

NEW UNIVERSITY COOPERATIVE

2009 SUMMER SHORT COURSE PROGRAM FINAL REPORT

August 1-28, Earltown, Nova Scotia, Canada

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Introduction

Summer 2009 saw the implementation of a month long intensive residential program of the New University Cooperative (NUC). This was the first attempt at implementing the vision and principles of the organization. The intention of the program was to determine the feasibility of this type of course delivery and programming, providing a test case for future programming. Everything to do with the organization and facilitation of the program would be assessed to see if indeed this structure could be used as a template for future curricula delivery. Planning began one year prior to the beginning of the program, and occurred primarily electronically with some face to face meetings, including a two-day symposium in Tatamagouche.

The planning included selection of location, course components and educators; promotion to recruit students; and fundraising. Ted Rutland and Wilma van der Veen agreed to be the lead organizers, educators and facilitators of the program, in consultation with the NUC's board of directors. A general location of Nova Scotia was chosen because of its proximity to NUC directors, members and supporters. The month of August was chosen as this would not be in conflict with the standard academic year. Some funds were provided by Carrot Cache of Toronto, in addition to funds that would be raised through tuition fees.

Instructors

- Dr. E. Wilma van der Veen, Ph.D. Sociology RMIT, B. Hon. Math UW, College Professor, Sociology, Okanagan College & Board of Director, NUC
- Ted Rutland, Geography, UBC Ph.D. Candidate

Wilma (B. Hon. Math University of Waterloo, Ph.D. Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) is an educator, including college professor of sociology and criminology, and trainer in nonviolence, diversity and environment, drawing upon a foundation of popular education. Wilma is an activist academic who uses her position of privilege to assist community groups to seek social change in various areas of social justice (e.g. peace, environment and development), and to advocate on behalf of marginalized groups in society, (e.g., youth at risk, inmates, women, people who are poor, people with disabilities, people of colour). Wilma is also a writer and researcher on issues of power and social justice, an organizer, facilitator, coordinator and spokesperson for various small and large non-profit and non-governmental organizations.

Ted (PhD (ABD) University of British Columbia, MA Dalhousie University, B. Comm Mount Allison University), is a teacher, researcher, and writer, focusing on issues of economic and environmental justice. His writing draws political economy and cultural theory to analyze how social divisions shape, and are shaped by, ongoing processes of capitalist development, urbanization, and environmental transformation. He is particularly interested in how perceptions of nature are shaped by colonialism and white supremacy (in its subtle forms), and how such perceptions create major obstacles to the creation of socially inclusive environmental movements. His teaching aims to create spaces of personal transformation, for students and teacher alike; anti-oppressive methods are central here, as a critical analysis of one's social position in networks of oppression is not only a necessary (and never finished) part of dismantling such networks, but also a productive way of remaking one's relationship with oneself and the world.

Location: Accommodation & Food

Hemalo property, Earltown, Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia was chosen as the location because several members of the cooperative resided in the province and would be available to work on the program leading up to it and during its implementation. Some of these members were able to scout around for appropriate facilities in which to hold the program. More specifically the area where facilities were sought was the North Shore as the members resided in close proximity to this region of the province. Facilities were sought that could simultaneously house the students in order to provide the residential living component of the course, as well as offer options in terms of classroom instruction space.

One of the greatest concerns of the organizers was finding a suitable and affordable location. This proved to be initially quite difficult, with summer being a prime time for property owners to rent out their summer properties at high seasonal rates. As well, to house potentially 10-12 people was deemed a significant financial liability by landlords. Fortunately through the

wide network of supporters, a solution presented itself that proved to be very cost effective for this 1st program and future NUC course offerings.

A rural location was also desired so that the students would not have distractions of an urban environment. This presented some challenges, mainly in the form of transportation. In keeping with NUC's principle of ecological sustainability and thus minimizing the organization's ecological footprint, bicycles were acquired for the students but these would only be suitable for short distance trips. There could not be an expectation that all students would be willing or able to use the bicycles. Thus vehicles were still necessary to transport students to site visits, field excursions, grocery shopping, etc...

