

Social Innovation in the Global South

SPRING-2026
LAS 4935 / LAS 6938

Day: Wednesdays

Time: 3:00 - 6:00 pm

Location: Grinter 376

NO PREREQUISITES OR INSTRUCTOR APPROVAL NEEDED FOR REGISTRATION

Instructor

Dr. Jairo Baquero-Melo

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Office hours: To be confirmed at the beginning of the semester.

Course Description

How do communities in the Global South innovate with limited resources? What role do local knowledge, culture, and collaboration play in addressing pressing social and economic challenges? This course investigates social innovation and other forms of grassroots problem-solving that emerge in response to scarcity, exclusion, and environmental pressures.

This course explores grassroots social innovation and frugal solutions in the Global South. Students analyze how resource-constrained communities develop creative, adaptive, and locally embedded responses to social and economic challenges. Through interdisciplinary perspectives from economic sociology, anthropology, and political ecology, the course examines case studies on informal economies, grassroots technologies, and community-driven solutions in Latin America, Africa, and South Asia.

Drawing from economic sociology, social economy, and political ecology, students will explore the theoretical and practical dimensions of frugal innovation, social entrepreneurship, and community-driven solutions. Case studies from Latin America, Africa, and South Asia will highlight informal economies, low-cost technologies, and participatory design approaches that empower marginalized communities.

Through hands-on learning, students will engage with participatory action research (PAR) and co-design methodologies, working in teams to analyze and propose solutions to real-world challenges. By the end of

the course, students will develop critical perspectives on innovation, recognizing both its potential and its limitations in fostering sustainable, inclusive development.

Please note: This course may count towards the [minor/certificate in Latin American Studies](#). For more information about enrollment in the **undergraduate** programs offered by the Center for Latin American Studies click [here](#). Do not hesitate to contact the undergraduate coordinator at luigomezlomeli@ufl.edu if you have any questions.

- International (N)
- Writing Requirement (WR) 2000 words

Required Readings and Works

Radjou, N., Prabhu, J., & Ahuja, S. (2012). *Jugaad innovation: Think frugal, be flexible, generate breakthrough growth*. John Wiley & Sons.

All other readings will be available in Canvas.

Materials and Supplies Fees: n/a

Recommended Writing Guide and Information on Citations:

Strunk, William, and Elwyn B. White. 2014. *The Elements of Style*. Pearson, Boston.

Citation Management Guide from UF Libraries: <http://guides.uflib.ufl.edu/citationsoftware>.

Description of Assignments

Assignments
Class participation (5%) Active participation is expected each week, demonstrating engagement with the required readings . The professor will track participation, encouraging quieter students to contribute in subsequent weeks.
Forum Participation on Readings (15%) Students will engage in weekly online discussions by posting brief critical reflections on the readings and responding to at least one classmate. These discussions will enhance analytical thinking and peer exchange.
<u>In-Class presentation of a case study on social innovation in a country from the Global South (20%)</u> Students will engage in an experiential-learning activity designed to deepen their understanding of social innovation through direct participation, observation, or applied research. This could include (choose at least one): <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Researching a social innovation project (videos, social networks, etc.) observing a local initiative focused on social change, such as a cooperative, NGO program, or social enterprise.

- Designing a small-scale, actionable proposal for a social innovation initiative, based on research and engagement with stakeholders.

Each student will document their experience through a written reflection (minimum 750 words) or a multimedia report (video, podcast, or visual presentation). The reflection should connect personal insights with course concepts, addressing the innovation's effectiveness, challenges, and lessons learned.

Mid-term Essay (20%) – (1000 words) - Thesis-Driven Analytical Essay

An analysis of the topics and questions suggested by the instructor. Students will critically engage with foundational theories and historical case studies to understand how social innovation has developed in response to local and global challenges. **Counts towards Writing Requirement (WR).**

Session leader and reading presentation (20%)

Each student will give a short presentation (between 15 and 20 minutes) on an assigned text from one session. In addition, they must plan an educational activity that allows the group to analyze the topic of the reading. This can be through gamification, multimedia analysis, debate, etc.

