**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** Cooperative businesses exist in a wide variety of sectors within the U.S. economy, and represent a distinctive model for organizing labor, capital, and knowledge to produce goods and services. Fundamentally, a cooperative is a unique form of business ownership where users or patrons, rather than investors, are the business owners. Cooperatives are an important but often overlooked part of the U.S. economy. They provide services in many sectors, including finance, utilities, health care, housing, agriculture, and retail.

This course is designed to introduce students to the cooperative business model and to encourage them to think critically about why co-ops emerge, the ways in which they differ from other forms of enterprise, and how the model can be used to address current social and economic issues. The course will be participatory and will include individual and group assignments. Students will also be exposed to guest speakers who are leading thinkers and employers from cooperatives in key sectors.

This course is taught using a community-based learning (CBL) approach. CBL is a credit-bearing educational experience that integrates meaningful service with a community partner on a community-identified need, traditional academic content, and guided reflection. CBL aims to enhance understanding of course content while developing critical thinking skills and stronger personal and civic responsibility.

**Instructor:** Courtney Berner, Executive Director, UW Center for Cooperatives  
**Office:** 235 Taylor Hall  
**Email:** cberner@wisc.edu  
**Office hours:** Available by appointment  
**Course time and location:** Tuesdays & Thursdays; 1:00 – 2:15 p.m.; Microbial Sciences 1510  
**Mode of instruction:** Face-to-face

**Course credits:** 3 credits. This class meets for two 75-minute class periods each week over the fall semester and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, problem sets, studying, etc.) for about 3 hours out of classroom for every class period. The syllabus includes more information about meeting times and expectations for student work.

**Course Prerequisites:** None

**Course Learning Outcomes:** By the end of the course, students will be able to do the following:

- Understand the role and characteristics of cooperation, collective action, and cooperatives
- Exhibit knowledge of the cooperative model as it exists locally, nationally, and internationally
- Compare and contrast the cooperative model with other types of business entities
- Apply understanding of cooperative finance and governance to the management of cooperatives
**Course Evaluation:** There will be a total of 500 possible points in this course. The different ways of earning points are listed below.

**Exams:** This course will have a midterm (100 points) and a final exam (150 points). Everything covered in class or found in required readings is fair game for the exams.

**Green County Project:** The Green County Project will be worth a total of 150 points. Your final grade on the project will be based on self-evaluation, small group evaluation, and the final paper grade. The final paper will be worth 75 points. The remaining 75 points between the self and group evaluation.

**In Class Activities:** I will not take attendance, however, over the course of the semester there will be ten in class activities that you will turn in for points. Each in class activity will be worth ten points.

**Optional Extra Credit Assignment:** You will have the opportunity to earn 20 extra points by completing the following assignment and turning it in no later than December 11 at 1:00 p.m.

*Learn About a Cooperative in Your Community:* Write a 2-page paper answering the following questions for a cooperative of your choosing.

- What primary products/services does the cooperative provide or offer?
- What led to the organization of the cooperative, and when was it established?
- Who are the members of the cooperative? What do they produce? Where are they located?
- How are members represented in this cooperative? What else can you learn about the co-op’s governance structure?
- How is the cooperative performing as a business? Have sales gone up in the last few years?
- How does the business appear to be leveraging the cooperative structure?

In summary, points will be distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Country project</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL:</strong></td>
<td><strong>500</strong></td>
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**Grades:** Final grades will not be curved. They will be allocated based on the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94+</td>
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<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>80</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>below 50</td>
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</table>

**Course Feedback:** You will have the opportunity to evaluate me as well. Although it is not required, I would greatly appreciate your honest (and anonymous) thoughts and suggestions on the course.

**Academic Integrity:** Academic honesty is expected. Students are accountable to uphold the core values of academic integrity and comply with UW-Madison policies and state laws regarding academic misconduct. Please familiarize yourself with the potential consequences of misconduct at the webpage of the Dean of Students: [http://www.students.wisc.edu/doso/academic-integrity/](http://www.students.wisc.edu/doso/academic-integrity/).
COURSE SCHEDULE

UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION TO COOPERATIVES

U1O1: Identify and summarize the important characteristics of the cooperative model
U1O2: Demonstrate knowledge of how cooperatives are used locally, nationally, and internationally
U1O3: Demonstrate understanding of the social and economic forces that lead to cooperation

WEEK 1
Thursday, September 6: Course overview and objectives; Introduction to cooperatives

WEEK 2
Tuesday, September 11: Historic roots of cooperatives

Guest speaker: Monica White, Assistant Professor, Gaylord Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies and the Department of Community and Environmental Sociology


VIDEO: “New Pioneers”, 5-min animation commissioned by the Rochdale Pioneers Museum and Co-operative Heritage Trust. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYPe5xJAm5w

Thursday, September 13: The role of cooperatives in the economy and society


WEEK 3
Tuesday, September 18: Green County Project Guests & Global cooperation: Cooperation Italian Style

Guests: Cara Carper, Executive Director, Green County Development Corporation
Gavin Luter, Director, UniverCity Alliance


Thursday, September 20: Global cooperation: The Japanese consumer cooperative movement

