

University of Waterloo
School of Environment, Resources and Sustainability

ERS 702 Critical Analysis and Research

Winter 2018

Dr. Rob de Loë

Wednesday, 11:30 AM to 2:20 PM
HH 259

1. CONTACT INFORMATION

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2. ABOUT THE COURSE

The PhD in Social and Ecological Sustainability provides advanced, transdisciplinary training for students who are pursuing diverse careers in the public, private and non-profit sectors, including academia. The program offers enormous flexibility to support these diverse career paths. However, at its heart it remains an advanced academic degree where students are expected to make a significant, original contribution to knowledge through research.

This course helps students lay the foundation for their doctoral studies in the PhD in Social and Ecological Sustainability. Some of the topics we'll explore are designed to help students successfully navigate the requirements of PhD studies, notably the comprehensive examination. Others are designed to help students clarify and focus their research interests.

3. APPROACH

Learning in this course will occur through a combination of self-study, focused discussions during class sessions, peer learning through workshops, a critical writing assignment, and the creation of a Research Profile. All parts of the course – class sessions, workshops, assignments, readings – are designed to work together, and to support your personal research and learning objectives.

Many class sessions will involve structured dialogues organized around key questions and related readings. You'll prepare for these sessions by reading assigned material, and by finding your own related material. *Ultimately, the value of discussions during class session will be determined by the extent to which you have prepared yourself, and by the quality of your contributions during class.* We'll also use several class sessions to workshop and brainstorm around key topics relating to your work. These sessions facilitate considerable peer-to-peer learning.

The Research Profile assignment (see below) is the vehicle through which you will develop and solidify your academic interests, while simultaneously defining the scope of your comprehensive examination. The related Conceptual Foundations paper complements the Research Profile and gives you an opportunity to dig deeply into your interests.

4. WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM THE COURSE

By the end of the course, you should have acquired the following:

- A Research Profile document that will provide the foundation for successful completion of your Comprehensive Examination within the required time frame.
- A better appreciation for transdisciplinarity, and how your own research will fit within the transdisciplinary PhD in Social and Ecological Sustainability program.
- A much clearer understanding of your personal research goals and the area(s) in which you'd like to make contributions.
- A working strategy for achieving your personal goals through doctoral research.
- A stronger basis for preparing a proposal for your doctoral research.
- A good understanding of the nuts and bolts of the academic research process, and insights into some of its quirks.
- Improved research, writing and critical thinking skills.
- A good understanding of the interests of your peers in the PhD program.

5. COURSE READINGS

The shared readings I've identified are critical to learning in this course. They provide a common foundation of understanding to support our discussions, and they are a key part of the self-study that defines the course. Readings are associated with each week's class, and are available as electronic resources linked to the course's web site (<https://learn.uwaterloo.ca>). The web site will be available at the start of the term.

6. SCHEDULE

Following the introductory session, there will be thematic classes focused on topics such as the nature of transdisciplinarity and strategies for knowledge mobilization, interspersed with workshop sessions designed to sharpen your thinking on key aspects of your own work.

A weekly schedule showing dates, topics and assignment due dates is posted on the course web site. Details regarding each week's activities also are posted on this site. Hopefully I won't have to adjust the schedule, but if I do (e.g., due to illness or weather) I will let you know as soon as possible, and provide an updated schedule.

7. EVALUATION

The grade you receive in the course will be based on the quality and depth of your engagement with the themes we're addressing, and the quality of the work that you submit (written assignments, presentations, etc.). Grades will be based on your performance in the following:

Course Component	Value
Research Profile assignment	50%
Conceptual Foundations paper	25%
Presentation linked to a theme session	15%
Peer feedback and class contributions	10%
Total	100%

Research Profile

The written and oral components of the Comprehensive Examination for the PhD in Social and Ecological Sustainability should be completed before the end of the 16th month of your program. Through a series of sub-components that build on each other you will produce a “Research Profile” that provides the basis for your Comprehensive Examination. See the separate handout on the course website, titled *Instructions for Research Profile Assignment*.

Ideally the questions you will be asked to address during the Comprehensive Examination will relate directly to the themes and literature you mapped out in your final Research Profile. Therefore, you should view this assignment as being much more than a course requirement; *through the Research Profile assignment you are laying the foundation for your doctoral program.*

Conceptual Foundations Paper

In undertaking transdisciplinary research it’s usually the case that we have to integrate foundational concepts from diverse fields and disciplines. You may even be drawing on quite different sources of knowledge and ways of knowing. Your Research Profile will identify foundational building blocks from the literature in broad terms. However, the Research Profile document does not provide space for you to delve deeply into theoretical and conceptual issues surrounding the building blocks, or to explore whether or not and how they can be assembled into a conceptual framework you can use to undertake your research. Through the Conceptual Foundations assignment, you’ll have an opportunity to fill this gap. Importantly, your Conceptual Foundations paper directly support your Research Profile, and vice versa. Therefore, you should view the two assignments as linked and complementary. See the separate handout on the course website, titled *Instructions for Conceptual Foundations Paper*.

