

# ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCE STUDIES 311

Fall 2013

## Introduction to Systems Thinking

**Instructor:** Dr. Dan McCarthy  
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Office: EV2-2031  
Office hours: Thursdays 10:00am-12:00pm

**Meeting Time/Location:** Thursdays, 1:30-3:20pm, PAS 2083

**Tutorials:**

TUT 101	Monday 3:30-4:20	EV1 354
TUT 102	Monday 3:30-4:20	EV2 2022
TUT 103	Tuesday 3:30-4:20	EV1 354
TUT 104	Tuesday 3:30-4:20	EV2 2022
TUT 105	Wednesday 4:30-5:20	EV1 354
TUT 106	Wednesday 4:30-5:20	EV2 2022

### **Overview:**

As human beings in an interconnected world, we face a number of complex and seemingly intractable problems including such things as climate change, food security, global poverty and pandemic diseases. Understanding how to address such problems is the first step to solving them. Ultimately we need to foster social and ecological resilience. Resilience is the ability of a linked social and ecological system to respond to stress and build the adaptive capacity of individuals and groups to respond to stress. The dynamics of social change and innovation are key to building such resilience.

This course provides an opportunity to learn and begin to apply systems-based tools in the context of a case-based study defined by the student in cooperation with the teaching-team. Students are provided with an introduction to the conceptual tools of systems thinking and resilience that help understand the dynamics of social change and social innovation. These conceptual tools will then be applied by students to develop a richer understanding of a case study of fostering social change and building adaptive capacity.

## **Course Objectives:**

- 1) Through readings and weekly discussions, this course is intended to introduce undergraduate students to:
  - (i) different approaches that have been taken to describe, analyze and intervene in complex systems, and;
  - (ii) how these can be applied to issues of resilience and sustainability of linked social and ecological systems, including development of social innovations for adaptive management responses to these issues.
- 2) Apply these tools to better understand a case study that may be related to your proposed undergraduate thesis or other work or coop related experience.

## **Course Structure:**

### **Lectures**

Lecture sessions will generally be an hour and a half to two hours long. Any of the official lecture time that is not used, the course instructor will be available to provide advice on assignments.

### **Tutorials**

The 50-minute tutorials will be used to supplement and support the lectures. Teaching Assistants will provide advice on assignment topic choice and on-going support for systems description in the tutorial sessions. Students will lead-off brief discussions on their systems descriptions and proposals to get input from their peers.

## **Resources:**

### **Course Texts:**

[David Waltner-Toews](#), [James J. Kay](#), [Nina-Marie E. Lister](#). 2008. *The Ecosystem Approach: Complexity, Uncertainty, and Managing for Sustainability*  
New York, U.S.A.: Columbia University Press.

### **NOTES:**

- This useful text will be often supplemented by weekly readings posted to LEARN.

### **DESIRE 2 LEARN:**

**All** course communications and course materials (lecture notes, weekly readings) will be provided through LEARN. Please sign in to LEARN as soon as possible and ensure you are on the course roster and that your e-mail address is correct.

**Course schedule** and **weekly readings** will be provided through **LEARN** under “Lessons”.

**Supplemental course readings** are posted under “Readings”, under weekly “Lessons”, as links or specific references are provided and students are expected to find these using the University of Waterloo’s E-Journals Collection available at:

(<http://sfx.scholarsportal.info/waterloo/az>).

Please allow at least **24 hours** for responses to e-mail inquiries from the teaching team and do not expect e-mail responses from the teaching team over the weekend.

## **Course Requirements:**

### **Annotated Bibliography: 20%**

- Review at least 15 topic-relevant articles / book chapters (mostly peer-reviewed) that will inform your systems description
- No more than 10 double-spaced pages
- **Due Date: October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013 (submitted on LEARN by midnight)**

### **Tutorial Lead-off Discussion: 10%**

- Lead Tutorial Discussion on Systems Description – Provide a brief 5-minute lead-off presentation for discussion in a tutorial session. These discussions are intended to allow you to get feedback from fellow students on your systems description to date.
- **Given that presentations will take place throughout the term, grades will be based on progress-to-date**
- **Sign-Up in First Tutorial**

### **Group Systems Description: 30%**

- In tutorial sessions, work in groups to explore everyday tendencies and practices of modern/western society (such as the desire to consume particular products) from a systems perspective and develop a systems description of the problem as you define it. Creativity in the final product and presentation of your group systems description is encouraged. A minimum 10-page report to document is required – otherwise outputs of this assignment are up to you!
- **As this is a group assignment - part of your mark will be based on your group's ability to work together.**
- **Due Date: Presentation in the last week of class and creative “documentation” to be submitted after presentation.**

### **Attendance and Participation: 10%**

- Attendance in the lecture and the tutorial sessions is mandatory and attendance will be taken. This portion of the grade will be based on your attendance record in the lecture and the tutorials as well as your contribution to discussions.

