

2025 ECOGATHER HANDBOOK

UPDATED JANUARY 2025



 **EcoGather**[™]
presented by

 **Sterling**
ECOLOGICAL THINKING & ACTION

EcoGather Handbook

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EcoGather Handbook

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About EcoGather

EcoGather is a paradigm and practice-shifting collaborative learning network composed of beings and communities ready to courageously confront the collapse of both natural systems that we depend upon and human systems that are hostile to life. We recognize that all people alive today are experiencing an existential opportunity – a rough reckoning with a particularly ungrateful and unwise era of human development and a chance to secure and shape a sequel for humanity. Together, we explore the space between systems and stories, figuring out how to show up for the world(s) our hearts know are possible.

Most of us were meticulously prepared to navigate and extend a human future that no longer awaits. There is a massive misalignment between mainstream education and acculturation and the knowledge, skills, and sensibilities that we need to safely navigate the fraught and fractious 21st century. EcoGather offers refuge and renewable resources for those who desire a different relationship to the future.

- We co-create, curate, and provide access to heterodox educational resources that support relational capacity and change competence, encouraging our participants to develop a sense of belonging and possibility within the web of life.
- We tend a digital learning commons full of ideas, examples, and exchanges conducive to the restoration of place-based lifeways, the vitality of agro-ecosystems, the change-competence of communities, the transition to well-being economies, and the pursuit of collective liberation.
- We also hold welcoming virtual spaces and guided journeys for learners to experience pluralistic exchange and resonant connections across geographies, cultures, identities, worldviews, and (a)livelihoods.

EcoGather's offerings tend to focus on place-based lifeways, the vitality of agro-ecosystems, the change-competence of communities, the transition to well-being economies, and the pursuit of collective liberation. We gather to learn from and transform our relationships with each other, the rest of the natural world, and life itself.

The EcoGather Handbook

The EcoGather Handbook was compiled through a collective effort among the EcoGather staff members, Sterling College leadership and other pertinent departments. It provides guidance and resources to help EcoGather learners efficiently navigate their learning experience through a Sterling College program and complements other College handbooks and resources, including the [Student Handbook](#)

The Sterling College [Student Handbook](#) is a publicly available, searchable resource that is comprehensive and provides information on other areas of campus life and policies that are not covered in this handbook. Note, however, that because the full [Student Handbook](#) is

designed for degree-seeking students in in-person programming, much of its content is not directly relevant to EcoGather participants, who engage with Sterling College remotely and on a very part-time basis.

The Spirit & Practice of Lifelong Learning Toward Communities of Learning & Practice

EcoGather aspires to foster communities of learning, imagination, reflection and transformative practice that bring together people with varied experiences and perspectives connected to different places all meaningfully contributing to the sharing of knowledge and collaborative transformative practice. EcoGather also encourages learners to be active participants in their local communities. We do this by incorporating application, community engagement, and reflection in many of our learning activities.

When you participate in an EcoGather program or offering, you will not only gain a wealth of knowledge from varied voices, you will also be guided to use that knowledge within your own communities to carry forward goals of that community with an ecological worldview, care for our earthly home and each other, and a radically imaginative spirit.

Learning: the Work of Lifetime

No one can solve environmental degradation alone. Nor can we build economies that support well-being or tell stories that stimulate empathy & move us toward equity without sustained interaction. We need each other. Through EcoGather, Sterling is finding ways to bring an even wider range of learners into transformative learning communities so they can reap the benefits of *intergenerational*, experiential, & cross-cultural exchange.

Most EcoGather courses are designed for adult learners, construed broadly. Some of our offerings have happily hosted groups ranging in age from 19 to 91 and stimulated rich exchange between people with very different vantage points on the human lifecycle.

Some mature minors may benefit from and be ready for these learning experiences. Often adults are inclined to co-enroll with older children and teenagers in their lives for a shared experience. To increase the likelihood of a positive, safe experience the following policies apply to learners under the age of 18 who wish to enroll in a EcoGather course through Sterling College.

