

# Environmental Studies 0332

## The Perennial Turn

### Spring 2023

Class Times and Locations  
Wednesday, 1:30-4:15 pm, Munroe 311

Primary Course Instructor Marc Lapin	New Perennials Project Director Bill Vitek	Community-Connected Project Assistant Shivapriya Sudhakaran Nair
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<b>Office Hours:</b> Th 10-12 & by appointment	<b>Office Hours:</b> W 10-12 & by appointment	<b>Office Hours:</b> TBD

**Class Website:** Our Canvas website, with course information, readings, assignments, and updates is <https://middlebury.instructure.com/courses/11875>. We suggest you bookmark this page. It will have all the essential course information.

**Course Description:** Twelve thousand years ago our ancestors developed a technology that started what human historians consider to be such a considerable turning point in Earth's history they have termed it a revolution, the Agricultural Revolution. The domestication of grains and the organization of societies shaped around concentrated cultivation of calories were independently developed in different places around the globe. The crops and agricultural practices spread quickly and mark the transition from the Paleolithic, the Old Stone Age, to the Neolithic, the New Stone Age. Certainly the development of older technologies - such as language, managed fire - led to profound changes in the brains and societal arrangements of *Homo* and contributed to early humans' manipulations of lands and waters. Yet, agriculture was such a large transition for Earth as a whole that conversion of land to fields of annual crops relate to markers of early stages of change in the historic record of anthropogenically elevated atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations. Our Perennial Turn course works with the premise that thought systems are intricately connected with food systems. We will build on this idea as we work with the New Perennials Project's five spheres—teaching/ learning, creative arts, sacred practices, healing arts, and food systems—and this semester learn with and from community partners in the latter two spheres.

The human history of “civilization” began with the ability to grow and store large surpluses of food. From these not-so-simple acts (let's honor these ancestors and their creativity, imagination and ingenuity—even Confucius at a young age worked in a granary) came not only civilizations with awe-inspiring art and architecture, but also power structures, institutional arrangements and socio-economic stratification that have shaped our minds, including what we do and do not notice as well as beliefs and behaviors that often go unquestioned. Humans came to characterize many plants as “weeds,” and, as you know, a lot of insects, fungi, viruses and bacteria are called “pests.” Some lands are thought of as “productive,” some as “wasteland” and some as “wild,” a term that has generated much discussion in recent years. Our ancestors learned that the soil needed yearly disturbance to grow the annually replanted grain monocultures that became essential to the survival of densely concentrated human

populations. And, since at least the mid-1800s (publication of G.P. Marsh's "Man and Nature"), we've been learning again and again that many of our contemporary food and agriculture ways are destroying the life systems that allowed humans and many other organisms to evolve and flourish.

"The Perennial Turn" is a *placeholder* phrase to describe ancient and recent ways of knowing that point to alternatives in agriculture and to discoveries in cosmology, quantum physics, evolutionary and ecosystem biology, systems science, and more. These discoveries increasingly reveal a Universe and Earth that are alive, creative, emergent, long-lasting, and diverse in ways we have not even imagined. It seems that our ancestors knew much of this for thousands, if not thousands of thousands, of years, and honored the sacredness of existence in ways that have largely fallen out of favor. As we collaborate within our region, the course brings together theory and ideas with the real-time practices that our partners bring forth in their many ways. We explore questions focused on what is needed for healthy minds, bodies and spirits in a world where many aspects of societies and ecosystems are breaking apart.

