇒ Orienting ourselves to agroecology
- ⇒ Internationalism and transformative agroecology

MODULE 2 - Multidimensionality (4 weeks – Sept 26th - Oct 17th)

- ⇒ Nature and biodiversity
- ⇒ Labor and value
- ⇒ Power and influence
- ⇒ Identity and culture

MODULE 3 – Scaling Agroecology (3 weeks – Oct 24th - Nov 7th)

- ⇒ Critical PAR, transdisciplinarity, and multiple ways of knowing
- ⇒ Conditions, drivers, and domains for transformation
- ⇒ Political and popular education

MODULE 4 – Current Issues (3 weeks – Nov 14th - Dec 5th)

- ⇒ Climate change
- ⇒ Technology & innovation
- ⇒ Imagining new futures

GRADING SCHEME (rubrics will be made available separately and accessible where you submit assignments in Brightspace):

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN DIALOGUE SESSIONS (30%)

SHOWING UP AND SHARING FROM YOUR OWN PERSPECTIVE (20%) - Please arrive each week ready to bring your unique contributions –based on your own experience and context– to our collective learning and ready to receive and engage with the offerings of our peers and guests. At the end of the semester, we will provide you with a rubric and ask you to grade your own participation.

MAKING MEANING IN COMMUNITY (10%) - Dialogue in small groups will offer an opportunity for shared exploration of topics, facilitating space for active listening to cultivate deeper understanding and more authentic conversations. At the end of the semester, we will provide you with a rubric and ask you to grade your peers' participation.

DISCUSSION BOARD POSTS (20%)

We are designing this class to support both learning and unlearning. In your discussion posts, we ask that you resist the temptation to share syntheses of what you read/heard/saw, and instead share your responses to the material. What questions are emerging for you? What are you confused by? Where do you see contradictions or gaps? What surprised or inspired you? This is a space for you to wrestle with ideas and offer observations and questions that will open further conversation and push forward our learning.

Weekly posts should be succinct (minimum 3 sentences for a written post). Please include at least one observation / insight, one question, and one way that the content relates to your past experiences or current interests. We also encourage you to push yourself beyond purely written discussion posts! Consider posting an audio file or sharing a poem or piece of art WITH an explanation (3 sentence minimum) that explains how what you shared encapsulates your learning or helped you clarify your thinking.

Posts are due by Sunday at 11:59 pm ET, which will leave you time to engage with your peers' contributions before our Tuesday sessions.

REFLECTIONS (25%)

In two short reflection pieces (one each during Module 1 and Module 4) you will explore your own relationship with concepts from the course, first focusing on personal observations, and then reflecting on what it means to be an agent of change.

FINAL PROJECT (25%)

During the course we will explore the idea of what it means to become an agroecologist. The final project will be an opportunity to chart your journey to date and intentions moving forward. We will share additional details as the semester progresses.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ACCESS

In keeping with University policy, any student with a documented disability interested in utilizing ADA accommodations should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS), the office of Disability Services on campus for students. SAS works with students and faculty in an interactive process to explore reasonable and appropriate accommodations, which are communicated to faculty in an accommodation letter. All students are strongly recommended to discuss with their faculty the accommodations they plan to use in each course. Faculty who receive Letters of Accommodation with [Disability Related Flexible accommodations](#) will need to fill out the Disability Related Flexibility Agreement. Any questions from faculty or students on the agreement should be directed to the SAS specialist who is indicated on the letter.

Contact SAS:

A170 Living/Learning Center;

802-656-7753

access@uvm.edu

www.uvm.edu/access

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Students have the right to practice the religion of their choice. If you need to miss class to observe a religious holiday, please submit the dates of your absence to me in writing by the end of the second full week of classes. You will be permitted to make up work within a mutually agreed-upon time. <https://www.uvm.edu/registrar/religious-holidays>

CODE OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All academic work must satisfy UVM's standards of academic integrity.

For the full policy, see: <http://www.uvm.edu/%7Euvmpg/ppg/student/acadintegrity.html>

COURSE EVALUATION

All students are expected to complete an evaluation of the course at its conclusion. Evaluations will be anonymous and confidential, and the information gained, including constructive criticisms, will be used to improve the course.

PROMOTING HEALTH & SAFETY

The University of Vermont's number one priority is to support a healthy and safe community:

Center for Health and Wellbeing:

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

Counseling & Psychiatry Services (CAPS)

Phone: (802) 656-3340

C.A.R.E. If you are concerned about a UVM community member or are concerned about a specific event, we encourage you to contact the Dean of Students Office (802-656-3380). If you would like to remain anonymous, you can report your concerns online by visiting the Dean of Students website at <https://www.uvm.edu/studentaffairs>