- *Under 16 years of age:* Participation by a person under the age of 16 may be appropriate in a EcoGather course otherwise designed for adults with the co-enrollment of an adult chaperone or companion, who does not have to be a parent or guardian but needs to take full responsibility for the student for the duration of the course. This will need to be vetted with and approved by the instructor and EcoGather Director (currently, EcoGather's Network Weaver and Creative Collaboration Director, Nicole Civita, ncivita@sterlingcollege.edu).
- *16-17 year old minors:* It is generally possible for an older teen to participate in a EcoGather course without an adult chaperone. However, we always check in with the Instructor to confirm their readiness and willingness to have unaccompanied minors aged 16 or 17 in their course. Thus, we can allow this with the approval of

both the EcoGather Director and Instructor. In seeking such approval, we consider whether this course poses any distinctive risks that we'd want to mitigate or that might require it to be limited to 18 & over.

Honoring Our Inspiration & Moving Toward Thought Relationship

EcoGather is both hopeful and reverent about moving from a culture of “thought leadership” to one of “thought-relationship.” We are moved by Rowen White’s synthesis of Steven Sloman & Phillip Fernbach’s ideas, which they set forth in *The Knowledge Illusion: Why We Never Think Alone* (2017):

In using our individual brains, we rely on components from other brains in...‘a community of knowledge.’

...The interdependence we have on each other for problem-solving, decision-making, and even memory. This dependence means that we often outsource our information, relying on our connections with others to obtain information we need, rather than holding it ourselves.

We constantly connect with other brains, not only those in our immediate vicinity but across time and space... accessing information from other minds and weaving it into our own repertoires.

We can even take ideas from people who died thousands of years ago, as long as they left an ancestral record. When we interweave one another’s gathered knowledge strings into a mutually recognizable social pattern, we have culture.

We recommend Rowen White’s substack newsletter, [Reseeding Imaginations](#), and in particular her entry on [“Cultivating a Personal “Idea Culture”](#) to learn more about how one can build a practice of “linked and distributed notemaking to enhance relational memory and thinking.”

Like White, Sloman, and Fernbach, contemporary author [Courtney Martin](#) observes: “Everyone is building on a lineage of disciplines, influences, models, and anti-models. All of our ideas are born of infinite layers of information, experiences, relationships, that we took in and—little by little—made our own...” In her substack newsletter, [The Examined Family](#), Martin invites us to reflect upon: “*Who do you have conversations with that always light you up? Whose writing makes your heart skip a beat? Whose art makes your mind spin out in a million wonderful directions?*” Those people (or more broadly, beings) have the potential to be more than just your “sources,” they can also be considered your “noble friendships” (to use the phrase Martin borrows from Buddhist tradition).

EcoGather’s own authors and scholars Nicole Civita and Michelle Auerbach take this approach a step further in their book [Feeding Each Other: Shaping Change in Food Systems Through Relationship](#), going so far as to say, “nothing we, or any other thinkers, say is ever truly individual. We believe ideas, theories, concepts and even

thoughts are relational and no one, even if they tell you otherwise, ever came up with one in some individualistic isolation. Just as we are a part of a relational network, so are our ideas and we celebrate that.”

EcoGather encourages its participants to honor noble friendships and respect thought relationships by crediting sources with care even when formal citation is not required by academic convention or Sterling College’s Policy on Academic Honesty. Informally identifying your sources is both a sign of your own integrity and a show of respect for members of your learning community, who may wish to trace the line of discourse or scholarship. (We’ve just modeled how to approach informal citation and crediting, throughout this section of the Handbook.)

