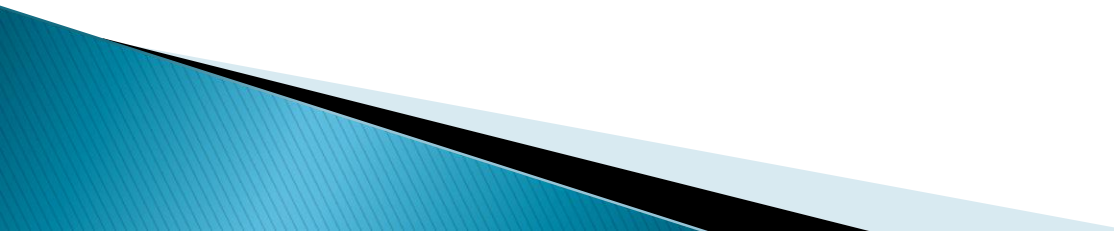


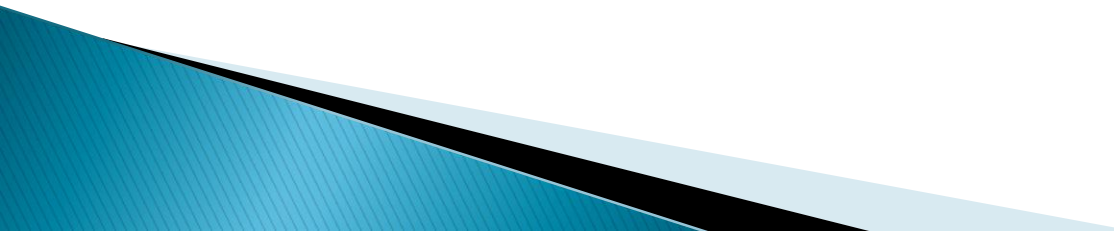
Teaching a Course about Social Sustainability: Transforming Social Action Theories into Practice

Michael Reisch
University of Maryland
October 17, 2010

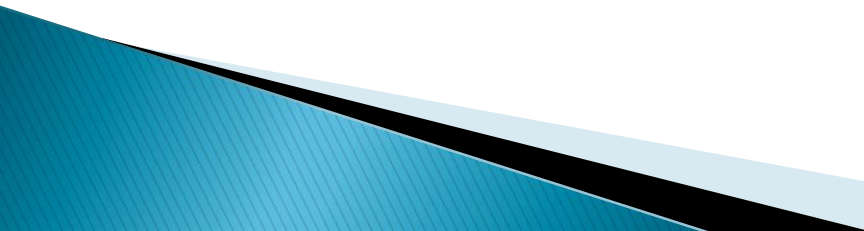
Overview

- ▶ **The Concept of Social Sustainability**
 - ▶ **Linking Social Sustainability and Social Action**
 - ▶ **Course Content and Design**
 - ▶ **Course Delivery and Impact**
 - ▶ **Reflections on the Experience**
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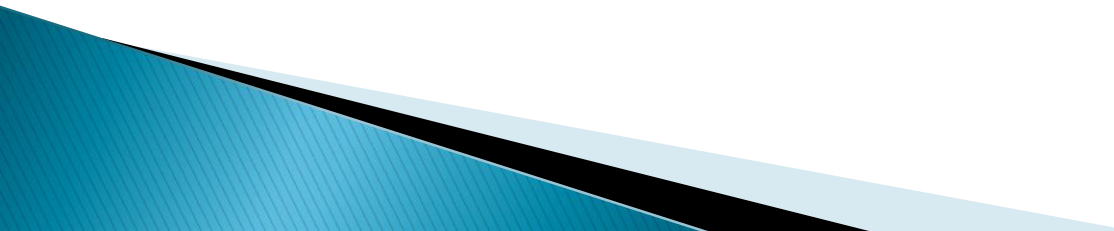
Concept of Social Sustainability

