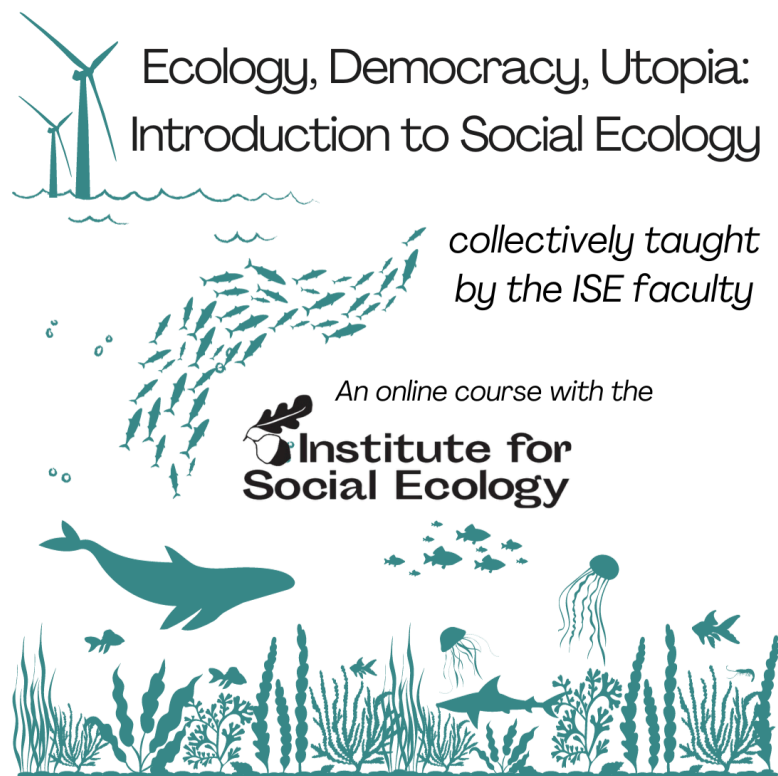


Ecology, Democracy, Utopia: Introduction to Social Ecology



Instructors:

Dan Chodorkoff, Chaia Heller, Brian Tokar, Kali Akuno, Yvonne Yen Liu, Blair Taylor, Peter Staudenmaier, Grace Gershuny, Mason Herson-Hord, and Brooke Lehman

Course Description:

The course introduces students to Social Ecology – an interdisciplinary body of ideas that explores the relationship between social and ecological problems. Social Ecology addresses a set of diverse yet interrelated themes including the emergence of hierarchy and domination in society, the nature of democracy and state, capitalism and inequality, global power relations, technology and sustainable design, food politics, and movements for social change. Students will learn the foundations of social ecology and apply these insights to a variety of contemporary political and ecological problems, sharpening their understanding of the world while developing visionary solutions to change it. The ten units explore:

- *What is Social Ecology?*
- *Understanding Nature*
- *The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy*
- *Cisheteropatriarchy and Feminist Responses*
- *Race and the Colonial Order*
- *Capitalism, Critique, Alternatives*

- *Agriculture, Climate, and Ecology*
- *Politics Beyond the State: Direct Democracy & Popular Assemblies*
- *Getting from Here to There: Social Movements and Community Organizing*
- *Reconstructive Vision: Reclaiming Utopia*

This course explores the intersection of nature, society, politics and power, examining the relationship between social and ecological problems. It addresses a set of diverse yet interrelated themes in political ecology including the nature of nature; different forms of ecological analysis and critique; how social domination relates to the domination of non-human nature; climate change and the anthropocene; technology, agriculture and sustainable design; food politics; ecology vis-à-vis utopia and dystopia; and current and historical movements for social-ecological change. We will consider how ideas about nature shape and reproduce a variety of social relations institutionalized by the state, capitalism, gender regimes, racialized inequality, sexuality, and global power relations. Students will critically engage with a variety of different theoretical perspectives – social ecology, deep ecology, ecofeminism, degrowth, eco-Marxism, accelerationism – to evaluate their analytical strengths and weaknesses and how their particular understanding of ecological problems lead to divergent solutions. We will apply these insights to a variety of contemporary political and ecological problems, sharpening our understanding of the world while developing visionary solutions to change, and perhaps save it.

WEEKLY LECTURE AND READING SCHEDULE

1. What is Social Ecology? Guest Lecturer: Dan Chodorkoff

Dan Chodorkoff. "Social Ecology: an Ecological Humanism." *The Anthropology of Utopia*. (New Compass: 2014).

Murray Bookchin. "What is Social Ecology?" *Social Ecology and Communalism*, (AK Press 2007).

