

Cooperative Enterprise for a Resilient Future

ESPM 98/198: 2 Units
UC Berkeley • Spring 2015
Tuesdays 4 - 6pm, Dwinelle 258



Course Description

Cooperative Enterprise for a Resilient Future will showcase the ability of cooperative business structures — whether they be consumer, worker, or residential — to offer solutions to some issues in contemporary society. The class will assert that cooperative principles of **diffuse ownership and democratic governance** are invaluable in **addressing environmental and social injustices that the institutions of unfettered capitalism have exacerbated** in pursuit of increased profit for managers and shareholders.

Berkeley, California just happens to be at the heart of the cooperative movement, **famous for some of the most successful cooperatives in history**, ranging from the 20th century *Consumers' Cooperative of Berkeley* — a cooperative grocery network that, at its peak, maintained a membership of over 100,000 — to the Berkeley Student Cooperative, which continues to house a substantial portion of campus undergraduates after 80 years. Given recent economic downturns, increasing income inequality, and Berkeley's important place in cooperative history, this class is uniquely positioned to provide students a firm grounding in what the past, present, and future of cooperatives can offer for the **environmentally sustainable, economically resilient, and socially just** communities of tomorrow.

Course Facilitators

Roberta Giordano: giordanorobie@berkeley.edu

Roberta Giordano holds a B.S in Environmental Science, Policy, and Management from the UC Berkeley. She has spent most of her life working as a grassroots organizer in the fields of social and climate justice. In 2012 she co-founded the [Student Environmental Resource Center at UCB](#), where she currently works as Development Associate, and in 2013 she co-founded [Students Against Fracking](#). She is actively involved with legislative advocacy in California to halt extreme oil and natural gas extraction, as well as efforts to expand US academic curriculums to include cooperative education.

Jeff Noven: jeff@simile.me

Jeff Noven is a student at UC Berkeley double majoring in History and Interdisciplinary Studies with foci in economic development and organizational structures, respectively. He serves as the Education Associate at the [Student Environmental Resource Center](#) where he works to bolster environmentalist students' voices on campus at Berkeley. He previously served as Education Director at the [Berkeley Student Food Collective](#).

Megan Svoboda: operations@foodcollective.org

Megan Svoboda graduated from Smith College where she worked with the University of Massachusetts Cooperative Enterprise Collaborative, co-creating economic and environmental impact reports for local coops. Since graduating from college Megan has worked at [CoFED \(the Cooperative Food Empowerment Directive\)](#) as the Operations and Development Coordinator and the [Berkeley Student Food Collective](#) as Operations Manager. Megan is a member of the [USA Cooperative Youth Council \(USACYC\)](#).

Zen Trenholm: zen@sustainabilitycoalition.org

Zen Trenholm graduated UC Berkeley with a B.S. in Cooperative Business Development and is the Development Director with the [California Student Sustainability Coalition](#). Concerned with developing new models to cultivate a regenerative economy, he became a Core Member of the [USA Cooperative Youth Council](#), helped co-found the [UC Berkeley Student Environmental Resource Center](#) and has previously served as a board member with the [Berkeley Student Food Collective](#) and the [Cooperative Food Empowerment Directive](#).

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students will:

- Have a strong understanding of the history of cooperatives using varying historico-political methodologies — historical materialism, environmental historiography, as well as more “normative” historical narratives will all make appearances as the class traces cooperative enterprise as far back as antiquity. To these ends, students will be introduced to the basic tenets of source criticism.
- Understand the fundamental operating structure of contemporary cooperatives (consumer, worker, and residential) and be able to draw strong connections between how the means and ends of a given enterprise are intricately linked with its organizational structure.
- Know something of the current state of the greater cooperative movement with a particular focus on the contemporary cooperative movement in America.
- Comprehend the pitfalls and challenges of operating a cooperative and how best to avoid them with alternative organizational systems that address those issues.
- Practice developing business models and writing business plans for new cooperative enterprise solutions to market failures and contemporary social issues.

