

CHL 7001: Building Community Resilience for 'The Great Turning' Course Syllabus

“A resilient community is one that takes intentional action to enhance the personal and collective capacity of its citizens and institutions to respond to and influence the course of social and economic change” (Colussi, 2000, p.5)

“Future generations, if there is a livable world for them, will look back at the epochal transition we are making [from an industrial growth society] to a life-sustaining society. And they may well call this the time of the Great Turning. It is happening now. Whether or not it is recognized by corporate-controlled media, the Great Turning is a reality.” -- Joanna Macy

Instructor: Blake Poland, PhD
Associate Professor
Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto

Time: evenings or weekdays, tbd in consultation with those enrolled in the course
October 2009 - March 2010 (half credit over 2 terms)

Location: tbd

Focus

Students can expect this course to cover a number of topics related to:

- contemporary challenges in environmental & public health (environmental justice, environmental degradation, climate change, industrial agriculture & food security, energy security & peak oil, pandemic, militarism & resource wars, social unrest)
- sustainability & health
- community resilience
- social innovation, social change
- diverse disciplinary & theoretical perspectives (systems theory, complexity science, ecosocialism, political ecology, deep ecology, ecopsychology, community psychology, critical sociology)
- case studies in community resilience (e.g. Transition Town movement, community economic development, etc)

The content will be finalized in consultation with students enrolled in the course.

Rationale & Context

The world, and North America in particular, is entering a period of unprecedented change. There is mounting evidence of the potential for (and pressure for action to avoid) catastrophic runaway climate change, unprecedented species extinctions and environmental degradation, the persistence (if not growth) of alarming inequities in health, and accelerated resource depletion. To this must be added the fact that we are entering the end of a historic period of cheap and abundant fossil fuels (hitting a 'peak' variously predicted to occur between 2005 and 2012) having made 50 years of investment in an infrastructure of globalized food and industrial production, suburban sprawl, burgeoning average house sizes, car-dependence and mass consumption that drove decades of credit-dependent economic growth but delivered little in terms of long-term sustainability, local economic and agricultural self-reliance, or even, arguably (by some accounts) quality of life. By many estimates we currently possess most of the

technological know-how to solve the world's fiscal, economic, environmental, social justice and climatological crises. In other words, the problem is not technical but social. Consensus is emerging that building resilience at 3 nested levels (psychological/ personal, community, systems level) is or must be at the centre of convergent social justice and environmental social change movements. Resilience is widely understood to refer to the ability of communities, persons, or systems to withstand shocks or stress without collapse, and perhaps the ability to accept and embrace (as opposed to resist) change.

Course Objectives & Scope

This course is designed to assist graduate students working in the area of environment, social work, adult education, community development, public health and/or cognate fields (in research, practice & policy) to understand and apply concepts of resilience (from systems theory and complexity science) to building the capacity of communities to (a) successfully weather predicted disruptions/shocks associated with climate change, global pandemics, interruptions in global trade and food supply, sharp increases in the cost of energy, and environmental degradation; and (b) nurture the development of alternative spaces (economic arrangements, networks, etc) that support the emergence of life-sustaining structures and practices (economic, social, etc) to replace the unsustainable industrial growth society whose accelerated unravelling we are currently witnessing on many levels.

Particular attention will be paid to the role of community-level initiatives aimed at transitioning towards a lower-carbon society (reduced reliance on fossil fuels, decarbonization, relocalization of production, etc) and the equity implications of such changes. Emphasis will also be on identifying elements of the social fabric that can hold communities through rough times, including diversity in knowledge, skills and networks; as well as interventions and grassroots social movements that build capacity and resilience at the community level.

Teaching & Learning Approach

This course emphasizes a person-centred transformative learning approach to education wherein faculty and students explore material of mutual interest as co-learners. We will create together a space for authentic dialogue which engages the whole person.

This is a directed studies course and therefore students are expected to do the readings and participate actively in the discussions each week. The course will stretch over two semesters even though it is a standard 1/2 credit course to provide learners with sufficient time to take in the material and apply it thoughtfully to their area of study. The format is designed to support the individual learning needs of students. The final course grade will be assessed as: CREDIT / NO CREDIT. *

Since learning is not limited to the classroom lecture, the course is designed to accommodate the dynamic, temporally flexible nature of learning and will incorporate multiple means of teaching and discussion throughout the 6-7-month course including scheduled face-to-face sessions and ongoing discussions via a Web-based NING platform throughout the course. Learners are expected to participate in the multiple forms of dialogue and activities throughout the course. Although critical discussion and synthesis of relevant texts is at the heart of the course format, learning will be also be facilitated through film, resonant texts (multiple forms expression that engages the whole learner), learning activities & games, guest speakers, multi-media programming, and supplemented throughout the course with additional materials. *

There will be opportunities to participate in the design, implementation, and/or evaluation of an arts-enabled community-based transformative learning curriculum in 6 modules, for which funding has been received from the Centre for Urban Health Initiatives.

Readings

A set of readings will be compiled collaboratively as the course unfolds, and learners are encouraged to recommend additional items for consideration and modifications to the reading list may be made based on these suggestions and student needs..

Recommended text(s):

Westley, F, Zimmerman, B, & Patton, M (2006) *Getting to Maybe: How the World is Changed*. Random House Canada.

Walker, B., & Salt, D. (2006). *Resilience Thinking: Sustaining Ecosystems and People in a Changing World*. Washington: Island Press.

Newman, P., Beatley, T. I., & Boyer, H. (2009). *Resilient Cities: Responding to Peak Oil and Climate Change*. Washington, DC: Island Press.

Assignments & Grading:

The assignments will be designed collaboratively to support the individual and collective learning needs of students, within the parameters set by the School of Graduate Studies.

Assignments will be timed so as to avoid 'peak' assignment deadline times of other courses, to enable students will an otherwise full course load in the fall and/or winter term to enroll in this course.

The final grade will be CREDIT / NO CREDIT (pass/fail).

** these 2 paragraphs adapted, with thanks, from Cameron Norman (reading course on systems theory)*