



Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics
AAE 323: Cooperatives and Alternative Forms of Enterprise Ownership
2025 Course Syllabus

COURSE DESCRIPTION: Cooperatives, credit unions, and other alternative forms of enterprise are unique businesses in which users—rather than investors—are the owners. Topics will include why these models emerge, who they serve, how they differ from other forms of enterprise, and the ways in which they can be used to address social, economic, and environmental challenges.

This class brings together students from across campus to dialogue on the purpose of business and alternatives to the investor ownership model. This is not a course where students will passively receive information from "experts;" it will be a space to actively engage in your own exploration of issues related to business purpose, ownership, and impact. The class will consist of lectures, supplemented with student discussions based on readings, videos, and case studies. The course will also include several guest speakers who are leaders in the local cooperative sector.

Instructor: Courtney Berner, Executive Director, UW Center for Cooperatives

Email: cberner@wisc.edu

Office hours: Online and available by appointment.

Course time and location: Tuesday and Thursdays, 9:30 – 10:45 p.m. Taylor Hall 103

Mode of instruction: This course will be delivered in person with a few sessions delivered virtually via Zoom.

Course credits: 3 credits. See below for more information about meeting times and expectations for student work.

Course Requisites: Sophomore standing and Satisfied Quantitative Reasoning (QR) A requirement.

Level: Intermediate

Breadth: Social Science

L&S Credit Type: Counts as LAS credit (L&S)

Sustainability Attribute: Yes

Course Learning Management System and Instructional Tools

All course materials will be organized and available on [Canvas](#). A few sessions will be delivered via Zoom. I strongly suggest that students explore and become familiar with these two platforms.

Course Learning Outcomes: By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Communicate the characteristics of cooperatives, credit unions, and other alternative forms of enterprise and their role in our economy and society.
- Describe the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of enterprise ownership structures and identify potential tradeoffs and interrelationships among these dimensions at a level appropriate to the course.
- Discern when a cooperative or alternative form of enterprise ownership is the appropriate response to a social, economic, or environmental challenge.
- Appreciate how ownership structures affect enterprise behavior, strategy, and decision-making.
- Apply knowledge of cooperatives and alternative ownership models to a real-world community economic development challenge.
- Use sustainability principles for developing personal goals and professional values.

Course Evaluation: There will be a total of 500 possible points in this course. The course will consist of readings, videos, podcasts, and two in person lectures per week. Graded activities will include two exams, online discussions, class participation, and a project. More information about these assignments will be provided in class and via Canvas. Points will be distributed as follows:

Exams (2)	150	points	(30% of your grade)
Online discussions	120	points	(24% of your grade)
Class attendance & participation	130	points	(26% of your grade)
<u>Project</u>	100	<u>points</u>	(20% of your grade)
TOTAL:	500	points	

Grades: Final grades will not be curved. They will be allocated based on the following scale:

A	94 - 100	AB	88 - 93	B	80 - 87		
BC	75 - 79	C	65 - 74	D	50 - 64	F	below 50

Course Feedback: You will have the opportunity to evaluate me as well. I will offer extra credit points at the end of the semester for providing anonymous, constructive feedback on the course.

Rules, Rights, and Responsibilities: Every member of the University of Wisconsin–Madison community has the right to expect to conduct his or her academic and social life in an environment free from threats, danger, or harassment. Students also have the responsibility to conduct themselves in a manner compatible with membership in the university and local communities. UWS Chapters 17 and 18 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code list the university policies students are expected to uphold and describes the procedures used when students are accused of misconduct. Chapter 17 also lists the possible responses the university may apply when a student is found to violate policy. The process used to determine any violations and disciplinary actions is an important part of UWS 17. For the complete text of UWS Chapter 17, see [Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards website](#), or contact them via phone at 608-263-5700 or room 70 Bascom Hall.

Diversity and Inclusion: Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit

ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world. <https://diversity.wisc.edu/>

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: McBurney Disability Resource Center recommended syllabus statement: The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

<https://mcburney.wisc.edu/instructor/>

Academic Integrity: By virtue of enrollment, each student agrees to uphold the high academic standards of the University of Wisconsin-Madison; academic misconduct is behavior that negatively impacts the integrity of the institution. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these previously listed acts are examples of misconduct, which may result in disciplinary action. Examples of disciplinary action include, but are not limited to, failure on the assignment/course, written reprimand, disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion.

<https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/syllabus-statement/>

Quarantine and Isolation: Please reach out to me as soon as possible if you become ill or need to isolate or quarantine, in order to make alternate plans for how to proceed with the course. Every effort will be made to accommodate the academic progress of students who become ill or are asked to isolate or quarantine. I will work with you to provide alternative ways to complete the course work, but my ability to do so will depend on your direct and open communication about your situation.

Usage of Recorded Lectures

Lecture materials and recordings for AAE 323 are protected intellectual property at UW-Madison. Students in this course may use the materials and recordings for their personal use related to participation in this class. Students may also take notes solely for their personal use. If a lecture is not already recorded, you are not authorized to record my lectures without my permission unless you are considered by the university to be a qualified student with a disability requiring accommodation. [Regent Policy Document 4-1] Students may not copy or have lecture materials and recordings outside of class, including posting on internet sites or selling to commercial entities. Students are also prohibited from providing or selling their personal notes to anyone else or being paid for taking notes by any person or commercial firm without the instructor's express written permission. Unauthorized use of these copyrighted lecture materials and recordings constitutes copyright infringement and may be addressed under the university's policies, UWS Chapters 14 and 17, governing student academic and non-academic misconduct.