- ▶ **Origins of Term and Recent Uses**
 - ▶ **Motives: From Neo-Liberalism to Environmentalism and Social Development**
 - ▶ **Link to Community Development: Features**
 - ▶ **Link to Concept of Conscientization**
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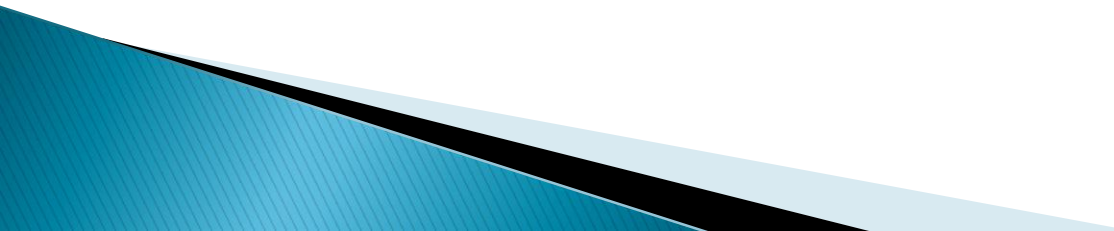
Elements of Social Sustainability

- ▶ **Continuity of mission, goals, and staff**
 - ▶ **Commitment to organization or group**
 - ▶ **Clarity about goals, objectives, strategies**
 - ▶ **Connections – sense of belonging to culture**
 - ▶ **Cohesiveness in the midst of change**
 - ▶ **Regeneration of people, ideas, and strategies**
 - ▶ **Distinguishing types of organizational growth**
 - ▶ **Participation in decision making**
 - ▶ **Preservation of well-being of group members**
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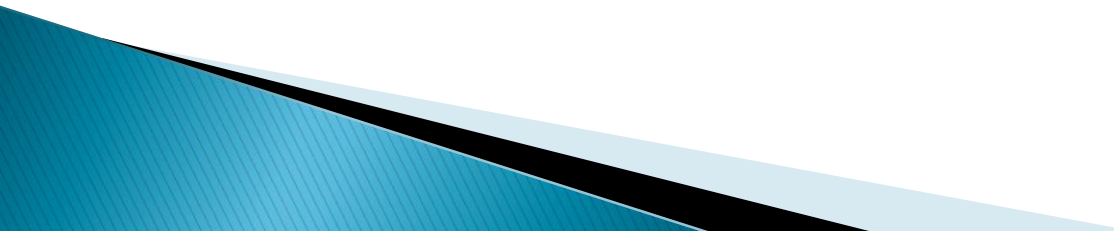
Achieving Sustainability: Challenges

- ▶ **Obtaining Lasting Commitment**
 - ▶ **Overcoming Apathy & Absence of Belonging**
 - ▶ **Individual vs. Collective Well-Being**
 - ▶ **Hierarchical Relations and Power Dynamics**
 - ▶ **Fear of Participation and Risk-Taking**
 - ▶ **Time Demands**
 - ▶ **Creating Real Not Token Membership**
 - ▶ **Rotation of Participants**
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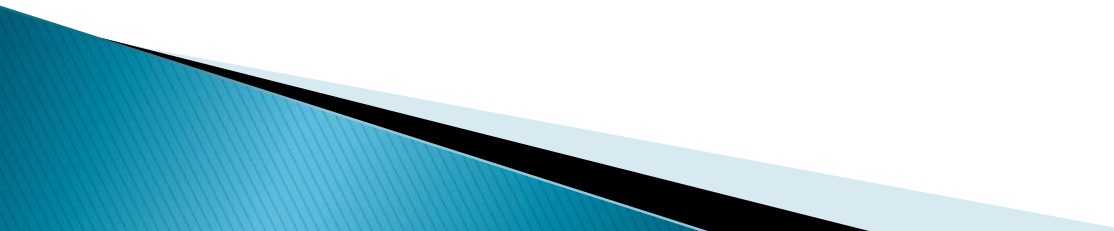
Course Goals