Formal Citation of Sources & Plagiarism

In formal academic, public discourse, and publishing settings, the act of representing another person’s words or ideas as your own is called *plagiarism*. Plagiarism is, of course, a violation of the Sterling College’s Policy on Academic Honesty (see, [Student Handbook](#)). To avoid plagiarism, whenever you write using direct quotes or paraphrased ideas from another source, you must always name and credit your source. It is helpful to ask yourself whether the concept or word you are using is wholly your own or taken from elsewhere. If borrowed or copied from any source, regardless of form, whether electronic, print, recorded, or spoken word, acknowledge the sources. Doing so is a sign of your own integrity and a show of respect for members of your learning community, who may wish to trace the line of discourse or scholarship.

Decoupling Reference, Affiliation, Endorsement, and Critique

When someone cites, references, or mentions the work of another person or organization, this does not necessarily mean that there is an affiliation between the two. It doesn’t mean the source knows that the person making reference to them exists, is familiar with, or approves of their work or interpretation. Reference – whether affirmative, critical, or in-between – also does not imply unequivocal endorsement or rejection of the concept or of the source’s body of work. More than likely, it just means that there is a particular cultural concept, idea or project that is relevant to the discourse and the speaker wants to give credit where it is due or make it easier for readers/listeners to trace that concept/idea/project to its origins. (hat tip to [Kelly Diels](#) for this framing.)

We need to be able to discuss the world to understand it and our role(s) in it better. When someone quotes an idea from a person or organization that may be objectionable to others, it is important to both engage with the idea separate from and in connection with its originator. Engaging with ideas – good, bad, or otherwise – neither absolves nor contaminates us. It is important to tolerate differences in perspective. It is not necessary to agree with everything someone has written, said, or done to appreciate some of their ideas or to respect or engage with their work. Policing for or imposing aspirations of intellectual homogeneity or purity is are not liberatory practices – and they do not help us to learn.

Policies on Student Conduct & Integrity

Responsible Conduct & Course Safety

Sterling personnel are responsible for the safety and security of all participants in College programs and will communicate safety procedures associated with a particular course or individual class clearly in person and in writing. Students who are unwilling or unable to comply with safety procedures create an unacceptable risk for the College. A student who fails to live up to specific written guidelines for college courses or activities may be barred from further participation in activities which involve the assumption of risks, including any student who may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Dangerous or Disruptive Behavior

EcoGather strives to balance concern for the health and safety of individual students with the interests of the broader learning community. EcoGather believes that all students have shared responsibility for the welfare and care of themselves and the community. Participants are responsible for conducting themselves in a manner that is not violent or disruptive.

Any behavior that may threaten the well-being of others will be addressed in a sensitive and appropriate manner. When a participant's behavior constitutes a serious disruption or danger to the living, working, or learning environment that EcoGather seeks to create, we may respond in a number of ways, ranging from providing mental health support to separating the learner from the program and from the College, if necessary.

The term dangerous or disruptive behavior includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Any behavior that points to the potential of imminent, foreseeable, or existing danger to self, other students, or other members of the College community;
- Destructive, intimidating, or violent behavior, including behavior that causes harm to individuals or groups, based on actual or perceived identity;
- Self-inflicted violence;
- Impaired operation of vehicles or other large machinery;
- Use of alcohol or other substances that places the individual or others at risk;
- Public suicide attempts, suicidal gestures, or disruptive statements of suicidal ideation;
- Lack of response to multiple attempts at communication to determine student health and safety;
- Failure to comply with prescribed medication orders, resulting in dangerous behavior;
- Bullying behavior: Any verbal, physical, written, or electronic communication which is intended to ridicule, humiliate, or intimidate, or interferes with access to educational or other College programs, or reasonably has that effect.

This policy does not apply to non-violent student protest and dissent, or to confidential interactions with a mental health counselor or medical staff (unless an exception to confidentiality applies). This policy will be administered in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and similar Vermont law.

Drug and Alcohol Policy

By enrolling in an EcoGather offering individuals agree to abide by Sterling College's substance abuse standards and certify awareness of this policy.