Presentation Linked to Theme Session

Four of the class periods are used for “theme sessions” where we will explore foundational topics such as transdisciplinarity and knowledge mobilization. During each of these sessions, students will deliver short presentations to provide a focus for the class discussions. See the separate handout on the course website, titled *Instructions for Theme Sessions for Presenters and Participants*. Each person will deliver *one* of these presentations during the term. I will assign presentation topics and time slots. Depending on enrolment, presentations may be individual or by teams. The *Schedule of Classes, Topics, and Assignment Due Dates* (available on the course website) lists the overall theme session topics and due dates.

Peer Feedback and Class Contributions

The quality of your contributions during class sessions, and the feedback you provide to your peers during workshop sessions, will provide the basis for your peer feedback and class contributions grade. This part of your overall grade speaks to the importance of constructive participation and engagement with your peers during the course.

Basic Expectations

My basic expectations are as follows:

- During class sessions, you participate effectively, respectfully and constructively.
- Your responses to other peoples' ideas are critical and specific, if necessary, but fair. At the same time, you accept fair but specific critical feedback in the spirit in which it is offered.
- Your written work is well organized, free of grammar, spelling and style issues, and properly supported with relevant literature; you follow the instructions.
- Your arguments are thoughtful, insightful and well-grounded in relevant literature and theory.
- Rather than simply relying on resources that have been provided to you, or on material with which you already are familiar, you read widely in new areas. This allows you to bring new ideas and perspectives to the table.
- Work you complete is submitted on time, and you are always well prepared for class.
- You understand the University of Waterloo's high standards of integrity and ethics, and you meet or exceed them at all times.

To receive a truly excellent grade, you need to go beyond basic expectations. For example, in tangible ways you will have to demonstrate originality and excellence in your research, argumentation, contributions during classes, peer feedback, writing and presentations.

8. POLICIES

Consultation

I've identified the day of class as my open "office day" for this course. Drop in any time I'm available and not in a meeting or otherwise busy. I'll try to be available.

On the remaining days of the week, I'm going to be busy with administrative tasks, course preparation and marking, other classes, research projects, graduate student supervision, writing, scheduled appointments and other tasks. Please try to see me on my scheduled office day – but if it's an emergency I will try to accommodate you. If you need to see me in person outside of my scheduled office hours, I'm always happy to make an appointment.

Email Policy

Email is an excellent way to contact me about straightforward problems and questions. I will respond to your emails as promptly as possible. However, I get a lot of emails so it may take me a day or two to reply to your message.

I will use your uwaterloo.ca account to send messages to you, so make sure that you check it regularly. If you use another service (e.g., Gmail), then make sure that you are forwarding messages sent to your uwaterloo.ca email account.

Course Web Site

This course makes extensive use of the University of Waterloo's courseware system. The course web site (<https://learn.uwaterloo.ca>) contains the following material:

- Schedules of dates (topics, assignment due dates, readings)
- Instructions and handouts
- Week-by-week overviews of each course, including the theme, key questions, links to readings, and instructions for assignments
- Discussion forums and drop boxes
- Announcements

It is your responsibility to learn how to use the course web site, and to check regularly for information and updates.

When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement Due to Illness or Other Reasons

If you find yourself unable to meet a course requirement because of medical, compassionate or other reasons, then please advise me as soon as possible. Contact me in advance, but otherwise let me know as soon as you can that you need special consideration. Email is fine.

There's a lot to do in this course, and your colleagues are depending on you to carry your share of the load during class time. If you're not prepared, then everyone's learning suffers. Therefore, please manage your time carefully, and remember that *pressure of work alone is not an acceptable reason for lack of preparedness.*

Remember that attendance in class and full participation in discussions is a course requirement!

Assignment Submission and Late Penalties

Assignments must be submitted through the course web site by the time and date specified in the instructions for that assignment. I will not accept assignments submitted any other way, e.g., in hard copy, or sent as email attachments.

Unless I have indicated otherwise, I will accept late assignments. If you're late because of illness or other emergency that we've discussed, then there won't be a penalty. Otherwise, in fairness to your peers, I will apply a late penalty of 5% per day. After 5 days I won't accept late assignments unless we have a prior arrangement.

Group Work and Collaboration

Discussing assignments with your colleagues is an excellent way to learn from your peers and to test your ideas. I strongly encourage you to brainstorm, share ideas, review drafts of assignments, etc. However, ultimately work that you turn in has to be the product of your own efforts unless the instructions specifically indicate otherwise.

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. The University's policies and procedures for students, staff and faculty regarding academic integrity are posted here: <http://uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/index.html>