2. What is Nature? Guest Lecturer: Chaia Heller

Chaia Heller. "Rescuing Lady Nature: Ecology and the Cult of the Romantic," Chapter One, *The Ecology of Everyday Life* (Black Rose: 1999).

Murray Bookchin. "Nature First and Second." pp 37-57 of *The Murray Bookchin Reader*.

3. The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy – Guest Lecturer: Brian Tokar

Murray Bookchin. "The Legacy of Domination," pp 75-98, and "Organic Society" pp 58-74 of *The Murray Bookchin Reader* (Black Rose: 1999).

David Graeber and David Wengrow. "[How to Change the Course of Human History.](#)"

Vandana Shiva. "Decolonizing the North," *Ecofeminism* (Zed 2014).

4. *Feminism(s), Ecofeminism(s), and Social Ecology – Guest Lecturer: Chaia Heller*

Chaia Heller. "Reflections on the Ecofeminist Desire for Nature," Chapter Two, *The Ecology of Everyday Life* (Black Rose: 1999).

Greta Gaard. "Ecofeminism Now" (video).

5. *Race and the Colonial World – Guest Lecturer: Kali Akuno*

Samir Amin. Selection from *Eurocentrism* (Monthly Review: 1989).

Victor Ray. "The Social Construction of Race", Chapter One, *On Critical Race Theory: Why It Matters and Why You Should Care* (Random House: 2022).

6. *Capitalism, Critique, Alternatives – Guest Lecturer: Peter Staudenmaier/Blair Taylor*

Peter Staudenmaier. "[What is Capitalism?](#)" ISE website.

Murray Bookchin. "Market versus moral economy." *The Modern Crisis* (Black Rose: 1986) pp. 77-98.

Howie Hawkins. "Community Control, Worker's Control and the Cooperative Commonwealth." *Society and Nature* 3, 1993.

Blair Taylor. "[Seven Left Myths about Capitalism.](#)" ISE website. 2012

(Video) [Fully Automated Luxury Communism](#)

7. *Agriculture, Climate, and Ecology – Guest Lecturer: Grace Gershuny*

Murray Bookchin. "The Social Matrix of Technology," "Utopia, not Futurism," and "Radical Agriculture."

Grace Gershuny. *Organic Revolutionary*. pp 12-14. (Joes Brook Press 2016).

Frances Moore Lappé. "The Food Movement: Its Power and Possibilities." *The Nation* (October 3, 2011).

8. *Politics and the State: Popular Assemblies and Direct Democracy – Guest Lecturer: Mason Herson-Hord*

Murray Bookchin. "Libertarian Municipalism: A Politics of Direct Democracy." Chapter 5, *The Next Revolution* (Verso: 2016).

Kali Akuno. "People's Assembly Overview: The Jackson People's Assembly Model." Chapter 5, *Jackson Rising: The Struggle for Economic Democracy and Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi* (Daraja Press: 2017).

Project South. *The People's Movement Assembly Organizing Handbook*.

(Video) Bookchin on "The Forms of Freedom," 1985.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FqPwr-cVz_M

9. *Getting from Here to There – Social Movements, Community Organizing, Revolutionary Politics – Guest Lecturer: Brooke Lehman*

Symbiosis Research Collective. "[Community, Democracy, and Mutual Aid: Toward Dual Power and Beyond](#)". *Next System Project*: 2017.

Tim Horras. "[Base-Building: Activist Networking or Organizing the Unorganized?](#)" *Regeneration Magazine*.

Detroit Build and Fight Strategy document (unpublished).

10. *Reconstructive Vision: Reclaiming Utopia – Guest Lecturer: Dan Chodorkoff*

Martin Buber. *Paths in Utopia*, (1949) pp. 1-15.

Dan Chodorkoff. "The Utopian Impulse," *The Anthropology of Utopia*, (New Compass: 2014) pp. 121-144).

Brian Tokar. "On Utopian Aspirations in the Climate Movement," *Toward Climate Justice*, (New Compass: 2010) pp. 117-136).

Blair Taylor. "[To Be Realistic, Demand the Impossible: Toward a Visionary Left](#)." *Tikkun*, 2014.

Information for those interested in receiving credit from Vermont State University:

Projects:

Following consultation with the instructor(s), students will design their own final project that integrates theory/knowledge from the course with real-world engagement and action. This project will draw together two components: a student-designed activity/project, and 10-12-page reflection paper. Examples of projects could include organizing a town hall meeting; applying social-ecological principles to a community garden, or participating in ongoing local activism or advocacy work. This assignment will foster the student's ability to use theory as a lens to ground personal action and transformation, seeing how their own personal history and experience resonates within larger social, economic, political and ecological contexts.

