

Traditions and transformations in sustainability: The researcher in an era of alternate truths

Credits: 5 ECTS / 7,5 ECTS with a manuscript ready for submission

Work load: About 200 work hours

Level: PhD

Semester: Fall 2017

Language of instruction: English

Entrance requirements: MA, MS, MFA or equivalent

Course coordinator: Professor Gudrun Helgadottir, Department of Business administration and IT, School of Business, University College of Southeast Norway

Course summary

This is a transdisciplinary PhD course on research and methods, using the theme of sustainability to investigate academic traditions and the transformations of contemporary discourse in terms of understandings of truth and the importance of evidence-based decisions. Information has never been as readily available to as many as now. Conventional academic wisdom would suggest that this leads to informed decisions and sustainable practice in individual lives as well as global politics. However, the capacity, competence and willingness to process, analyze and conclude from reliable information is not a given in the information society. Powerful voices call into question the validity and applicability of academic knowledge. Being in an era of “alternate truths” means that the traditions of academia are under challenge if not transformation, that young researchers must understand and actively engage in.

Learning outcomes

Knowledge

Upon completion of the course, the students will be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the nature of sustainability as a cultural construct
- Discuss manifestation the sustainability aspect in their respective field of research

Skills

Upon completion of the course, the students will be able to:

- Present a contribution to academic discourse through oral presentation among peers
- Write a manuscript for publication in an academic journal (for 7,5 ECTS)
- Make informed contributions to sustainability issues in public discourses
- Critically and constructively review the work of their peers

Competencies

Upon completing the course, the students should be able to

- Apply a multidisciplinary approach to sustainability research by drawing on the four pillars of sustainability; nature, culture, society and economy
- Account for the premises of their work, the quality criteria they espouse and the applicability of their research

Content

The theme of the course is research methodology; how ontologies and epistemology affect the notion of sustainability as interplay between society, culture, economy and ecology. We wish to address the complexity of multi-level, multi-interest, multifaceted choices and challenges involved in how traditions and transformations affect sustainability. Transformations in the public discourse on knowledge production and the application of research, challenge young researchers to examine the epistemological enterprise they engage in and the ontological premises it rests on.

The literature for the course falls into three categories;

1. Texts dealing with the mission of academics and the nature of knowledge are compulsory reading
2. Texts on sustainability from diverse disciplines and fields, here each student selects readings from own academic field
3. Texts on research methods, again here students are expected to select the texts most relevant to their research project

The course is in collaboration with the North Atlantic Forum network on occasion of their 11th conference held in Bø in Telemark September 13th-16th 2017. PhD students from a wide range of disciplines and programs in the North Atlantic region are invited to apply for the course and present research papers. Keynote speakers from the conference will participate in a seminar with the doctoral students and give feedback on their first presentation. The students will participate in and observe the conference as a case in contemporary sustainability discourses.

The conference is an interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral forum to address the interplay between society, culture, economy and ecology. This theme fits well with the ambition and profile of the University College of Southeast Norway as interdisciplinary, international, yet locally relevant and devoted to sustainability.

Learning activities

The course follows and provides reflection on the process of contributing to academic discourse by proposing, presenting, peer reviewing and writing for publication.

The student applies for the course with an abstract of about 250 words on their proposed presentation in a course seminar. Application deadline is March 15th 2017.

September 12th 2017 each student has a 20-minute presentation of own work in progress and participates in a dialogue on other participants' contributions led by the course instructors and with participation from the keynote speakers. September 16th is a follow up seminar for feedback on

presentations and the conference theme and workshop on academic life and publishing by course instructors. Approximately 12 hours.

Students are required to attend keynotes and choose pertinent parallel sessions to attend presentations at the North Atlantic Forum conference. Approximately 18 hours.

Following the conference and seminars, students write a paper elaborating their initial presentation as a draft manuscript for publication and submits for comment by course instructors. Approximately 130 hours. Each student also reviews a draft by a fellow student. Approximately 40 hours. Those students wishing to take the course for 7,5 ECTS continue working on their paper to prepare it for submission in a chosen journal and a manuscript ready for submission is due December 5th. Approximately 100 hours.

Assignments and assessment

1. Presentation of own work during introductory seminar. Due September 12th. Pass/Fail
2. An elaboration of the concept in a final text of about 4 500 words. Due October 24th Pass/Fail
3. A review of about 250 words of another student's contribution. Due November 15th Pass/Fail
4. OPTIONAL: Taking the final text to submission in an academic journal. Due December 5th Pass/Fail

Literature

Bates, S.R. & Jenkins, L. (2007) Teaching and Learning Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science *POLITICS* 27(1), 55–63

Birkeland, Inger Constanza, Robert Burton and Katriina Siivonen (editors) (forthcoming 2017). *Cultural sustainability and the nature-culture interface: Livelihoods, policies, and methodologies*. Routledge Series in Culture and Sustainable Development.

Campbell, C.M. & O'Meara, K. (2014) Faculty Agency: Departmental Contexts that Matter in Faculty Careers. *Res High Educ* 55: 49. [doi:10.1007/s11162-013-9303-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-013-9303-x)

Caplan, P. (1992) *Lifting a ton of feathers. A woman's guide to surviving in the academic world*. University of Toronto Press.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Los Angeles, Calif: SAGE.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. London: Sage.

Finley, S. (2012). Ecoaesthetics. Critical Arts-Based Research and Environmental Advocacy. In N. K. Denzin & M. D. Giardina (Eds.), *Qualitative Inquiry and the Politics of Advocacy* (pp. 205-220). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press

Foucault, M. (1979). 'What Is an Author?' In *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*. Josué V. Harari, ed. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 141–160

- Hay, C. (2007). Does Ontology Trump Epistemology? Notes on the Directional Dependence of Ontology and Epistemology in Political Analysis *POLITICS* 27(2), 115–118
- Nogues-Pedregal, A. (ed.) (2012) *Culture and society in tourism contexts*. Emerald <https://www.amazon.com/Culture-Society-Tourism-Contexts-Science/dp/0857246836>
- Latour, B., 2005. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford UP. (281 pages)
- Lippard, Lucy (1997). The lure of the local. Senses of place in a multi centered society. <http://www.openbibart.fr/item/display/10068/952560>
- Rose, G. (2001). *Visual methodologies*. London: Sage.
- Skúlason, P. (2006). The university and ethics of knowledge. Presented at Le Collège de France, April 6th 2006, translated into English by Barbara Nelson. <http://pallskulason.is/english/90-the-university-and-the-ethics-of-knowledge>
- Soini, K. & I Birkeland (2014) Exploring the scientific discourse on cultural sustainability- *Geoforum*, Volume 51, January 2014, Pages 213–223 (10 pages) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2013.12.001>
- Stake, R. (2010). *Qualitative research: Studying how things work*. New York: Guilford Press.

Part of study

This is an elective course offered by the PhD programme in Culture Studies suitable for students in all PhD programmes at USN and international PhD students.