

Promising practice

University: Leuphana University of Lüneburg

Academic discipline: Sustainability Science (Master)

Course title: Transdisciplinary Project

Course description:

Two-semester research based learning project. Semester 1: identification of societal problems with various actors from different societal fields and cooperative problem framing, building of a transdisciplinary team and development of a research plan. Semester 2: implementation of the research project, including dissemination of outcomes; different actors are coordinated by a so-called “case study office”

Learning outcomes:

The different projects offer a learning framework for students that includes the development and processing of a concrete case together with a lecturer, tutor and practical partner. Students learn to collaborate in transdisciplinary teams, including collaborating with actors from different fields of practice in mutual learning processes. Within their projects, students pass through all three phases of transdisciplinary sustainability research: identification of a case/problem, formulation of a research question, building of a transdisciplinary team (phase A), working on the research questions in the team with different stakeholders (phase B), preparation of results for societal and academic use and publication (phase C). Students learn how to theoretically and methodically conduct and implement a transdisciplinary research project.

How students’ learning is assessed:

At the end of the first project-semester the student group hand in a research design and an essay that focuses on an individually selected aspect of the transdisciplinary research process, including experiences from an experiential case encounter (1 day working in the field). Furthermore the learning process is reviewed in a compulsory, but not graded, reflexion dialogue between each student and the lecturers. The final report consists of a scientific paper presenting the process and a brochure (or similar) including results and recommendations for practitioners.

How students learn with civil society organisations through this course:

Students acquire the ability to work collaboratively with different actors from various fields of practice (e.g. municipality, NGOs, industry). They learn how to identify societal problems and translate them into research questions and how to collaborate constantly, e.g. by implementing steering groups (or similar) that take joint decisions on process design and conduct.

How students learn about dimensions of RRI through this course:

To establish a common base and methodological orientation for all, the module starts with an introductory lecture in the 1st semester. Students are introduced to theoretical and methodological foundations of transdisciplinarity as well as methods for transdisciplinary research, including boundary work to identify differences in knowing and acting, roles, responsibilities and abilities of all persons involved. An accompanying workshop program offers support in the strongly self-organized research process. Among others, workshops on research management, moderation and gender diversity issues are offered.

RRI keys integrated in the course

Societal engagement; Sustainability; Open access; Gender and diversity

RRI process requirements integrated in the course:

Inclusion; Anticipation; Responsiveness

To find out more contact:

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Web information (German only):

<http://www.leuphana.de/universitaet/fakultaet/nachhaltigkeit/studium-lehre/fallstudienbuero.html>

Article presenting the module with a focus on boundary work:

Vilsmaier, U. & D. J. Lang (2015): Making a difference by marking the difference: constituting in-between spaces for sustainability learning. –In: Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability 16, 51-55.