- ▶ **Define Social Sustainability & Community Well-Being within a Social Work Framework**
 - ▶ **Focus: University & Surrounding Community**
 - ▶ **Understand Power & Privilege at All Levels**
 - ▶ **Understand Role of Institutions & Individuals**
 - ▶ **Investigate Specific Issues**
 - ▶ **Model Concepts in a Classroom Setting**
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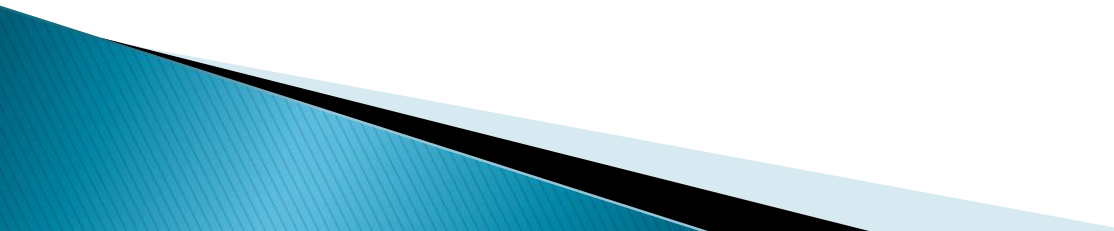
Course Design

- ▶ **Development of course with student**
 - ▶ **Met for three hours/week + outside work**
 - ▶ **Combined directed readings, discussions, written assignments, speakers, and individual and group exercises**
 - ▶ **Emphasis on experiential learning**
 - ▶ **Training on group facilitation & dialogue**
 - ▶ **Use of multiple facilitators**
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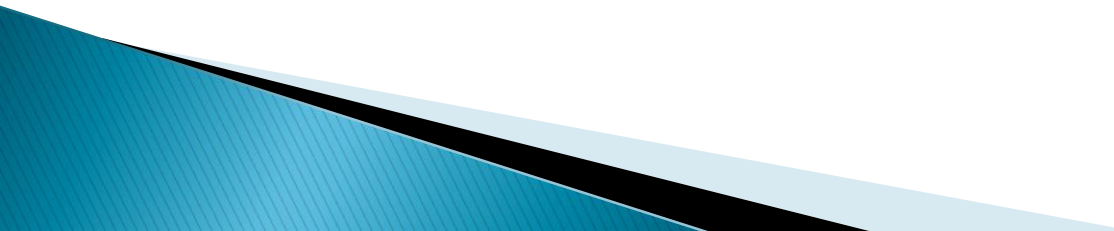
Assignments

- ▶ **Facilitating one or more sessions**
 - ▶ **Journal and Use of Online Discussions**
 - ▶ **Group Research Project**
 - ▶ **Oral presentation and Written Report**
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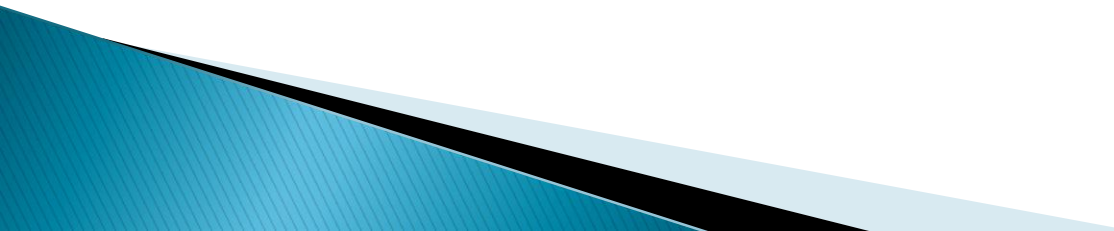
Course Outline – Part I

