



FACULTY SENATE

Research, Scholarship & the Creative Arts Committee  
February 13, 2022  
12:30-2:00  
Microsoft Teams

Present: Raju Badireddy (CEMS), Brandon Bensel (Postdoctoral Association), Thomas Borchert (FS President), Marieka Burg (CAS), Evan Eyler (Faculty Senate Vice President), Rachelle Gould (RSENR), Jennifer Hurley (CESS), Dimitry Kremontsov (CNHS), Jill Preston (CALs), Christie Silkotch (LIB), Daniel Weiss (LCOM), Chun Zhang (GSB)

Absent: Mary Cushman (LCOM), Jonah Steinberg (CAS), Pending (GSS), Sarah Wood (SGA)

Guests: Colin Anderson, Cindy Forehand, Ernesto Mendez

Co-Chair Gould called the meeting to order at 12:30 pm via Microsoft Teams.

- 1. Approval of the Minutes.** The minutes of the January 2022 meeting were approved as written.
- 2. Chair Update.** Rachelle will be serving as the co-chair of the RSCA with Mary for the spring semester.
- 3. Agroecology Institute, Colin Anderson & Ernesto Mendez**

## **AN INSTITUTE FOR AGROECOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT (UVM)**

Our food system is in crisis. While the causes will undoubtedly continue to be debated, we can no longer deny that the current model is exploitative of both human and natural resources, and unable to sustain and nourish the world.

Agroecology offers an alternative paradigm for food and farming that can build back agricultural biodiversity, confront climate change, address inequity and that empowers farmers and citizens in transformations that allow people and the planet to thrive.

UVM's Institute for Agroecology will be a bold international institute that works within and outside of academia, in Vermont and across the world, seeking bold and creative solutions for food systems transformation.

Driven by a multi-scale community of practice, it will be a hub for researchers, organizers, food producers, students, movement actors and civil society leaders. We will adopt holistic and equity-focused processes that embrace complexity, collective thinking and a commitment to affecting societal change.

The Institute will be a force for the co-creation and mobilization of new knowledge, driving innovations and pushing boundaries to support impactful research, education, outreach and action.

## Three Pillars

A specific focus on agroecology will set the UVM Institute for Agroecology apart from existing institutes that focus on sustainable agriculture. Three pillars will guide our actions, representing both our focus and approach:

### **Transforming Food Systems for Just Sustainability**

While many approaches emphasize 'technical fixes' that tweak the existing food system, we focus on processes of social transformation in pursuit of an ecologically sound and socially just food system. This requires systems level analysis and action, where we will be looking for leverage points for change.

### **Participatory, Transdisciplinary and Action Research**

The institute will focus on Participatory Action Research (PAR) approaches, which place the needs and agency of community partners (e.g., smallholder farmers) at the heart of the research process. UVM has been a pioneer in PAR approaches to agroecology, which has since become internationally recognized as a leading approach to knowledge production for agroecology.

### **Centering Equity**

Today's food systems are fraught with inequity and reflect deeply exploitative land and labor relations, gender and racial inequality and an extractive relationship between the global north and south. We recognize that if we are not actively centering our work around this awareness, we will be complicit in reinforcing these patterns of oppression.

## Approach and Strategies

The institute will adopt the transdisciplinary approach that is required by agroecology, and will transcend the boundaries of research, learning, extension and action through engaged co-creation of knowledge. Following principles grounded in rigor, relationships, and reciprocity, the Institute will focus on five action strategies to support the transformation towards ecologically sound and socially just food systems.

**Untangle:** Lead and facilitate critical transdisciplinary action research that explores alternatives to improve conditions and untangle the persistent challenges.

**Cross-Pollinate:** Engage within and outside of academia, fostering connections among diverse voices, and knowledge systems across local, national, and international networks for collaboration, learning and action.

**Amplify:** Create platforms for communication and storytelling that amplify agroecology narratives for ecologically sound and socially just food systems.