Readings

Readings are assigned on a weekly basis and are posted to the bCourses course page. Course readings correlate with the topic of the upcoming week and prepare students to engage in dynamic group discussion and ask well-informed questions of the guest speakers. Readings are of reasonable length and from a diverse mix of sources: peer-reviewed research, book excerpts, short essays, and news articles among others. Students should complete the readings prior to class. Recommended readings are also available for further study upon request.

Attendance

As a weekly class with a limited number of times to convene, it's important that students come to class! In a distinctly hierarchical vein, the facilitators will mandate that any perceived absence from the course come with a notification to the facilitators at least 12 hours in advance. One unexcused absence is permissible given that, well, life happens. Any more than one unexcused absence will require a short meeting with the course facilitators to arrange for alternate venues of learning to make up for lost class time: community or on-campus events, additional reading, or other options relevant to cooperative study are all on the table.

Disabled Students

Students with physical, learning, or other disabilities are welcome in this course; we as facilitators hope that needs are communicated to us early in the semester so we can do our best to cooperate and accommodate in any way we can.

Grading

- Course is graded on a P/NP basis for 2 units.
- 50% - Attendance/ in class participation
- 30% - Discussion write-ups (8 Total)
- 20% - Final Group Project

Course Outline

Part 1: Introduction

- Session 0- Decal Infosession and Mixer
- Session 1- What is a cooperative anyway?

Part 2: Historical Context

- Session 2- Cooperative Histories, Part 1: From Robert Owen to the 20th Century
- Session 3- Cooperative Histories, Part 2: From WWI to Neo-Liberalism
- Session 4- Cooperative Histories, Part 3: Third Wave Cooperatives in the Era of Neo-Liberalism

Part 3: Co-ops of Today

- Session 5- In Our Backyard! Part 1: Worker Cooperatives of Berkeley
- Session 6- In Our Backyard! Part 2: Collective Cooperation and the Radical Commons
- Session 7- Housing Cooperatives in the Berkeley Student Cooperative

Part 4: Imagining Tomorrow

- Session 8- Project Brainstorming: Business Model Canvas
- Session 9- Project Working Groups: Cooperative Business Development
- Session 10- The Co-op Movement: CoFED, USACYC, and Beyond
- Session 11- Cooperatives at Scale
- Session 12- Final Project Presentations



Part I: Introduction



Session 0, Week of January 27th — Decal Infoession & Mixer

Optional class: Interested in the class but not quite sure you want to commit? Let the facilitators win you over with free food at this casual infoession. We'll eat, answer questions, and let you know what you can expect from the best Decal you'll ever take!

Session 1, Week of February 3rd — What is a Cooperative, anyway?

So, what is a cooperative, anyway? In this, our first official class meeting, we seek to answer that seemingly simple question from a variety of perspectives, including your own! We'll compare our classroom's basic notions of cooperation with cooperators throughout time and across the globe; in the process we'll take our first look at the stunning diversity of cooperatives, showing how this 'niche' business model is already mainstream throughout the global economy — and shows promise to become even more prominent.

Assigned reading

- *Excerpts from “Democracy at Work: A cure for Capitalism” by Richard Wolff, in class Google Folder*
- [Principles of Cooperatives](#)
- *Excerpts from cultivate.coop*

Optional reading

- *Excerpts from “The Cooperative Solution” by E.G Nadeau*
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Part II: Historical Context



Session 2, Week of February 10th — **Cooperative Histories, Pt. 1:** **From Robert Owen to the 20th Century**

While cooperative business is beginning to become more prominent today, it has a long and storied history that explains both its absence from the mainstream and normative business' rise to power. By understanding both for whom cooperation emerged in the first place — and why many cooperative ventures have failed — we can better grasp the strengths and weaknesses of cooperative enterprise in context of today's market economy. In this class we'll use the [longue durée](#) historical method to follow cooperatives from ancient Babylon to the Rochdale Pioneers, drawing out themes we see as common to over 3,000 years of cooperation.

