BA (HONS) SUSTAINABLE FUTURES:

ARTS, ECOLOGY AND SYSTEMS CHANGE

MODULE OVERVIEW

Coleg y Mynydd Du
Black Mountains College

WHAT WILL I LEARN ON THE BMC DEGREE?

YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3
How can we learn in a changing world?	How can we address some of the world's most urgent challenges?	A question that you design yourself

YEAR 1 EXPLORES THE QUESTION:

HOW CAN WE LEARN IN A CHANGING WORLD?

Year 1 is taught using the 'block method'. You study each module one after the other, rather than juggling several modules at the same time. Each module will be taught in a 5-week block, with 12 days direct face-to-face teaching, followed by 1 week of independent study to prepare your submission.

HOW CAN WE LEARN THE SKILLS WE NEED TODAY?

Explore your own history of learning, your aims for the future, and the skills that are required to achieve systems change in the context of climate disruption.

We will develop tools to think critically, flexibly, and creatively in response to questions and challenges. We will examine what kinds of knowledge we need, how to assess what can be trusted, and how to keep learning in a context of uncertainty and complexity.

By the end of the module, you will have been introduced to some key approaches to learning at BMC, and gained new strategies to guide and experiment with individual and group learning.

HOW CAN WE UNDERSTAND THE PAST?

In this module, you will explore how the past shapes the world we live in today.

We will examine how the past is narrated through different traditions and academic lenses — from ecological histories of the Earth to social science approaches. You will be introduced to key concepts from earth systems, geology, and ecology, and consider how these ideas operate across different times and scales. We will also engage with storytelling traditions that question notions of origins and beginnings, drawing on Indigenous perspectives, decolonial thought, feminist theories, and people's histories.

Part of the module will utilise the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park and its landscape as the classroom. Through exploring its post-industrial terrain and its many natural and cultural histories, we will ask how our understanding of the past informs the present, and shapes possibilities for the future.

CREATIVE PRACTICE 1 & 2

Creative practice isn't just for artists- it is a way of thinking and living that helps us adapt, collaborate, and imagine new possibilities together. Over three modules, you'll gradually build towards your own creative project in **Year 2**: something that feels meaningful and true to you and the world you live in.

In **Year 1**, a diverse group of artists and makers will guide you through a rich mix of creative and sensory experiences - seeing, listening, moving, making, noticing. Together we'll ask: What happens when we pay attention differently? How can creativity help us make sense of the world? And how can art, in all its forms, support us during times of ecological and social crisis?

Creative Practice 1 introduces us to what creative practice can be - not just for artists, but for anyone trying to live thoughtfully on this planet. We will play, experiment, and use journaling, reflection, and conversation to discover how creative work can support personal wellbeing, community care, and planetary health.

Creative Practice 2 focuses on creativity as an inclusive space - working with communities who have often been ignored or silenced, including those of the more-than-human world. By the end of the module, you'll have begun to shape your own creative path in preparation for **Year 2.**

Throughout each module, you will document your experiences -sketches, notes, reflections, images, voice memos, recordings - and weave them into a portfolio. This will tell the story of your learning journey: what you noticed, what you learned, and how you grew.

SYSTEMS CHANGE 1: FRAMEWORKS & MODELS

in **Systems Change 1**, we move beyond ‘snapshot’ or surface-level solutions to more complex problems, digging deeper to uncover the world of systems, dynamics, and relationships between diverse challenges.

We’ll explore how systems thinking can help to address root causes - rather than just the symptoms - of urgent challenges in key areas such as food and energy systems.

You will learn practical tools to identify the linkages and patterns which drive and embed these challenges, and examine examples of systems dynamics, including climate tipping points and feedback loops. This foundation will help you see problems in a more connected, holistic way, opening up possibilities for meaningful and lasting change.

CHANGE IN PRACTICE 1

In the final module of **Year 1**, you will bring together everything you have learned and put it into action. Working in small groups, you'll take on a real-world challenge - either on the BMC campus or in collaboration with a local community. By engaging with external partners, you will develop practical skills that are directly relevant to addressing worldly challenges and preparing for future employment.

Identifying possible solutions to a water supply and/or drainage issue within a specified location on the BMC farm campus.

Working with a local housing developer to understand the challenges in developing a project for intergenerational housing.

EXAMPLES OF CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED DURING THE MODULE COULD INCLUDE:

Conducting an ecological survey of the BMC farm and considering how particular planting schemes can improve biodiversity.