**Cultivate:** Prepare the next generation of transformative agroecological leaders through undergraduate, graduate, community and professional co-learning opportunities.

**Activate:** Engage in local economic, social and cultural development processes in Vermont, and beyond, to directly foster agroecology in place.

## Signature Programs: Locally rooted, globally connected

Any efforts to advance food systems transformation through agroecology must be simultaneously grounded in local action and connected to national and international dialogues through networks of partners and collaborators. We have constructed two mutually reinforcing signature programs that span the local and the global (figure 1). See the attached descriptions of our: 1) Locally Focused Signature Programs and 2) Globally Focused Signature programs.

*Locally Focused Signature Programs:* **Activating Agroecology in Vermont**



Globally Focused Signature Programs: **Global Agroecology Knowledge Alliance**

## The People, The Team

The Institute builds a decade of work in the [Agroecology and Livelihoods Collaborative \(ALC\)](#), co-directed by Martha Caswell and Ernesto Méndez, along with a recently expanded leadership team that spans expertise across research, education and extension. The Institute is building a diverse advisory board made up of agroecology and food systems leaders from Vermont, the U.S.A. and Internationally. See the attached docket on our leadership team.

For the full presentation please e-mail the Faculty Senate Office at [Facsen@uvm.edu](mailto:Facsen@uvm.edu). This program is unique there is only one other program in the United States, and it is in California. UVM has a track record in this field, and this presents a great opportunity.

They have outside support however they cannot make this work without some University of Vermont funding. They are currently working on a budget. Thomas will have a conversation with Colin and Ernesto outside RSCA meeting about procedure.

- 4. Decolonizing Research, Rachelle.** It is an interdisciplinary movement that focuses on the UVM commitments of equity, justice and inclusion. Thinking about what this means and counteracting it.

#### **Resources on Decolonizing Knowledge**

- Rachelle prepared a list of resources (based on input from an international decolonization list-serv) that the sub-committee will review.
- Examples include:
  - <https://www.bath.ac.uk/research-centres/centre-for-decolonising-knowledge-in-teaching-research-and-practice-deckno/>
  - <https://www.soas.ac.uk>

The committee utilized break out rooms to discuss how relevant this topic is in their field and if the RSCA should continue discussions on this topic. Some of the topics they discussed.

- What at UVM needs to be addressed but also know faculty work globally
- The many definitions of decolonizing research
- How the RSCA could bring this to light on campus.

The RSCA will form a subcommittee to continue conversations on this topic so that the RSCA can move it forward. Members of this subcommittee will include Rachelle, Jennifer, Raju, Brandon, Christie and Marieka. The Faculty Senate Office will help set up a meeting for the subcommittee before the March RSCA meeting.

#### **5. Spring 2022**

- April, Kirk Dombrowski
- April, Dean Forehand

#### **6. Old or New Business.**

- **Academic Free Speech Policy.** Thomas Borchert updated the committee on the Academic Freedom Policy. The process has been long, there has been a lot of back and forth. The focus is around social media. Thomas asked the Immediate Past Faculty Senate President, Chris Bruns to join in the conversations with United

Academics. He is asking that a member of the RSCA also join in on the conversations. Jill Preston was involved in drafting the new policy and volunteered to join this group. After the policy is reviewed with United Academics, they will bring it back to the RSCA for comment.

Thomas will put the current draft of the policy in the RSCA files for the committee to review (this draft was previously approved by the RSCA).

- **Resolution to eliminate critical race theory.** Would the RSCA review a resolution that is being presented to the senate on this topic. Thomas will have further conversations with Mary and Rachelle to determine if the RSCA is the appropriate committee to discuss this issue.

**7. Adjourn.** The meeting adjourned at 2:02 pm.

The next meeting of the RSCA will take place on Thursday, March 17th at 12:30 on Microsoft Teams.