Assigned reading

- *Excerpts from "Humanizing the Economy: Cooperatives in the Age of Capital" by John Restakis*

Resources from class

- "[New Pioneers](#)," Rochdale Pioneers Museum and Co-operative Heritage Trust
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Session 3, Week of February 17th — **Cooperative Histories, Pt. 2:** **From World War I to Neo-Liberalism**

Major 20th century socio-political movements have defined cultural concepts of reciprocity and self-reliance. We will examine how communism, fascism, and capitalism shaped this social discourse and analyze how cooperatives fit within these ideologies. An analysis of different co-operative examples in select periods will be followed by a [World Café](#) discussion on their similarities and differences with the struggles faced by communities today. Specific examples will be taken from Europe, the United States, and the Americas.

Guests

- **John Curl** is a professional woodworker, a former city planning commissioner, and a 30-year member of Heartwood Cooperative Workshop in Berkeley, California. He is the

author of seven books of poetry and several historical books, including *History of Work Cooperation in America* and *Memories of Drop City*. He lives in Berkeley, California.

Assigned reading

- *Excerpts from Chapter 9 of “For All the People” by John Curl*
 - *Excerpts from “Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice” by Jessica Gordon Nembhard*
 - *Excerpts from “Humanizing the Economy” by John Restakis*
 - *Excerpts from “Making Mondragon” by Whyte and Whyte*
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Session 4, Week of February 24th — Cooperative Histories, Pt. 3:
Third Wave Cooperatives in the Era of Neoliberalism

The first part of this class will explore how neoliberalism and *laissez faire* capitalist set of ideas have shaped our current economic system through the lens of three influential thinkers: Milton Friedman, Robert Reich, and Naomi Klein. The second part of the class will examine how co-operatives today are taking matters into their own hands and responding to the crisis induced by neoliberalism by creating alternative economic models that address issues of income inequality, power redistribution, and environmental degradation.

Assigned reading

- *Excerpts from Chapter 14 of “For All the People” By John Curl*

Resources from class

- [*Power of the Market - The Pencil*](#)
 - [*Supercapitalism*](#)
 - [*Disaster Capitalism*](#)
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Part III: Co-ops of Today


Session 5, Week of March 3rd — In Our Backyard!, Pt. 1: **Worker Cooperatives of Berkeley**

The Bay Area, one of the epicenters of business model innovation, is abundant with thriving worker-owned cooperatives. During this class, we will host a panel discussion with worker-owners from a couple local worker cooperatives. We will gain firsthand experience about the organizational structure, need and challenges of the Cheeseboard Collective and Inkworks Press.

Inkworks Press is a democratically-run worker collective print shop specializing in high quality, affordable printing for both the social justice movement and for a wider range of nonprofits and socially responsible businesses.

Cheese Board Collective is a combination of two worker-owned and operated businesses: a cheese shop/bakery commonly referred to as "The Cheese Board", and a pizzeria known as "Cheese Board Pizza".

Assigned Video

- [*Democracy in the Workplace: All About Collectives*](#)
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Session 6, Week of March 10th — In Our Backyard!, Pt. 2: **Collective Cooperation & the Radical Commons** *(Field trip to [Omnicommons](#) in Oakland!)*

Cooperation can take a number of different forms. Sometimes it takes the form of 22,000 sq. ft. heavy metal venue in Oakland converted into a cooperative mecca. The [Omnicommons](#) on Shattuck Avenue is a mammoth, department-store sized reconceptualization of “commons” that is host to more than ten volunteer collective cooperatives. Using innovative revenue-generating and governance models, member organizations of Omnicommons include a worker-owned café, a democratic “hacker space,” a citizen-science laboratory, a print-shop, and a film studio, among others. We’ll find out what is possible when a neighborhood bands together cooperatively to imagine new forms of community institutions, how they did it, and what’s next.

