CHL5126H: Building Community Resilience - Course Syllabus - Winter 2013

“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, Associate Professor, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto
Time: Winter 2013, Thursdays 1-3pm
Location: FG77

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) runaway climate change, unprecedented species extinctions and environmental degradation, the persistence (and 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 2020) 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, or the ability to accept and embrace (as opposed to resist) change.

Course Objectives & Scope
This course is designed to assist students working in the area of public health, 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 health and 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.

Students are expected to do the readings and participate actively in the discussions each week.

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 term 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 get involved in a number of related research projects and community initiatives that address the core themes and issues of the course. Some optional field trips and site visits may also be arranged.

The course will be supported by a vibrant interactive website using the NING platform. This will be a member-only space to encourage sharing. It will be a space to post video links, documents & readings, announce events, discuss aspects of the course via discussion forums, etc.

Readings
A set of readings has been compiled collaboratively as the course unfolds in two previous years in which it has been offered. 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 books (you are not required to purchase these):


Assignments & Grading:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Max. Length</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Tentative Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1. Individual paper on emerging challenges: implications for public health</td>
<td>1,000 words</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Monday, Feb.4, noon</td>
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<tr>
<td>A2. Book review</td>
<td>1,000 words</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Monday, Feb.25, noon</td>
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<tr>
<td>A3: Final Group Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>a) statement of intent</td>
<td>500 words</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>March 11, noon</td>
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<tr>
<td>b) final paper</td>
<td>4,000 words</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>April 17, noon</td>
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(see separate handout on Assignment Guidelines for additional details)
Course Structure & Topics “At a Glance”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Topics (class sessions)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Introduction</td>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
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| II. Emerging Threats to Health Equity (resilience in the face of ~) | 2. Environmental Degradation & Ecosystem Collapse & Climate Change  
3. Peak Oil / Energy Insecurity & Economic Instability |
| III. Understanding Resilience | 4. Resilience in Social-Ecological Systems  
5. Understanding Community Resilience |
8. Community Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Change  
9. Transition Towns: A Social Movement Response |
| V. Deepening: Perspectives on (Intentional) Social Change | 10. Community Organizing & Social Action  
11. Critical Perspectives on ‘Green Capitalism’  
12. Understanding & Working with Emergence / Indigenous & Global South Perspectives  
13. Student group project presentations |

2013 Reading List
(see separate extended reading list for full reference information - full length title, publisher, etc):

SESSION 1: Introduction
- Introductions
- Course overview & philosophy
- Q&A
- **Presentation: Building Community Resilience (BP)**
- Discussion (in pairs + plenary)
- Next steps

PART II. EMERGING THREATS TO HEALTH EQUITY

SESSION 2: Environmental Degradation / Environmental Justice / Climate Change / Climate Justice

Film: Refugees of the Blue Planet (NFB, 2007)  
Radio Australia interview with Paul Gilding, former ED of Greenpeace http://www.resilience.org/stories/2012-12-11/paul-gilding-on-the-great-disruption (14min)

Readings
Also recommended:

Adger, WN, Paavola, J, Huq, S, & Mace, MJ (Eds.), Fairness in Adaptation to Climate Change. Boston, MA: MIT Press. (Chapter 1)


Goldtooth, T. B. K. (2009). Indigenous perspective on cozlonialism. Canadian Dimension, 43(6), 31-33. (a post-colonial critique of carbon trading and market/political responses to climate change)


SESSION 4: Peak Oil, Energy Security & Health + Economic Instability, Globalization & Health + Rising Inequality

Films: End of Suburbia + The Economics of Happiness

Readings


Also recommended:


### PART III. UNDERSTANDING RESILIENCE

#### SESSION 5: Resilience in Social-Ecological Systems

Readings:


Also recommended:


SESSION 6: Community Resilience

Readings:


Also recommended:


PART IV. APPLYING RESILIENCE THINKING: BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

SESSION 7: Building Community & Community Resilience

Film: *The Power of Community - How Cuba Survived Peak Oil*

Readings:


Also recommended:


SESSION 8: Community Resilience & Adaptation to Climate Change

Readings:


Also recommended:


SESSION 9:  Transition Towns: A Social Movement Response

Readings:


Also recommended:


Hopkins, R. (2009). Resilience Thinking: Why ‘resilience thinking’ is a crucial missing piece of the climate-change jigsaw and why resilience is a more useful concept than sustainability. Resurgence, 257(Nov/Dec)


Murphy, P. (2008). Plan C: Community Survival Strategies for Peak Oil and Climate Change. New Society. (Chapter 8)


SESSION 10:  Community Organizing & Social Action

Readings:

Also recommended:


The ACTivist Toolkit online (Activist Magazine) [http://www.activistmagazine.com/index.php?option=content&task=category&sectionid=3&id=109&Itemid=56


SESSION 11: Critical Perspectives on ‘Green Capitalism’

Short Web Video: [www.storyofstuff.com/capandtrade/](http://www.storyofstuff.com/capandtrade/)

Readings:


Also recommended:


SESSION 13: Student group project presentations

Readings: none.
Final course evaluations
Celebratory pot-luck