Possession, use, or distribution of illegal drugs (including alcohol for those less than 21 years of age) is prohibited on the Sterling College campus. This policy includes being under the influence of such substances while on campus or participating in college-sponsored activities **including**, but not limited to, classes, meetings, presentations, social **events in** both the in-person or **virtual/online context**.

Abuse of legal substances (including alcohol for those 21 years and older and marijuana use) which results in destructive behaviors will be addressed by the Dean of Community as a violation of the first guideline for Community Behavior. Supplying underage drinkers with alcohol is considered a serious offense by the State of Vermont and by Sterling College.

Sterling College and EcoGather personnel reserve the right to excuse students from class or other college-sponsored activities who appear, or may appear, to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol. An incident report will be filled out by the faculty or staff and further discussion and potential disciplinary action may take place between the student and faculty/staff member and may involve the Dean of Community.

Off-Campus Conduct

The College reserves the right to take action against Sterling College students or EcoGather participants who are involved in any off-campus incidents of criminal activity or otherwise inappropriate noncriminal behavior, particularly when such incidents have implications for campus safety, the safety or integrity of the EcoGather community, or affect the reputation or operation of the College or of EcoGather. While Sterling College and EcoGather prioritize restorative and transformative justice principles, there are times when public and community safety requires that we collaborate with the Vermont State Police and share information regarding student or participant violations of local, state, and federal law.

Sexual Misconduct, Intimate Partner Violence, Stalking Title IX Policies

All of Sterling College, inclusive of EcoGather, is committed to a policy of nondiscrimination on the basis of sex and gender in all educational programs and activities sponsored by the College and in its employment practices. It is the policy of the College to maintain an environment for students, faculty, administrators, staff, and visitors that is free of all forms of unlawful discrimination and harassment, including sexual misconduct. The College has enacted a detailed *Sexual Misconduct, Intimate Partner Violence and Stalking Policy* to (1) reflect and maintain its institutional values and community expectations; (2) provide for fair and equitable procedures for determining when violations have occurred; and (3) provide recourse for individuals and the community in response to violations of this Policy.

Because the *Sexual Misconduct, Intimate Partner Violence and Stalking Policy* is quite lengthy and specific, Continuing Education with interest in the policy or need to avail themselves of related processes, standards and procedures are directed to the [Student Handbook](#).

Commitments to Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion

Sterling has made a commitment in its Strategic Initiative to be and merit a reputation as an anti-racist and anti-biased institution. We are actively working to dismantle white supremacy culture, structural racism, and the persistence of oppression that impacts human and ecological well-being.

EcoGather, in particular, is a space where Sterling College is well-positioned to engage with and lift up voices and perspectives from a wider array of diverse communities (along many dimensions), participate in co-creative collaboration, deploy cosmological theories of change, and develop thick solidarities in pursuit of collective liberation from systems of oppression that diminish most of us, past and present, and challenge our ability to survive the future.

Even as we center collective liberation and live into our aspirations for deep and wide inclusion, we also must remain attentive to the possibility of racist/bias and other harm-inducing incidents that may happen in our community; hold accountability for conduct and patterns that are out-of-alignment with shared values; and attempt to transform harm into opportunities for (inter)personal development. Our approach to learner/participant support and to addressing harm/transforming conflict, addressed further [below](#), is aligned with these aims and values.