- ▶ **Training on Group Facilitation and Dialogue**
 - ▶ **Defining Social Sustainability**
 - ▶ **The Relationship of Social Sustainability to Social Justice & Community Well-Being**
 - ▶ **Envisioning a Socially Sustainable University**
 - ▶ **Creating & Sustaining Institutional Change**
 - ▶ **Impact on Surrounding Community**
 - ▶ **Selected Topics on Social Sustainability**
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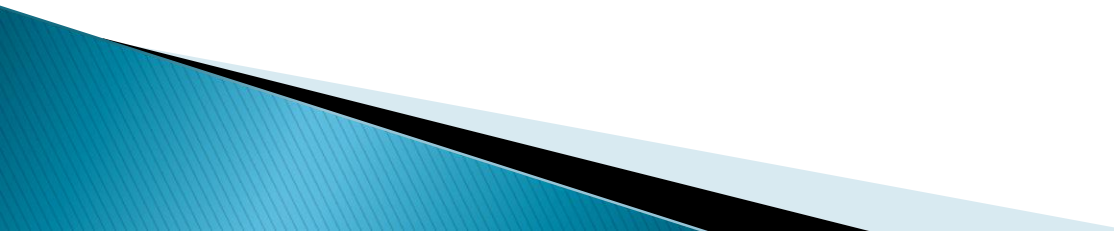
Course Outline – Part II

- ▶ **Skills in Community–Based Research**
 - ▶ **Skills in Group Problem–Solving**
 - ▶ **Skills in Report Synthesis and Team Writing**
 - ▶ **Presenting Findings**
 - ▶ **Evaluating Effectiveness of Effort**
 - ▶ **Envisioning the Future & Sustaining Action**
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Mid-Course Corrections

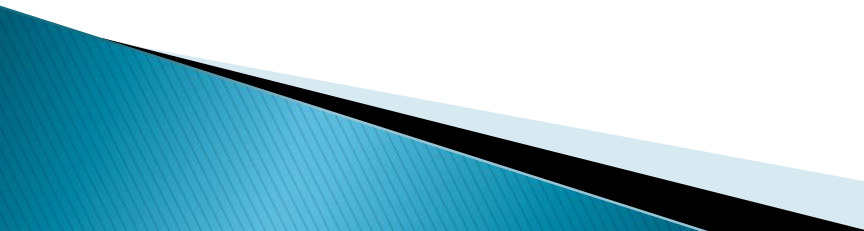
- ▶ **Changes in Course Format and Content**
 - ▶ **Focus on Corporatization of University**
 - ▶ **Adaptation to Interests of Students**
 - ▶ **Iterative Nature of Educational Process**
 - ▶ **Product: Final Report Sent to Administration**
- 

Personal Reflections

- ▶ Evoked complex and contradictory emotions
 - ▶ Difficult to revise format & content mid-term
 - ▶ Struggled with concepts and their application
 - ▶ Reluctant reversion to traditional faculty role
 - ▶ Highlights: Informal Dialogue, Speakers, Trips
 - ▶ Breaking down faculty/student barriers
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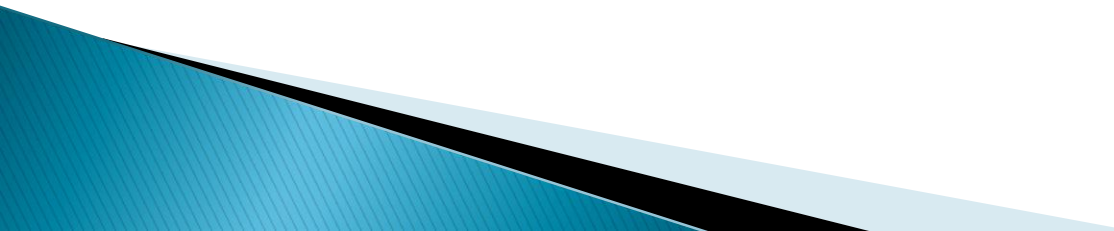
Student Comments

Positives:

1. Opportunity to focus on a specific topic
 2. Opportunity to dialogue, disagree, question, take risks, & create “safe, respectful space”
 3. Focus on educational process not product
 4. Ability to adjust the course format & reflect
 5. Breaking down faculty/student barriers
 6. Research experience
 7. Linkage of institutional & societal forces
- 

Student Comments

Criticisms:

1. Difficulty in establishing course goals
 2. Difficulty of defining key concepts
 3. Overwhelming amount of initial content
 4. Lack of traditional structure initially difficult
 5. Complex issues made focus challenging
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**Thank you for
your attention!**

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