Identifying potential solutions within the transport plan that connects the farm campus with a new BMC site elsewhere in the Bannau Brycheiniog.

YEAR 2 EXPLORES THE QUESTION:

HOW CAN WE ADDRESS SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST URGENT CHALLENGES?

Year 2 is taught in two semesters. You will study three modules in each 'half' of the year. The first half of the year further builds upon your interdisciplinary skills. In the second half, you will begin to develop your own specialism.

Semester 1

HOW CAN WE IMAGINE THE FUTURE?

To be able to build different futures, we first need to imagine what they might look like. In this module, you will think speculatively, employing creative and critical thinking skills to envision future scenarios that could help us to shape and re-build a fair and just society within safe planetary boundaries.

You will explore and compare practices drawn from a range of disciplines - including decolonization, ecology, philosophy, arts, design, and technology - that enable humans to imagine alternative futures.

You will also develop 'futures literacy', equipping you with the skills and resilience to anticipate, adapt, and respond creatively to an uncertain world.

SYSTEMS CHANGE 2: PRACTICES & METHODS

Systems Change 2 builds on the theoretical foundations of Systems Change 1, exploring further how practices and methods for addressing complex challenges are applied in practice and in diverse areas.

Drawing on examples from the arts, ecology, and sociotechnical systems, this module uses a range of case studies to show how change is enacted in practice.

Through this module, you will engage deeply with complex challenges, reflect critically on potential responses, and begin to develop strategies for meaningful and systemic change.

CREATIVE PRACTICE 3

Deepen your own creative practice through seminars, workshops, and structured time with mentors. Guided by tutors, you will develop your own practice and explore the relationships between creative practice and real-world contexts.

How do we apply creative or artistic approaches to environments that are not commonly perceived as ‘artistic’? How can creativity drive social transformation? You will work together to create a group exhibition that integrates each student’s individual contribution.

Semester 2

CHOOSE ONE OF:

1. AGROECOLOGY FOR FOOD SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

How people live, and how many people the planet can sustain, depends largely on how we farm. Without ecologically coherent farming, both human society and the biosphere face an uncertain future. This module explores key trends in food systems, ecology, and climate change, asking: What kind of agriculture do we need, and how can we create it?
You will have hands-on opportunities to explore and experiment with relevant issues on the BMC farm itself, as well as through engagement with other farms and farming practices regionally and globally.

2. SOCIOTECHNICAL SYSTEMS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Over the past century, technological advancements have driven rapid human development - but often at the cost of environmental degradation and social exploitation, threatening the future of both human and the more-than-human communities. As we enter the era of Industry 4.0, marked by automation, AI, and smart technologies, questions about who decides how these technologies are adopted and used are increasingly urgent. Using methods such as dynamic systems change, actor-network theory, and post-phenomenology, you will analyse and anticipate the consequences of past, present, and emerging technologies. You will apply these insights to diverse contexts at different scales - from hospitals, schools, and fire stations, to farms, factories, and local cafés - gaining tools to shape how technology is applied responsibly and ethically.

3. CREATIVE PRACTICE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Further develop your individual creative practice while situating it within the framework of relevant future generations thinking. You will consider the role of the arts in driving social change, fostering more responsible and sustainable ways of living, and engaging with 2-3 key goals of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales).

Through practical exercises and applied projects, you will gain skills to leverage your creative practice to achieve meaningful transformation across a variety of settings.

DESIGNING THE FUTURE

Apply your emerging specialism in agroecology, creative practice or sociotechnical systems in the context of a single imagined future scenario. Using methods such as design and systems thinking, you will engage with complex challenges and explore possible solutions.

You will work both individually and in teams to map and compare your responses to the scenario, creating a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities that emerge. Additionally, you will receive support in developing your own specialism, including defining a research question and identifying a placement opportunity, helping to structure your studies in Year 3.

CHANGE IN PRACTICE 2

This module builds on everything you have learned this year, applying it to a real-world challenge. You will tackle a question relevant to a specific industry or sector, and undertake both desk-based research and hands-on explorations to understand and address the issues at stake.

YEAR 3 ENABLES YOU TO DESIGN A QUESTION YOURSELF

In **Year 3** you will undertake **three 40 credit modules** across the year.

We hope you have gained enough knowledge, experience, and transferable skills from your studies in Years 1 & 2, that you are now able to study more independently, with minimal supervision as you begin to transition into your life after the Degree.