WEEK 4
Tuesday, September 25: Economic rationale for cooperation

Guest speaker: Brent Hueth, Faculty Director, UW Center for Cooperatives & Associate Professor, Agricultural & Applied Economics


Thursday, September 27: Economic rationale for cooperation

Guest speaker: Brent Hueth, Faculty Director, UW Center for Cooperatives & Associate Professor, Agricultural & Applied Economics

UNIT 2: COOPERATIVE FINANCE

U2O1: Identify and summarize the tools cooperatives use to finance their businesses
U2O2: Demonstrate understanding of how cooperatives make decisions about equity and profit
U2O3: Apply understanding of cooperative finance to cooperative case studies

WEEK 5
Tuesday, October 2: Co-op finance basics


Thursday, October 4: Understanding cooperative equity: Premier Cooperative, Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin

Guest speaker: Andy Fiene, General Manager, Premier Cooperative

WEEK 6
Tuesday, October 9: Mechanisms for financing new cooperatives


Thursday, October 11: Case study: Cass County Electric Cooperative

UNIT 3: COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE

U3O1: Demonstrate understanding of the cooperative governance models
U3O2: Compare cooperative governance models to governance models in other types of organizations
U3O3: Apply understanding of cooperative governance to cooperative case studies

WEEK 7

Tuesday, October 16: Co-op governance basics


Meyer, T. “Who runs the cooperative business?” USDA Cooperative Information Report 45

Thursday, October 18: Case study: Balancing fairness and profitability at Producers Cooperative Assoc.


WEEK 8

Tuesday, October 23: Meeting the changing needs of members: Producers Cooperative Oil Mill case


Thursday, October 25: MIDTERM

UNIT 4: COOPERATIVE MANAGEMENT & STRATEGY

U4O1: Apply understanding of cooperative finance and governance to the management of cooperatives
U4O2: Evaluate the management strategies used by a selection of cooperative businesses

WEEK 9

Tuesday, October 30: Leveraging the cooperative advantage


Thursday, November 1: Cooperative management: Surviving and thriving in a high tech industry

Guest speaker: Ole Olson, Engineer, Isthmus Engineering & Manufacturing

VIDEO: Short video on Isthmus Engineering: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lYQstgywNM
**WEEK 10**

**Tuesday, November 6:** Willy Street Grocery Cooperative

*Guest Speaker: TBD, representative from Willy Street Grocery Co-op*

**READING(S):** TBD

**Thursday, November 8:** Independent work on Green County Project

**UNIT 5: LAUNCHING A NEW COOPERATIVE: DEVELOPMENT PROCESS & CONSIDERATIONS**

U5O1: Demonstrate understanding of the cooperative development process
U5O2: Apply knowledge of the cooperative model to the cooperative business development process
U5O3: Investigate how a cooperative could be used to meet the needs of farmers in Green County

**WEEK 11**

**Tuesday, November 13:** The co-op development process; Green County presentations

*ASSIGNMENT DUE:* Draft case studies and report on survey findings for Green County Project

**Thursday, November 15:** Case Study: Fifth Season Cooperative

**READING(S):** Berner, C. Case study: Fifth Season Cooperative

**WEEK 12**

**Tuesday, November 20:** Co-opoly

**Thursday, November 22:** NO CLASS—Thanksgiving holiday

**UNIT 6: COOPERATIVE MODELS FOR OUR CHANGING WORLD**

U6O1: Summarize the social and economic issues that are driving new types of cooperation
U6O2: Identify novel approaches to cooperation that could address current social and economic issues

**WEEK 13**

**Tuesday, November 27:** The changing nature of work: Platform cooperativism and economic democracy

**READING(S):** “U.S. Worker Cooperatives: A State of the Sector.” Democracy at Work Institute.

**VIDEO:** Watch Trebor Scholz’s lecture (min 5:30 – 50:15): [https://vimeo.com/219339038](https://vimeo.com/219339038)
Thursday, November 29: Sustaining successful small businesses: the role of purchasing cooperatives

**READING(S):** Clamp, C. & I. Alhamis. *Carpet One: A Case Study of Cooperative Entrepreneurship*

**ASSIGNMENT DUE:** First draft of Final Paper for Green County Project

WEEK 14

Tuesday, December 4: Sustaining our natural resources: Reforming fisheries through cooperatives

*Guest speaker: Dominic Parker, Assistant Professor, Agricultural and Applied Economics*


Thursday, December 6: The Affordable Housing Crisis: Possible Roles for Housing Cooperatives

WEEK 15

Tuesday, December 11: Exam review

**ASSIGNMENT DUE:** Final draft of Green County white paper; Green County poster

EXAM: December 15, 12:25 – 2:25 p.m. Location TBA

Resources:
- University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives: [www.uwcc.wisc.edu](http://www.uwcc.wisc.edu)
- National Cooperative Business Association: [www.ncba.coop](http://www.ncba.coop)
- University of Saskatchewan Centre for the Study of Cooperatives: [www.usaskstudies.coop](http://www.usaskstudies.coop)
- Democracy At Work Institute: [www.institute.coop](http://www.institute.coop)