Friends of NUC, Ume Hermanski & Augie Coombs, were gracious to offer the use of their property for the duration of the course. In exchange for renovation work in the weeks leading up to the course, preparing the site for the students, and with a contribution of \$500 towards supplies, the course was able to take place at a greatly reduced cost in terms of rental of facilities. As a corollary, the owners have offered the use of Hemalo for subsequent courses of NUC, for which the organization is very grateful.

Hemalo, set in a forested area and within walking distance to a river, as well as the residence of one of the instructors, was in close proximity to the Northumberland Strait coast and local beaches, and the community of River John where a library was accessible for computer and wireless internet use. On several occasions, there were opportunities to go to the beach for an afternoon and combine this with discussions about the topics under exploration for that day. The change in scenery was very useful, and did not detract from learning.

Teaching and learning pedagogy

A critical educational pedagogy was employed, including applied/practical elements, theoretical components, and reflective inquiry.

Course Objectives

The objectives of the summer program were as follows:

- To experiment with different learning techniques and styles;
- To engage at the abstract and applied dimensions with the subjects of sustainability and social justice;
- To be accessible to all regardless of financial ability;
- To draw upon the local resources in terms of knowledge and expertise;
- To create an empowering environment for the students;
- To enable students to be educators; and,
- To further enable the development of the New University Cooperative.

Learning Outcomes

The following were the expected learning outcomes:

- To learn about various interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives pertaining to issues of ecological sustainability and social justice, including material from the social and physical sciences;
- To learn about and critique ways of knowing and understanding;
- To practice various communication skills, both verbal and written;
- To practice cooperative living and minimization of one's ecological footprint;
- To learn and practice various survival strategies, e.g. growing food, building shelters;
- To engage in community service;
- To assist in the further development of the New University Cooperative; and,
- To provide the students with skill development in teaching.

Course Structure

Originally there were to be four foundational courses, one each week, comprising the main components of the month, along with field excursions, site visits and workshops. Two instructors were each responsible for two foundational courses. Each course was either 3 or 4 days in length. The other days of the week were devoted to coursework, community service, NUC development work, household duties, and leisure time. Evenings were either devoted to guest speakers, people from the local community who shared their knowledge concerning a particular topic, or free time.

Open space process was to have been undertaken at the beginning of the program so students could direct some of their own and collective learning. Unfortunately due to a very full program, this component did not materialize.

As communal living was a foundation for the program, the students required time for meal preparation, house cleaning, laundry and other household responsibilities. As well, leisure time was incorporated throughout the month in order to allow for relaxation and reflection. The Hemalo property was ideal for all these multiple purposes.

Although the schedule for the course was comprehensive, with mornings, afternoons and evenings allocated with specific activities, there was sufficient flexibility and adaptability built into the program that last minute opportunities could be incorporated. This happened on several occasions. For example, the annual Peace & Friendship Gathering organized by and held at the Tatamagouche Centre provided several unanticipated and rewarding learning opportunities. These included opening ceremonies with the lighting of a sacred fire; teepee and sweatlodge construction; an overnight in the teepee; and attending a talk given by guest speaker Daniel Paul, a local Mi'qmaq elder. Another opportunity that presented itself was meeting the Otesha bicycle touring group who were staying at the Green Dragon Farm which resulted in an exchange of information and ideas between NUC & Otesha members.

Course components

Week one: Nonviolence: From the personal to the political

Day 1: The Nonviolence Model of Power; What is Violence, What is Nonviolence?