WHAT NEXT?
GLOBAL & LOCAL SYSTEMS CHANGE

In this module, you will examine different 'theories of change' and deepen your understanding of natural and human-driven global change, exploring its impact on marine, freshwater, terrestrial, ecological, and social systems. Through a series of case studies, you will analyse these complexities at global, national and local levels, and articulate different models for future development.

You will also reflect on broader questions: What comes next for humankind - locally and globally? And what comes next in your own development and career beyond graduation?
You'll be encouraged to work independently, pursue your own research, and explore different case studies, whilst taking responsibility for finding support when needed, and for achieving both personal and group goals.

INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH PROJECT

In this module you will consolidate your learning on the Degree by designing and undertaking your own research project. You will propose a question that is both personally meaningful and professionally relevant, drawing on the specialism you developed at Level 5 - whether in creative practice, agroecology, or technology for future generations. Your research project compliments and supports the work you will pursue in Change in Practice 3.

The research project will culminate in a substantial output, which can take one of three formats: an academic dissertation, a research report, or a creative piece accompanied by a capstone text that contextualises the work.

CHANGE IN PRACTICE 3 OR CHANGE IN THEORY 3

In this final module of the Degree you will do one of the following:

1. A sustained work placement to gain experience in an organisation relevant to your chosen field

2. A sustained civic engagement project, which may be developed collaboratively with an external organisation relevant to your chosen field

3. A supported and sustained new venture creation project, to design and test a product, service, project or business idea relevant to your chosen field, working with a mentor

4. An action research project (in Change in Theory 3), in which you diagnose an issue with an external partner, design a plan for change and reflect on wider contexts

WHAT SORT OF QUESTION MIGHT YOU COME UP WITH IN YEAR 3?

Your question will develop out of your earlier studies, and will be unique to your interests. You will receive support to design, revise and refine it. Here are some questions our current students are working on:

Giving rivers a voice: how can we better understand the needs of nature in local government and in communities?

How can regenerative farms in one area work together to build their reach and range, but not compete with one another?

What kinds of solutions could help address the housing crisis for young people, creatives and land workers in rural areas?

How do perceived levels of pollution impact on nature connection and outdoor activity?

How can narratives and story support new audiences to engage with bird conservation and bird watching?

HOW IS THE DEGREE ASSESSED?

A FLEXIBLE APPROACH

The approach to assessments allows you, where possible, to demonstrate your knowledge in a form that suits your learning style and future career aspirations; for example, by emphasising academic writing, project reporting and development, oral presentations or creative responses to a set task. You will be encouraged to build up a portfolio of assessments across the programme, so you can demonstrate a range of skills on completion.

REAL-WORLD SKILLS

There is an emphasis throughout on authentic assessments, the application and evaluation of knowledge, and skills relevant to a rapidly-changing world of employment.

CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

The degree is continuously assessed, meaning there is an assessment in each module – rather than at the end of each year. There are no exams, although occasionally there will be a 'timed' assessment (e.g. an assessment that is set, and must be completed, within a defined period of time such as 1 week or 48 hours).

WHAT CAN I READ IN ADVANCE TO PREPARE FOR THE DEGREE & TO FIND OUT IF IT'S RIGHT FOR ME?

There is a wide range of reading involved in any degree, and you will be sent a reading list in advance of the programme starting. Particular reading lists may vary from year-to-year, but 1 or 2 of the following key works would be a good starting point:

Stella Cotterill, Critical Thinking

Amitav Ghosh, The Nutmeg's Curse

Jay Griffiths, Why Rebel?

Timothy Morton, All Art is Ecological

Andy Northedge,

The Open University's Sciences Good Study Guide

(now out of print but available second-hand online)

Robin Wall-Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass

If you want to find out more about the approaches that have informed our College and degree, you may find the following texts by our staff or trustees of interest:

• **Natalia Eernstmann and Arjen E.J. Wals,**
'Locative Meaning-making: An Arts-based Approach to Learning for Sustainable Development'
• **Keri Facer**, '*Beyond Business as Usual: Higher Education in the era of Climate Change*'
• **Ben Rawlence,** '*The Treeline*'
• **Tom Sperlinger, Josie McLellan and Richard Pettigrew,**
'*Who are Universities for?*'

If you are interested in studying on the degree, and would like to find out more, our Discovery Days may be of interest. Keep an eye on the events page on our website!

For further information on our degree and how to apply, scan the QR code

Coleg y Mynydd Du
Black Mountains College

www.blackmountainscollege.uk