

# MA in Sustainable Development Practice

## Welcome Letter 2024/2025

### DEAR INCOMING STUDENT:

Congratulations on your decision to begin SIT's MA in Sustainable Development Practice this fall! I would like to welcome you into the program—the next step in your academic, personal, and professional development. Our team looks forward to supporting you throughout this exciting journey. I'd also like to take this opportunity to share some important information about the program and to answer some of your questions regarding what to expect. This letter and pre-departure website contain important information about your upcoming program and subsequent studies and should prove useful as you prepare for the program.

### YOUR DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE CHAIR

My name is Dr. Joseph Lanning. I have worked in sustainable development for 24 years, focusing on agriculture and food insecurity in southern Africa with a particular focus on the ways in which smallholder farmers make decisions in the face of economic risks and climate uncertainty. I joined SIT as a Program Director for the International Honors Program in 2016 (I also attended an SIT program in the late-1990s!). Currently, I am responsible for teaching, advising, and serving as chair of the Development Practice program. In addition to my work at SIT, I am a former Peace Corps volunteer (Malawi 2000-2002) and continue to conduct research in Malawi examining the relationship between social networks and wealth inequality and co-manage a community-based agroecology demonstration and teaching farm with a Malawian partner.

As the program chair, my role is to coordinate all administrative and academic aspects of the program and to facilitate your learning. I am not expected, however, to do those things on my own. There is a strong network of faculty and staff in Ecuador, South Africa, Malawi, and the US who work with me to help ensure that you have every opportunity to develop as a innovative and multidisciplinary development practitioner. On behalf of the staff and our program partners - our "SIT family"- I look forward to receiving and working with each of you during the coming year.

### GET TO KNOW YOUR COHORTMATES

Because of privacy laws, SIT is unable to share personal information about future students with other future students. However, we will soon ask a member of your cohort to set up a Facebook page just for the group so that you all can start to get to know each other and if desired, consider possible housing and roommate scenarios as well. We will send this information once available; please note that it is not intended to duplicate or replace official information and is for personal purposes only.

### ACADEMIC AND GENERAL EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS

This Master's in Sustainable Development Practice has been conceived to build on SIT's expertise in experiential-based learning and hands-on training in global settings to provide students with the knowledge and skills to lead principled, effective, and innovative work in sustainable and

regenerative development. Although, your base studies will be in the classroom, you will learn directly from practice-based activities and projects relating to sustainable and regenerative development. In this respect, it is important to emphasize that to make the most out of the experiential learning opportunities throughout the whole program, you need to be engaged and actively involved in your learning, through reflective practice, analysis, and synthesis of your experiences on the individual and group levels. Furthermore, the program provides a comparative, transdisciplinary, and relational approach to enhance critical analysis skills and understanding of the role and impact of the political, legal, social, ecological, and economic contexts of development.

Finally, it is crucial to point to the importance of investing on the global nature of the program to hone your cultural competence and collaborative relationships, critical enablers to work across different cultural and social contexts. This is crucially important to develop a career in the field of development practice. To this end, you must be flexible, open-minded, and willing to challenge your comfort zones, and adopt some new habits that may at times seem inconvenient, but which will enable you to better interact with and respect local realities.

## RECOMMENDED READINGS

To enable you to make the most of your time with SIT, we strongly advise you to begin now to monitor local and international media coverage of the countries and regions of your program. To get started you can access your recommended – but, not required – readings below. You can find most of them online (Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.com>), or at your local library.

- B. Harriss-White: *Destitution and the Poverty of its Politics* Chambers, R.: *The Origins and Practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal*, World Development Indicators (World Bank 2015); MDG Report 2015; Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda for 2030)
- Scoones, I. (2009) *Livelihoods perspectives and rural development*, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36:1, 171-196, DOI: 10.1080/03066150902820503
- Frankenberger, T., Mueller M., Spangler T., and Alexander S. October 2013. *Community Resilience: Conceptual Framework and Measurement* Feed the Future Learning Agenda. Rockville, MD: Westat.
- Escobar, A. (2011). *Encountering development: The making and unmaking of the Third World* (Vol. 1). Princeton University Press. (Chapters 1, 2 and 6)
- Frank, A. G. (2018). The development of underdevelopment. In *Promise of development* (pp. 111-123). Routledge.

In closing, I know that you are making a huge investment of time and money to pursue your master's degree. To that end, I want to emphasize that my colleagues and I are very excited to begin collaborating with you and supporting your professional development journey.

I wish you all the best as you prepare for this exciting learning experience, and I look forward to meeting you soon.

Sincerely,



Joseph Lanning