In this fifth iteration of the course, our Spring 2023 version will *focus on healing arts/well-being and food systems*. Students have continually expressed a deep interest in these two New Perennials (NP) spheres. In all of our NP work, we explore how different ways of being may be informed by and arise from a different way of growing food. More specifically we will consider the perennial polyculture Natural Systems Agriculture approach first developed by [The Land Institute](#) in Salina, Kansas. Natural Systems Agriculture is premised on growing our major food crops as perennial plants in diverse mixes that mimic simplified (very simplified) prairies. Ecosystems actually exist and function on Earth mostly as diverse mixtures with perennial plants doing the huge majority of transforming sunlight, water and carbon dioxide into energy-rich carbohydrates. Perennial primary producers are embedded in the Ecosphere as parts of complex living systems. Perennial grain, legume and oilseed crops now being developed in over 50 research institutions offer the possibility that we humans can come to feed ourselves without tearing apart the soil each year and planting monocultures of one grain or legume over hundreds and thousands of acres. The class will consider societal structures that might likewise be informed by this ecosystem approach—and that are ripe for transformation—by investigating interrelationships among:

1. annual-disturbance surplus-agriculture,
2. the thought systems, hierarchical state-societies, and social institutions that co-emerged with agriculture in many places around the world, and
3. imaginative ways forward that offer just, reasonable and resilient alternatives.

We want to learn to think like a prairie, a forest, and soil, and use "[nature as measure](#)" [[click for 15-min video](#)] for transforming both agriculture and social institutions.

Together in a spirit of collegial trust we engage in the lifelong work of learning-unlearning-learning anew. We will all encounter the uncomfortable, move within ages of past-present-future, and co-create from a foundation of perennial ideas, practices and frameworks. We hope to envision and discuss the efficacy of Perennial Turn-thinking for addressing local, regional and planetary issues. We will launch into imaginative conversation, writing and contemplation about a universe of alternative ways of thinking, growing, eating, being, healing, honoring and teaching. We hope to embrace uncertainty, non-linearity, and the

discomforts that come from an open-systems, emergence-oriented ‘classroom.’ There is work and wonder enough for each one of us in this course, regardless of major or background.

### **Structure and Process of the Class**

Weekly classes will include the following elements:

1. Contemplative and embodied learning – some of this takes place outside – which includes movement, meditation, stillness and exploration of the more-than-human world (please be prepared to be outside in any type of weather each week)
2. Discussing readings, viewings, listenings – *the first half of the semester has a heavier reading load as we engage with materials to introduce you to perennial-thinking that emerged in previous semesters and from colleagues and like-minded folks around the world through the ages*
3. Community-Connected Learning / Community partner work
4. Whatever else emerges

Additionally, this spring we currently know of one event co-hosted by one of our community partners and the Food Studies program. We will notify you of other relevant special events on campus, but it is unlikely that we will assign attendance to others. **Please plan to attend this assigned program:**

**Tuesday, March 14<sup>th</sup> 6:30-8 pm.** [The Role of Ruminants in Reversing Global Warming](#)  
Seth Itzkan of [Soil4Climate](#); McCardell Bicentennial Hall 216.

### **A Community-Connected Learning / Deep-Listening Model**

Engaged-learning is a form of experiential learning that combines collaborative work with an external partner, scholarly reading, in- and out-of-class discussion, and creative-reflective expression through the likes of sketching, writing, dance, and music. A primary goal of this course is for all of us to be consciously immersed in systems of inter-dependence, while considering health and wellbeing at scales including personal, community, all of humanity, and planetary. Coursework is designed to create valuable learning experiences for all of us, and it can sometimes be disorienting and uncomfortable.

An important aspect of this course is Community-Connected Learning (CCL) where your work with community partners will support you in perennial thinking and doing and in development of deep-listening skills to create meaningful, authentic conversations. This semester the CCL portion of the course will be under the aegis of Project Assistant Shivapriya (Priya) Sudhakaran Nair, who comes to us via the [Community-Connected Project Assistant program run by CCE](#). You will have a chance to develop and practice [Deep Listening](#) throughout the entire semester. CCL small-group work will help develop leadership, cooperation, and collaboration—skills needed to work effectively in professional settings. We hope that, in addition to your community partner conversations, every class will provide opportunities for deep listening.