Final Written Report (20%) – (1000 words) - Thesis-Driven Analytical Essay

Students will write an analytical essay that presents a clear, well-supported thesis related to social innovation in the Global South. The essay should critically engage with course readings, case studies, and external scholarly sources to analyze a specific innovation, policy, or grassroots initiative. Students must demonstrate a strong understanding of the broader socio-economic and political contexts, critically assess the innovation's impact, and articulate its challenges and scalability. Essays should be well-structured, with a clear argument, supporting evidence, and a reasoned conclusion.

Grading Scale

For information on how UF assigns grade points, visit: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

A	94 – 100%	C	74 – 76%
A-	90 – 93%	C-	70 – 73%
B+	87 – 89%	D+	67 – 69%
B	84 – 86%	D	64 – 66%
B-	80 – 83%	D-	60 – 63%
C+	77 – 79%	E	<60

Weeks and Sessions:

Week	Topic, Readings & Materials
Week 1: January 12 - January 16	Course Presentation
	Basic concepts: social innovation, resources & scarcity, Jugaad, frugal innovation, grassroots innovation, community-based solutions

	<p>Pansera, M. (2013). Frugality, grassroots and inclusiveness: New challenges for mainstream innovation theories. <i>African Journal of Science, Technology, Innovation and Development</i>, 5(6), 469-478.</p>
Week 2: January 20 - January 23	<p>Food and agriculture</p> <p>Da Silva, A. L. F., Plaza-Úbeda, J. A., & Souza Piao, R. (2024). Social innovation as a game changer in agriculture: A literature review. <i>Sustainable Development</i>, 32(4), 4160-4171.</p> <p>Rover, O. J., De Gennaro, B. C., & Roselli, L. (2016). Social innovation and sustainable rural development: The case of a Brazilian agroecology network. <i>Sustainability</i>, 9(1), 3.</p> <p>Video (26 minutes):</p> <p>Kenya – Fighting for Water Off The Grid Documentary</p> <p>Assignment: Write a short essay discussing the Documentary on Kenya and water.</p>
Week 3: January 26 - January 30	<p>Energy solutions</p> <p>Dall-Orsoletta, A., Cunha, J., Araújo, M., & Ferreira, P. (2022). A systematic review of social innovation and community energy transitions. <i>Energy Research & Social Science</i>, 88, 102625.</p> <p>Budiman, I. (2018). Enabling community participation for social innovation in the energy sector. <i>Indonesian Journal of Energy</i>, 1(2), 21-31.</p>
Week 4: February 2 - February 6	<p>Social economy, solidarity & cooperatives</p> <p>Molina, F., & Miguez, A. (2008). The origins of Mondragon: Catholic co-operativism and social movement in a Basque valley (1941–59). <i>Social History</i>, 33(3), 284-298.</p> <p>Explanation on Netnography applied to Social Innovation in the Global South</p> <p>Hine, C. (2015). The E3 Internet: Embedded, embodied, everyday internet. <i>Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, embodied and everyday</i>, 19-54.</p> <p>Optional</p> <p>Bucos, T. (2024). Social and solidarity economy: principles and contributions to sustainable development and social inclusion. <i>European Journal of Accounting, Finance and Business</i>, 114-127.</p>
Week 5: February 9 - February 13	<p>Community-based savings and credit</p> <p>Younus, M. A. F., & Sharna, S. S. (2014). Combination of community-based vulnerability and adaptation to storm surges in coastal regions of Bangladesh. <i>Journal of Environmental Assessment Policy and Management</i>, 16(04), 1450036.</p>