Credit Hour Definition

Students will meet the 3 credits of the course by spending a total of 135 hours on learning activities and interactions with the instructor and classmates. See the table below for a breakdown of activities and hours per week.

Learning Activity	Hours per Week	Weeks	Total
Absorbing content (lecture, readings, videos, etc.)	6	14	84
Online discussions	2	10	20
Exam (studying + taking exam)	5	2	10
Project	4	5	20
Office hours with instructor	0.5	2	1
		Grand Total	135

COURSE SCHEDULE

Please refer to the weekly overviews in Canvas for the complete list of activities for each week. It is the most accurate and up to date resource for this course.

UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION TO COOPERATIVES AND ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF ENTERPRISE OWNERSHIP

U1O1: Identify and summarize the important characteristics of the cooperative model and other forms of enterprise ownership

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

U1O4: Compare the U.S. cooperative ecosystem to cooperative ecosystems in other countries

WEEK 1

January 21 Introductions; course overview; intro to alternative enterprise ownership models

January 23 Fundamentals of the cooperative model

WEEK 2

January 28 The role of cooperatives, credit unions, and mutuals in the economy and society

January 30 Essential conditions for cooperation

WEEK 3

February 4 History and impact of cooperatives in the ag sector

February 6 The cooperative difference: strategic advantages, impacts on decision-making, and how cooperatives evolve over time

UNIT 2: GOVERNANCE: WHERE BUSINESS AND DEMOCRACY COLLIDE

U2O1: Demonstrate understanding of corporate governance models

U2O2: Compare cooperative governance models to governance models in other types of organizations

U2O3: Apply understanding of cooperative governance to case studies

WEEK 4

February 11 Unpacking the history of corporate governance

February 13 Cooperative governance in theory and practice (

WEEK 5

February 18 Managing the diverse needs of members and other cooperative governance challenges

February 20 Case study: The Case of Pedernales Electric Cooperative

WEEK 6a

February 25 Cooperative governance in a large, federated ag cooperative
Guest speaker: Pete Kappelman, Senior VP, Member and Government Relations, Land O'Lakes

UNIT 3: COOPERATIVE FINANCE

U3O1: Define basic terminology related to cooperative finance

U3O2: Communicate how cooperatives differ from other types of enterprises in terms of how they are financed and how profit is distributed

U3O3: Compare the different financing mechanisms used by cooperatives

WEEK 6b

February 27 Unpacking the meaning of member economic participation

WEEK 7

March 4 Cooperative finance basics and equity management strategies

March 6 Case study: United Agricultural Cooperative: considering the sale of the agronomy division

WEEK 8

March 11 Case study: Producers Cooperative Association

March 13 MIDTERM

UNIT 4: COOPERATIVE MANAGEMENT & STRATEGY

U4O1: Identify the key factors that influence a cooperative's strategy

U4O2: Apply understanding of cooperative finance and governance to the management of cooperatives

U4O3: Evaluate the tactics and strategies used by a selection of cooperative businesses

WEEK 9

March 18 The cooperative difference in retail grocery
Guest speaker: Kristina Kuhaupt, Customer Experience Manager, Willy Street Grocery Co-op

March 20 NO CLASS, meet with your group to finalize business plan canvas

Business Plan Canvas Due

March 22 – 30: SPRING BREAK

WEEK 10

April 1 Electrifying Rural America Through Cooperation
Guest speaker: Carol Blaken, Assistant General Manager, Jackson Rural Electric Cooperative

April 3 The cooperative difference in healthcare
Guest speaker: Dr. Mark Huth, MD, President and CEO, GHC of South-Central Wisconsin

WEEK 11

April 8 How Credit Union priorities differ from other financial institutions
Guest speaker: Ligia Vado, Senior Economist at America's Credit Unions

April 10 How employee ownership impacts strategy and performance
Guest speaker: Ole Olson, Engineer Isthmus Engineering

UNIT 5: COOPERATIVE MODELS FOR OUR CHANGING WORLD

U5O1: Summarize the social and economic issues that are driving new types of cooperation

U5O2: Identify novel approaches to cooperation that could address current social, economic, and environmental issues

WEEK 12

April 15	Overview of growing cooperative sectors: housing, platforms, childcare, and homecare
April 17	Cooperating to sustain our natural resources

WEEK 13

April 22	Innovative Food System Cooperatives to Address Present-Day Needs <i>Guest Speaker: Kelly Maynard, Cooperative Development Specialist, UW Center for Cooperatives</i>
April 24	Shared capitalism and the changing nature of work and ownership Business Plan due

WEEK 14

April 29	Student presentations
May 1	Review for final exam

Additional Resources:

- University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives: www.uwcc.wisc.edu
- Cooperative Glossary: <https://uwcc.wisc.edu/about-co-ops/co-op-glossary/>
- National Cooperative Business Association: www.ncba.coop
- University of Saskatchewan Centre for the Study of Cooperatives: www.usaskstudies.coop
- Democracy At Work Institute: www.institute.coop