### **Systems Study/Description: 30%**

- Develop a systems description of the research problem to refine your understanding of the case study. The system description is to be comprised of the following:
  - A description of the components and structure of the system
  - A description of the dynamics that underlie the system
  - Your conceptual/theoretical and personal perspective, biases, assumptions
- No more than 12 double-spaced pages
- **Due Date: December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012 (submitted on LEARN by midnight)**

### **Late Policy:**

Late assignments will be accepted up to **one week after the due date** with a penalty of one full grade (i.e., 80% becomes 70%) except for unusual mitigating circumstances that should, of course, be communicated as soon as possible. Any requests for extension without penalty or for more than one week must be made in writing in advance of the assignment due date.

## **Course Schedule:**

**NOTE:** Please refer to **LEARN 311 site** regularly for changes to this tentative **Schedule** and for **Weekly Readings**

Week #1 – September 12<sup>th</sup> – Introduction to the course

NO TUTORIALS (September 9-11)

Tutorials (September 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>): Introductory Session and Sign-up for Presentations

Week #2 – September 19<sup>th</sup> – Introduction to Systems Thinking

Tutorials (September 23<sup>rd</sup>-25<sup>th</sup>): Topic Choice for Systems Description (Individual and Group)

Week #3 – September 26<sup>th</sup> – Guest Lecture: Prof. Bob Gibson – Systems, Sustainability and Limits to Growth

Tutorials (September 30<sup>th</sup> - October 2<sup>nd</sup>): Topic Choice for Systems Description (Individual and Group)

Week #4 – October 3<sup>rd</sup> – Basics of Systems Thinking

Tutorials (October 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>): Topic Choice for Systems Description (Individual and Group)

Week #5 – October 10<sup>th</sup> – Describing Systems

Tutorials (October 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>): Questions for Annotated Bibliography and Topic Choice

**ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ASSIGNMENT DUE: October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2012**

Tutorials (October 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>): Group work with TA

Week #6 – October 17<sup>th</sup> – Systems Thinking, an Ecosystem Approach and Decision-Making

Tutorials (October 22<sup>nd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup>): Group work with TA

Week #7 – October 24<sup>th</sup> – Systems Thinking and Interdisciplinary, Environmental Research

Tutorials (October 29<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>): Group work with TA

Week #8 – October 31<sup>st</sup> – Resilience Thinking

Tutorials (November 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>): Student Presentations

Week #9 – November 7<sup>th</sup> – Social Innovation and Transition Management

Tutorials (November 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>): Student Presentations

Week #10 – November 14<sup>th</sup> – Critical Systems Thinking and Course Wrap-up/Evaluations

Tutorials (November 19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup>): Student Presentations

Week #11 – November 21<sup>st</sup> – Guest Lecture by Prof. Stephen Quilley – “Big History” and a “Third Basin of Attraction”

Tutorials (November 26<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup>): Student Presentations

Week #12 – November 28<sup>th</sup> – Final Group Presentations

**SYSTEMS DESCRIPTION ASSIGNMENT DUE: December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012**

## **Academic Integrity:**

**Academic Integrity:** In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. [www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/). Students who are unsure what constitutes an academic offence are requested to visit the on-line tutorial at: <http://www.lib.uwaterloo.ca/ait/>

**Research Ethics:** Please also note that the University of Waterloo requires all research conducted by its students, staff, and faculty which involves humans as participants to undergo prior ethics review and clearance through the Director, Office of Human Research and Animal Care (Office). The ethics review and clearance processes are intended to ensure that projects comply with the Office's Guidelines for Research with Human Participants (Guidelines) as well as those of provincial and federal agencies, and that the safety, rights and welfare of participants are adequately protected. The Guidelines inform researchers about ethical issues and procedures which are of concern when conducting research with humans (e.g. confidentiality, risks and benefits, informed consent process, etc.).

If the development of your research proposal consists of research that involves humans as participants, the please contact the course instructor for guidance and see:

[www.research.uwaterloo.ca/ethics/human/](http://www.research.uwaterloo.ca/ethics/human/)

**Note for students with disabilities:** The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the OPD at the beginning of each academic term.

**Religious Observances:** Please inform the instructor at the beginning of term if special accommodation needs to be made for religious observances that are not otherwise accounted for in the scheduling of classes and assignments.

**Grievance:** A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, [www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm). When in doubt, please contact your Undergraduate Advisor for details.

**Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offence, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offense, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offenses (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71, Student Discipline, [www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm). For typical penalties, check Guidelines for Assessment of Penalties, [www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm)

**Appeals:** A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71 – (Student Discipline) may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to Policy 72 (Student Appeals). See: [www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm)

### **Consequences of Academic Offences:**

ENV students are strongly encouraged to review the material provided by the university's Academic Integrity office (see: <http://uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/Students/index.html>).

**Turnitin:**

Plagiarism detection software (Turnitin) will be used to screen assignments on this course. This is being done to verify use of all material and sources in assignments is documented. In the first lecture of the Term, details will be provided about the arrangements for the use of Turnitin. **NOTE:** Students may request an alternative to Turnitin, which is to prepare an annotated bibliography for each assignment. For advice on how to prepare an annotated bibliography, see:

<http://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/writing/annotated-bibliography>