### **Course Materials**

Throughout the semester we will engage with a wide variety of readings, podcasts and videos. Assignments, links and pdf's will be accessed through [Canvas](#). In addition to the posted pdf's, readings will draw from three books that you will have—one for you to purchase and two that will be gifts from New Perennials:

1. **Purchase:** *Emergent Strategy* by adrienne maree brown. 2017. AK Press.

2. *The Perennial Turn: Contemporary Essays from the Field*, edited by Bill Vitek – a gift underwritten by our generous New Perennials Project funders!
3. *Living Perenniality: Plants, Agriculture, and the Transformation of Consciousness* by Craig Holdrege – another gift underwritten by our generous New Perennials Project funders!

## Course Elements

1. **Participation.** We meet for only 2¾ hours each week, and our time together learning from each other and co-creating the Perennial Turn is not only a critical part of the course but truly is very much a cherished part of the “turn” that we are considering. Thus, class attendance and positive, active participation are a major part of the course. “Positive, active participation” includes participating respectfully and constructively in class discussions; communicating and interacting conscientiously and responsibly with the whole class, which includes your project group, community partners, and instructors; meeting group obligations and deadlines; and having a team-oriented, collaborative, and thoughtful attitude. We expect your participation to incorporate the following: 1) all person-to-person course-related **engagement**, 2) a **weekly reading response assignment** that you will submit as a Discussion post in Canvas (details provided in class and on Canvas), 3) **attendance** at the required March 14<sup>th</sup> evening talk, and 4) taking all opportunities to express your **depth** of integrative thinking and connections with all knowledges you bring to class from assigned and previously assimilated materials, other courses, and your wealth of thinking, feeling, intuition and experiences.
2. **Community-Connected Learning: Partner Work.** Throughout the semester you will be participating in a team of two students to collaborate with a community partner. Your CCL work throughout the semester involves: 1) logistics, communications, and time management with your teammate and partner; 2) collaboration with your teammate; 3) reporting/sharing your partner experience with the entire class three or four times during the semester; and, 4) a final presentation to synthesize and communicate about your partner work (during the penultimate or last week of classes). Please note we will be sharing detailed information about the Community Partner experience during the first two weeks of the semester, with work commencing with your partners during the third week of the semester. The first partner conversation must take place during the third or fourth week of the semester (weeks of 2/27, 3/6). The second conversation must occur during weeks seven to nine (weeks of 3/27, 4/3, 4/10).
3. **Interlearning Activity, a semester-long relationship and journaling experience.** Detailed instructions will be provided for this activity which is, among other goals, designed to help us practice multiple ways of knowing. You will visit your other-than-human inter-learning site, for 20-30 minutes at least once a week and preferably twice, to deeply observe and inter-learn (learning from and with). As you will see, the assignment specifies a different focus for each week. You will submit integrative-reflective work twice—once part-way through the semester and at the conclusion of the semester. We expect that the mid-way interlearning submission is a substantial, deeply considered work, and we expect that the final submission,

which will reflect a whole semester of interlearning, is even more deeply considered and substantial.

- 4. Perennial Turn paper/pamphlet.** In previous iterations of this course the formal paper assignments explored notions of perennial learning (2020 and 2021) and a perennial glossary (2018 and 2019). This year we turn to the radical pamphlet tradition as a medium for addressing social justice issues, and as a low cost, easy-to-produce alternative to the dominant power structures that control the media, including social media. The pamphlet has been utilized for centuries and around the world to advocate for political independence, freedom from oppression, the expansion of rights, greater access to education and health care, peace, and environmental protection, to name just a few causes. Ideally, your pamphlet submission will have a page length of 7-10 pages of persuasive, analytical prose focused on an issue and audience of your choosing, and will incorporate broadly and synthetically some of the themes, ideas, readings, discussions, and experiences from the course. Specific details and background materials will be provided well in advance of the due date.