Day 2: Case Studies in Nonviolence

Day 3: Student research to produce new case studies

Day 4: NUC Project planning workshop with Hugh Landry: Developing the First NUC Campus

Day 5: Community service project: Windy Hill Farms

Week two: Social Class & Deep Democracy

Day 1: Green Dragon Organic Farm and B&B, Gerlinde Pilgrimm and Stephan Hederich

Day 2: Social Class: from the personal to the national

Day 3: Deep Democracy workshop with Aftab Erfan

Day 4: Student research on Nonviolence case studies

Day 5: Community service project: Windy Hill Farms

Week Three: Economic Politics Under Capitalism

Day 1: Commodities (Karl Marx, "Chapter 1" from *Capital, Vol. 1*)

Day 2: Labour (Marx, "Chapter 1")

Day 3: Economic Alternatives (JK Gibson-Graham, "The intentional economy of Mondragon" from *A Postcapitalist Politics*)

Day 4: Economic Alternatives (Ruonna Kuokkanen, "The Gift" from *Rebuilding the University*)

Day 5: Solidarity in Struggle (Kuokkanen, "The Question of Speaking and the Impossibility of the Gift" from *Rebuilding the University*)

Week Four: Anti-Oppressive Environmental Politics

Day 1: History of Environmental Ideas (William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," from *Uncommon Ground*)

Day 2: Nature and Racism (Catriona Sandilands, "Cape Rouge Remembered," from *Great White North*)

Day 3: Anti-Racist Environmental Struggles (Ingrid Chapman, "Hearts on Fire: The Struggle for Justice in New Orleans"; and Beenash Jafri and Karen Okamoto, "Green is not the only colour: reflections on the state of anti-racist environmentalism in Canada")

Day 4: A New Relationship with Nature? (Guest lecture on Emanuel Levinas's environmental philosophy by Chris Cohoon, Teaching Fellow, Sorbonne, France)

Day 5: Tatamagouche Freeschool, Waldegrave Farm*, NUC 1st course presentation by 1st NUC graduates

*Subsequently, all of the students were able to attend the Tatamagouche Freeschool, which took place August 28-30th.

Evening Talks

- Breaking the Silence: Kathryn Anderson and Ann Manicom
- North Shore Local Fair Trade Initiative: Av Singh and Berta Gaulke
- Imire Safari Ranch, voluntourism conservation project: Wilma van der Veen

Field Visits

- Luchtenberg Farms, industrial dairy operation, Rik and Lokie Roeterdinck
- Peace & Friendship Gathering 2009, Tatamagouche Centre
- Waldegrave Farm
- Catherine Hughes and June Daley, Strawbale House
- Tatamagouche Freeschool

Assessment

A number of different assessment strategies were employed to gauge the progress of the student's learning. This included written assignments, journaling, verbal feedback, as well as a public presentation at the end of the program. In addition to this, each student was to facilitate and teach a 1-2 hour lesson on a topic of their choice in order to in the role of educator. Unfortunately due to lack of time, this component did not take place as planned, but from the student evaluations, it was learned that this took place informally. Each student was also to undertake an individual creative project that they would take away to represent their time at this program and their personal development and learning.

Promotions

- Email
- Listserves
- Websites
- Word of mouth
- Posters in Halifax

An intensive and continuing electronic promotions campaign was undertaken by the NUC directors, members and supporters. Using established networks in alternative education, environmental sustainability, and drawing upon the members personal connections, the course was advertised far and wide.

An indication of how effective this method of promotions was is provided by the fact that there were inquiries from three persons outside of Canada, a fellow from China who was studying in Europe, a fellow from Uganda and another from Kenya. They indicated that they had simply Googled environmental sustainability and education and our course was an option that appeared.

Students

Course enrolment stood at a high of 10 in the weeks leading up to the start of the program. A \$100 deposit was required with submission of the online registration form. Subsequently, the numbers dropped to 8 then 6 and then to 4 when on the day before the course was to begin there were 2 last minute cancellations. As the instructors and possibly the students had expected there to be more participants (this was confirmed by evaluations the students completed after the course ended), a discussion about this situation was held one the first morning of the program. This proved to be very beneficial as it allowed for the instructor (Wilma) and the students to air and deal with their feelings about this matter, both positive and negative. The result was that the matter was in no way ever a hindrance or detriment to the program.