Session 7, Week of March 17th — Housing Cooperatives & the BSC

What is a housing cooperative? There are multi-million dollar apartment buildings, 50,000 occupant developments, and student houses. This week we will conduct case studies of five different housing cooperatives to analyze the ownership structures and financial planes that differentiate them independently owned homes. We will gain an understanding of the role housing cooperative play in maintaining affordable housing and building community.

The Berkeley Student Cooperative is a 501c3 non-profit housing cooperative. The BSC provides affordable housing and board to students at UC Berkeley and other Bay Area colleges and universities.

Assigned Video

- [*Student Cooperatives Around the World*](#)
- [*Welcome to the Berkeley Student Cooperatives*](#)
- [*Berkeley Student Cooperative Member Rights*](#)
- [*Berkeley Student Cooperative Member Responsibilities*](#)

Week of March 24th — No class, spring break!
Start imagining and brainstorming for your final project!



Part IV: Imagining Tomorrow



Session 8, Week of March 31st — Project Brainstorming:
Business Model Canvas

To develop a deeper appreciation of the challenges in launching a cooperative enterprise, our class will fill in a business model canvas for the Berkeley Student Food Collective to understand the complexities associated with delivering value to customers and stakeholders. We will then share ideas for starting new co-ops, identify existing co-ops for deeper analysis, and propose ideas for transitioning non-cooperative businesses into cooperative enterprises.

The Berkeley Student Food Collective is dedicated to providing fresh, local, healthy, environmentally sustainable, and ethically produced food at affordable prices to the Berkeley campus and greater community. Through inclusive, democratic decision-making, they operate a cooperative grocery market that promotes community-building and environmental stewardship.

Assigned Video

- [Business Model Canvas explained](#)
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Session 9, Week of April 7th — **Project Working Groups: Cooperative Business Development**

Having chosen a team project, students will meet with co-op development practitioners, legal experts, and entrepreneurs in a World Café style discussion to explore the intricacies of cooperative business development and management. Our guest speakers from the Sustainable Economies Law Center and Alchemy Collective will help students advance and refine their project business models. We will also examine the policy and legal frameworks that impede or support the development cooperatives in California.

The Sustainable Economies Law Center cultivates a new legal landscape that supports community resilience and grassroots economic empowerment. They provide essential legal tools - education, research, advice, and advocacy - so communities can develop their own sustainable sources of food, housing, energy, jobs, and other vital aspects of a thriving community.

The Alchemy Collective is a worker-owned and democratically-managed café and coffee roaster in south Berkeley. They hold art openings, movie nights, poetry readings and acoustic music shows for the greater community.

Session 10, Week of April 14th — The Co-op Movement: CoFED, USACYC, and Beyond

The cooperative movement is vast and ever growing but what role do young people (17-30) play in it? In this class we will talk with organizers, developers, and professionals who work with cooperative youth. We will explore the objectives of the movement and discuss opportunities for college students and graduates interested in careers in this field.

CoFED (Cooperative Food Empowerment Directive) is a non-profit organization that supports college student start, run and improve cooperatively owned and operated food businesses. They provide hands on support and development advice to students starting new businesses as well as improving old ones.

USACYC (USA Cooperative Youth Council) facilitates and strengthens the influence of youth in the cooperative movement. By organizing caucuses, conferences, and cohorts they empower and broadcast youth voices within the movement.

Session 11, Week of April 21st — Cooperatives at Scale

When cooperatives are growing rapidly, they have fundamentally different questions to answer around the issue of expansion than those of traditional businesses. Cooperatives that choose to pursue expansion must maintain effective democracy while creating economies of scale, create bureaucracies without unchecked hierarchy, all while staying true to their underlying social and environmental principles. We'll explore how preeminent large-scale cooperative networks — Mondragon, Evergreen, Arizmendi, and Equal Exchange — balance these competing considerations while staying afloat in a chaotic industrial marketplace to pave the way for a true cooperative economy.

Resources from class:

- *Video: [Shift Change](#)*
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Session 12, Week of April 28th — Final Class: Project Presentations

This class will be dedicated to final projects presentations, followed by a course evaluation and reflection activity.