### **Assessment**

Students sitting in rows like a standing crop that becomes graded upon harvest (prime, choice, select, top quality, seconds...) is very much aligned with, and historically a result of, a purely quantitative and mechanistic model of life. Grading student work is problematic and can be antithetical to both learning and unlearning. All “alternative” grading models also have undesirable aspects. [This very short read about ungrading](#) has many expressions aligned with the sensibility of our community of learning and exploration in Perennial Turn. Please read it. We are required to submit a grade for you for the course, so, after much thought we have decided that your grade in ES332 will be your own. Give yourself the grade you want. Simple as that—with two guidelines required for an A: 1) You must submit every assignment, and 2) What you submit must be aligned with the guidelines of the assignment. Our primary interest is that you learn. Please, as part of our learning community be the best you can be on any day, given where you are at the moment, living among everything that you are inter-relating with, holding on to, releasing, forgiving, questioning, grieving...Explore with us unbound and limitless learning. Bring your whole self, acknowledging that your whole self is dynamic and ever-emerging.

### **Assignment and Partner-Work Dates**

- ✓ Interlearning site and greeting narrative – Due Sunday, February 26
- ✓ Background research on your partner – February 22-28
- ✓ Partner conversation 1- February 26-March 19 (Weeks 3-5)
- ✓ Interlearning snapshot – Due Friday, March 17
- ✓ Partner conversation 2 - March 26-April 15 (Weeks 7-9)
- ✓ Interlearning midstream submission – Due Sunday, April 9 (please make alternative arrangements if this conflicts with your observance of a religious holiday)
- ✓ Perennial Turn pamphlet – Due Monday, April 24
- ✓ Community-Connected Learning Partner presentation – Wednesday, May 3
- ✓ Interlearning end-of-semester submission – Due Thursday, May 18
- ✓ Conversation with Marc or Bill – schedule for a time between May 1 and May 12

## **Accommodations**

Students who have Letters of Accommodation in this class are encouraged to contact us as early in the semester as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. For those without Letters of Accommodation, assistance is available to eligible students through the Disability Resource Center (DRC). Please contact ADA Coordinators Jodi Litchfield, Peter Ploegman or Dierdre Kelly of the DRC at [ada@middlebury.edu](mailto:ada@middlebury.edu) for more information. All accommodations-related discussions with professors and DRC are confidential.

## **Conflicts in Scheduling**

Students involved in extracurricular activities including sports and creative arts productions will need to notify the professors at the beginning of the semester about any schedule conflicts. We realize schedules develop through the semester, so please notify us asap when you learn of an event that presents a conflict with our scheduled class time and other course-related events.

## **Honor Code**

We operate on trust! Adherence to the [College honor code](#) is required, of course. Professors and students alike all agree to be familiar with the College policy. In Perennial Turn, a sizable portion of the work is collaborative by design and thus, your classmates and project groups often represent “authorized (wildly! encouraged) aid.” The work of your individual assignments—perennial pamphlet and interlearning submissions—must be your own “product” but you may rely on conversations with any and all, be they human or other-than-human.

## **Email Policy**

If you have questions or things you’d like to discuss, please schedule a time to meet with any of the three instructors. If you send us an email, please allow enough time for us to respond. We’ll do our best to respond to email inquiries within 24 hours during the week and within 48 hours on weekends.

## **Class Communication and Collaboration**

We use Canvas and email for everything course-related. [The Canvas site](#) will include readings beyond the three books listed above, links for assigned materials and of general interest, discussion links for the weekly reading responses, and assignment instructions and depositories. We will provide more information about each of your assignments well in advance of due dates. For written materials we’ll ask for submissions via Canvas in the form of word documents or pdfs. Interlearning works often include non-text or non-scannable submissions and can be handed to us in person or delivered to Marc’s office.

## **Weekly Readings/Watchings/Listenings & Other Class Prep Information**

Please refer to the Canvas site weekly modules for this info. Class prep materials will be posted no later than one-week in advance. A Calendar of Weekly Work and Events will also be posted in Canvas.