	<p>Santos, M. R., & Silva, B. (2022). Community-based savings groups: An alternative model for resilience. <i>Handbook of research on acceleration programs for SMEs</i>.</p>
	<p>Assignment: Questions for first essay distributed (1000 words analyzing basic concepts of the course and readings on energy, food, and credit; & netnography analysis of one Youtube video on social innovation).</p>
	<p>Video (23 minutes):</p>
	<p>A history of microfinance Muhammad Yunus TEDxVienna</p>
Week 6: February 16 - February 20	<p>Alternative money & innovations</p> <p>Bowles, S. R. (2022). <i>Money, credit and regional development: complementary local currencies and the provision of small business credit</i> (Doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham).</p> <p>Avom, D., Bangaké, C., & Ndoya, H. (2023). Do financial innovations improve financial inclusion? Evidence from mobile money adoption in Africa. <i>Technological Forecasting and Social Change</i>, 190, 122451.</p>
Week 7: February 23 - February 27	<p>Crowdfunding, fundraisers and nonprofit organizations</p> <p>Adjirakor, N. D. (2022). Funding Popular Culture in Tanzania: Crowdfunding, Self-Funding and the Live Performance as Fundraiser 1. In <i>Routledge Handbook of African Popular Culture</i> (pp. 222-236). Routledge.</p> <p>Assignment: identify, analyze and present cases of Crowdfunding from a community in Latin America, Africa or Asia</p>
Week 8: March 2 - March 6	<p>Barter, moonlighting & time banks</p> <p>Gregory, L. (2009). Spending time locally: The benefit of time banks for local economies. <i>Local Economy</i>, 24(4), 323-333.</p>
Week 9: March 9 - March 13	<p>Caring economies</p> <p>Robinson, F. (2006). Beyond labour rights: The ethics of care and women's work in the global economy. <i>International Feminist Journal of Politics</i>, 8(3), 321-342.</p> <p>Ossome, L. (2021). The care economy and the state in Africa's Covid-19 responses. <i>Canadian Journal of Development Studies/Revue canadienne d'études du développement</i>, 42(1-2), 68-78.</p>
Spring Break: March 14 - March 21 (no classes)	<p>No Class</p>
Week 10: March 23 - March 27	<p>Assignment: Presentations of case studies and examples</p>

Week 11: March 30 - April 3	
	Peasant & indigenous knowledge; Co-creation & social solutions
	Poto, M. P. (2023). Knowledge co-creation as a methodological approach: participatory approaches to environmental legal research. In <i>Coproduction of knowledge in Climate Governance</i> (pp. 27-55). Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag.
	Lang, W., Gkartzios, M., Yan, J., Chen, T., & Tan, S. (2024). Community Co-creation through knowledge (Co) Production: The engagement of universities in promoting rural revitalization in China. <i>Journal of Rural Studies</i> , 112, 103455.
Week 12: April 6 - April 10	Transportation innovations
	Bissel, M., & Becker, S. (2024). Social innovation for sustainable and equitable transport: The case of Commons Cargo Bikes. <i>Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research</i> , 1-23.
	Pojani, D., & Stead, D. (2015). Sustainable urban transport in the developing world: beyond megacities. <i>Sustainability</i> , 7(6), 7784-7805.
Week 13: April 13 - April 17	Health solutions
	van Niekerk, L., Mathanga, D. P., Juban, N., Castro-Arroyave, D. M., & Balabanova, D. (2020). Universities as catalysts of social innovation in health systems in low-and middle-income countries: a multi-country case study. <i>Infectious Diseases of Poverty</i> , 9, 1-14.
	Dako-Gyeke, P., Amazigo, U. V., Halpaap, B., & Manderson, L. (2020). Social innovation for health: engaging communities to address infectious diseases. <i>Infectious Diseases of Poverty</i> , 9(1), 98.
	Assignment: questions distributed for a final essay (1000 words) covering the readings
Week 14: April 20 - April 22 (last day of classes on April 22)	Networks and social organization
	Alcaide Lozano, V., Moliner, L. A., Murillo, D., & Buckland, H. (2019). Understanding the effects of social capital on social innovation ecosystems in Latin America through the lens of Social Network Approach. <i>International Review of Sociology</i> , 29(1), 1-35.
	Optional: Espinoza, V. (2018). Social networks among the urban poor: Inequality and integration in a Latin American city. In <i>Networks in the global village</i> (pp. 147-184). Routledge.
Reading Days: April 23 - April 24 (no classes)	