Completion of this project includes a reflection paper of approximately 1600-1800 words that is due 2 weeks following the end of the semester. The reflection paper will summarize what

students have learned through the project, and draw insights and analysis using the course readings. It must include at least 6 references to lectures and texts from the course (footnote or in-line citation is up to you), but can also draw from your own research materials. This paper will be evaluated by ISE faculty and given careful feedback from the instructor. Engaging in the final project will entail a total of 24 hours of study.

Evaluation: Evaluation is carried out by instructor and course administrator Blair Taylor according to the parameters set out in the “Grading” section which follows.

Grading:

Students will be assessed according to participation, papers, and conference work projects, based on the following evaluation guidelines: the ability to think analytically, express ideas effectively through written and communication, exchange ideas effectively through oral communication, bring innovation to their work, envisage and work independently on a project, and to accept and act on criticism. Good papers take time and come in drafts, so start early and ask a friend or colleague to read it – your final project in particular. Research librarians are an excellent resource to help get you started, as is the writing center. Don’t plagiarize; it’s counterproductive and you’ll get caught. Here are some tips on how to avoid it: <https://www1.chapman.edu/~babbie/plag00.html>. If you’re stuck or pressed for time ask for help or an extension. Lastly, we recommend checking out this useful short article on active reading strategies that can help you more efficiently identify the main arguments and key evidence in sometimes dense academic texts:

<http://blogs.swarthmore.edu/burke/permanent-features-advice-on-academia/how-to-read-in-college/>.

Grading Policy:

Grades are indicated by letters with a designated “quality point” value assigned to each as follows:

A	4.0
A-	3.7
B+	3.3
B	3.0
B-	2.7
C+	2.3

Additional grading information can be found in the 2020/2021 Castleton University Graduate Catalog, under Academic Policies, accessible online at:

<http://catalog.castleton.edu/index.php>

Academic Honesty Policy:

Castleton University is a learning institution committed to the highest standards of scholarly conduct. The students, faculty, and administration make up a scholarly community whose

integrity and success necessarily stem from a mutually agreed upon code of academic standards and principles that promote trust and honesty and prohibit the attempt to gain unfair academic advantage. Membership in the Castleton community means sharing responsibility for upholding and safeguarding these academic standards and principles.

Any violation of academic honesty will be considered cheating and will be dealt with accordingly by the appropriate authorities.

For more information click the link below to access the 2020/2021 Castleton University Graduate Catalog Academic Policy section:

http://catalog.castleton.edu/content.php?catoid=16&navoid=1204#Academic_Honesty

Use and Ownership of Copyrighted Materials:

For information and guidance, faculty and students are referred to the Vermont State College Manual of Policy and Procedures as it relates to the use and ownership of copyrighted materials. Guidelines are set out in Policy 416, accessible online at the following address:

<http://www.castleton.edu/library/information-literacy-graduation-standard/information-literacy-tutorial/information-ethics-citing-sources-and-fair-use/>

Additional information on this subject is contained in the publication “Questions and Answers on Copyright for the Campus Community.” This document can be accessed online on the National Association of College Stores web site at the following address:

<http://www.nacs.org/toolsresources/cmip/copyright/questions.aspx>

Accommodations:

Castleton is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to qualified students with disabilities so that no such student shall, by reason of a disability, be excluded from participating in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs or activities of Castleton University. For more information, please contact the Coordinator of Disability Services, at (802) 468-1428.

Course Drop Policy:

Castleton University offers courses to educators with the expectation participants will complete the course. However, the University realizes circumstances arise in one’s personal life that may cause disruptions. The policy for dropping a course is that a participant will notify the instructor in writing of the intent to withdraw from the course.

The notice should include the reason for withdrawing and be made as follows:

- 1 credit course (15 hours) – before 3 hours of the course have taken place
- 2 credit course (30 hours) – before 6 hours of the course have taken place
- 3 credit course (45 hours) – before 9 hours of the course have taken place

4 credit course (60 hours) – before 12 hours of the course have taken place

After that, changes in class status will be considered for health, bereavement, and personal or emergency situations only. Those who withdraw without adhering to this policy may be liable for associated course costs.

For more Academic Policy information check the link below to access the 2020/2021 Castleton University Graduate Catalog:

<http://catalog.castleton.edu/index.php>

Transcript Request:

<http://www.castleton.edu/campus-life/student-resources/student-services-center/transcript-request/>