The four students were from the following provinces: one from Nova Scotia, one from New Brunswick, one from Ontario and one from British Columbia.

Finances

The program was a success in terms of its finances, although this wasn't necessarily anticipated. The primary goal was that the program should break even. Funds were to be sought from foundations and similar, donations in kind for supplies, as well as students paying a portion of the cost in tuition fees. One key factor in helping to minimize costs was that the two instructors were more than willing to offer their services pro bono. And as was stated earlier, the location expenses ended up

being minimal. From this experience, future locations will be sought where work in kind (either conducted by organizers prior to the course beginning and/or by the enrolled students) can be provided to properties in order reduce the cost of subsequent programs.

In terms of tuition fees, as one of the principles of the NUC is accessibility, funds were sought to provide subsidies to students although this proved to be only minimally successful. Originally the cost per student was projected at \$400-\$600 depending on the numbers of students enrolled. This was based on daily food cost and accommodation. In the end the lower end of the tuition fee was charged. From the completed evaluations of the students, it was concluded that the cost of \$100/week/student was very reasonable and feasible. It continues to be NUC's long-term goal to offer courses tuition-free (which may involve students doing some unpaid work during their studies), but this does not appear to be a feasible goal in the short term.

Expenses

- Food
- Transportation: gas costs
- Honorariums for speakers
- Accommodation
- Supplies for various components of the program, e.g. photocopying, building materials

Income:

- Tuition – registration fees: \$400/student
- Foundations: Carrot cache \$1500
- Donations: Just Us Coffee Cooperative – coffee, tea and sugar
- Pro bono work of the instructors
- Canadian Worker Cooperative Federation Initial Development Support Program grant: \$1000

Evaluation of the Program and Recommendations for Future Programs

The program evaluation is based on the completed student evaluations, the feedback from the two instructors, and other NUC organizers.

For the instructors, the best possible learning environment was realized as all the students chose to enrol in the program on their own volition. In essence, best said by Wilma, “the students were complete ‘keeners’”. Both instructors have taught (or currently teach) in post-secondary education, and in these contexts there has been a continual problem of students’ lacking commitment to their education. Many students don’t want to be in college or university, may see their education as a means to an end (e.g., a job), and they will have multiple priorities such as family, employment and other courses. With NUC’s intensive residential program, the student’s complete attention was devoted to learning. This was truly amazing - an educator’s dream come true. It is recommended that this be used as a major selling point to attract educators, as well as providing them with beautiful accommodation.

As for the communal living arrangements, this proved overall very fruitful. The students were responsible for maintaining the household by undertaking various chores, for example planning and preparing meals, construction of outbuildings, etc.. At the beginning of the program there was discussion with the instructor about how best to undertake these activities but it was deemed the responsibility of the students to devise a workable plan. Some feedback stressed that more structure with built in flexibility could have been helpful in order to accomplish the necessary tasks, as some required more direction and motivation, as well some further training in conflict resolution would be useful, for example applying the learnings from the Deep Democracy session.

Food is of course extremely important to make for happy people. The location proved ideal in terms of access to local and organic food. There were weekly visits to the local Tatamagouche Farmer’s Market, where various items were purchased from local vendors. As well, a site visit was organized with one of the vendors, a local organic and biodynamic farmer from where the bulk of produce was acquired. It was also possible to acquire the organic non-perishable foods in bulk from a regional distributor which also kept costs low. One significant positive development was that the students engaged in their own teaching and learning pertaining to cooking. Living communally, the students were required to plan and prepare all of

their meals, using base ingredients, as the purchased of processed foods was strongly discouraged. For example, the students learned and practiced baking their own bread. One student brought with them a cook book, good advice for future programs.