Final Exams: April 25 - May 1	Assignment: Upload final research essay (1000 words) that includes instructor and peer feedback. Students will receive a grade and feedback on their writing via canvas. The writing will be evaluated based on content, organization, coherence, effectiveness, style, grammar and punctuation. Please see rubric of group research for more information on how this assignment will be graded.
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Details of Experiential Learning Component

This course integrates experiential learning through a twofold approach:

i) Digital Netnography / Online Observation

Students, working in small groups of four, will identify and analyze a short **netnography** (Hine, C. (2015). *The E3 Internet: Embedded, embodied, everyday internet. Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, embodied and everyday*, 19-54.) or **digital observation** of a project developed in the Global South, focused on social innovation (e.g., water, food, transportation, communications, or other pressing challenges). Drawing on class readings and discussions, they will formulate a research question related to community-driven innovation and connect their observations to the broader literature on social change and innovation.

ii) Local Engagement / Community Connection

In addition, students will complement their digital analysis with an in-person experiential activity. Options include:

- **Visiting a local project or organization** in Gainesville that involves community innovation to address social or environmental issues.
- **Attending a public lecture, panel, or conference** at UF related to innovation, sustainability, or global challenges.

These experiences are designed to move beyond classroom learning, fostering direct engagement with innovation practices in both digital and physical settings.

Academic Policies

- Requirements for **class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work** in the course are consistent with university policies. [See UF Academic Regulations and Policies for more information regarding the University Attendance Policies.](#)
- **Students with disabilities** who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center. [See the "Get Started With the DRC" webpage on the Disability Resource Center site.](#) It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.
- Information on **current UF grading policies for assigning grade points**. Here you can find [a link to the University grades and grading policies.](#)
- Students are expected to provide professional and respectful **feedback on the quality of instruction** in this course by completing course evaluations online. Students can complete evaluations in three ways:

1. The email they receive from GatorEvals

2. Their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals
3. The central portal at <https://my-uf1.bluera.com>

Guidance on how to provide constructive feedback is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

- The **University's Honesty Policy** regarding cheating, plagiarism, etc.:

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [See the UF Conduct Code website for more information](#). If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TA in this class.

- **In-Class Recording:**

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal education use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and deliver by an instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course.

A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentation such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or guest lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless, of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third-party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

Academic Resources:

- E-learning technical support: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at [352-392-4357](tel:352-392-4357) or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.
- [Career Connections Center](#): Reitz Union Suite 1300, [352-392-1601](tel:352-392-1601). Career assistance and counseling services.
- [Library Support](#): Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Call [866-281-6309](tel:866-281-6309) or email ask@ufl.libanswers.com for more information.

- [Academic Resources](#): 1317 Turlington Hall, Call [352-392-2010](tel:352-392-2010), or to make a private appointment: [352-392-6420](tel:352-392-6420). Email contact: teaching-center@ufl.edu. General study skills and tutoring.
- [Writing Studio](#): Daytime (9:30am-3:30pm): 2215 Turlington Hall, [352-846-1138](tel:352-846-1138) | Evening (5:00pm-7:00pm): 1545 W University Avenue (Library West, Rm. 339). Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.
- Academic Complaints: Office of the Ombuds; [Visit the Complaint Portal webpage for more information.](#)
- Enrollment Management Complaints (Registrar, Financial Aid, Admissions): [View the Student Complaint Procedure webpage for more information.](#)
- UF Student Success Initiative: Visit <https://studentsuccess.ufl.edu/> for resources that support your success as a UF student.
- [Public Speaking Lab](#): (Dial Center, 501 Rolfs Hall). Offering online and in-person help developing, organizing, and practicing oral presentations. Contact email: publicspeakinglab@clas.ufl.edu.

Campus Health and Wellness Resources:

- UF Whole Gator Resources: Visit <https://one.uf.edu/whole-gator/discover> for resources that are designed to help you thrive physically, mentally, and emotionally at UF.