From the instructors, there was one area of complaint that could not have been anticipated. Due to the fact that none of the students had their own mode of transport (e.g. a car), the students were reliant upon the instructor 'on duty' for any distance transportation. As a result the instructors had to take on the role of 'chauffeur'. This was in and of itself not an issue, but there was a time component attached to this aspect. It was very time consuming and thus energy taxing to have to ferry the students to and from various activities that were included in the program. If, over the long-term, the NUC intends to attract volunteer instructors, it will have to consider how to decrease the daily time commitment and allow the instructors to focus on their teaching (and still have some free time each day). In addition, in line with one of the foundational principle of the NUC, that of ecological sustainability, there is a commitment to have anything and everything to do with the NUC minimizing the organization's ecological footprint. This was accomplished in a variety of ways, for example sourcing the food requirements locally and from organic producers, and the students not having their own cars. However, using the instructor's vehicle was necessary. Fortunately, carpooling was undertaken for the transportation requirement as five persons fit into one vehicle. As well, bicycles were acquired so that the students would have some mobility. It is recommended that when more permanent locations are acquired for NUC, then a fleet of electric bicycles be acquired for student use. Otherwise the rural location was deemed excellent and contributed greatly to the learning.

In terms of the accessibility principle, in order to increase this in terms of student enrolment, it will be necessary to find sources of income, either from individuals or organizations, or equivalents, to keep the cost of tuition low and/or to provide travel/tuition subsidies. However, from the students' feedback, the \$400 cost proved "very very reasonable... a bargain... a great deal" (various students).

In terms of promotions, the course brochure and NUC's first brochure depicted scenes of different types of activities that students might have undertaken pertaining to self-sufficiency and sustainability. However the images were mainly of hands on skill development, and this was only to be one component of the program. From the student feedback, they had expected more of this and so in future, the brochures and their images must more accurately reflect what will actually transpire in terms of learning and associated activities.

Factors that contributed to students choosing to enrol in the program included: location in Canada and in the province outside of a city, cost, topics to be taught, hands on skill development, instructors, and networking with peers. There was an expectation of more students from both the enrolled students and the instructors. In future, unexpected and last minute cancellations will most likely result and thus enrolment numbers should be set higher, however a limit of 12-15 students should be maintained for such an intensive communal program. The fact that the program was not accredited did not deter any of the students: "those dedicated to really learning about the subject matter will register" (Hugh), and "I very much liked that me and my peers were there just for the sake of being there and not because we would be further 'qualified' by it" (Mary-Beth). However in order to attract more students, and to provide a genuine alternative to the mainstream education system (e.g., an alternative that provides students with a recognized post-secondary education), it should remain part of NUC's strategic plan to seek out accreditation,

One component of the program that was deemed the most disappointing was the one day where some work was undertaken for the development of the organization. Specifically a cooperative development consultant was hired thanks to a CWCF grant (the only person who received payment for their instruction), to get the students to develop a draft plan to build the first NUC campus. The failure in this component was not a result of the consultant's abilities, but rather this person's lack of knowledge of the organization and the student's lack of knowledge in this area. Also the task at hand in hindsight was far too large in scope for the students to undertake as well as there being a lack of time for the students to conduct further research into aspects of the plan. It is still recommended that there be an organizational development component included in the program as a fundamental principle of the cooperative structure is that members are active in its development. And since the NUC is a new organization, much work is still needed in its development.

Conclusion

All in all, from the perspective of the instructors, Wilma and Ted, and the students, the first New University Cooperative program offering was a tremendous success. The four graduates of the NUC are now student ambassadors that will be very helpful in carrying the vision of NUC forward.

It is recommended that this format of curricula delivery - intensive, residential programming - be an adopted standard mode of delivery. The 2nd summer program is already being planned, this time to be held in a location in British Columbia, and once again during the month of August in 2010.