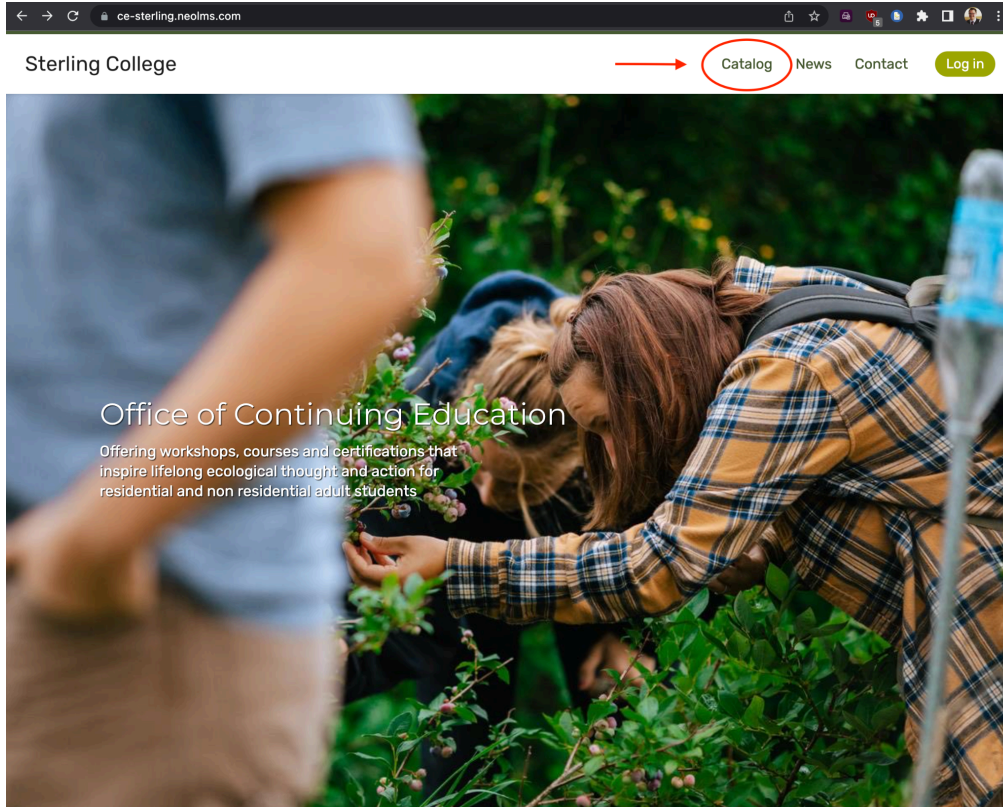
If you have suggestions on how the College can continue its anti-racist and anti-bias work, please feel free to submit those via email to ecogather@sterlingcollege.edu and we will share with the relevant stakeholders.

Course Registration, Fees, & Accounts

Course Registration

To Register for one of our EcoGather lifelong learning courses you must first access our online [learning portal](#), which is currently hosted on the Cypher for Academia platform.

Once there, you can access our current course offerings by selecting “catalog” in the upper right corner of the screen.



From there you can access any of our current courses, either by selecting [EcoGather Lifelong Learners](#) to see all our offerings, or sort by one of the subject subcategories, such as [Collapse & Reworld](#), [Relational Food Systems](#), [Change Shaping](#), or [Farming with Nature](#).

Alternatively, you may visit the [catalog of classes](#) on our website, select “learn more” under a course of interest, and you’ll be taken directly to the catalog page with instructions to register for that class.


Within these programs are several different course offerings that you may wish to purchase access to or register for. To do this, select a course in which you are interested and select “Purchase for \$xxx.” If a course requires an application, you may see the words “Contact Us” instead. If this is the case, select this button, and send us a message, and someone will reach out with a link to an application.

The example below is for a past course on *Artisan Breadmaking & Heritage Grains*.

ce-sterling.neolms.com/visitor_catalog_class/show/3069609

Sterling College Catalog News Contact Log in

< School of the New American Farmstead Calendar view



Artisan Breadmaking & Heritage Grains Class

Quantity
 For someone else

[Purchase for \\$1395](#) [or enter access code](#)

About

Flour, water, salt, and wild yeast—combined with time, handwork, and the heat of a reverently fired oven—become the most delicious form of sustenance. Learn techniques to bake numerous styles of yeasted and naturally leavened bread with a variety of flours from regional grain growers.

Course Description

Connecting to the origins of sustenance, students in the Artisan Bread Making and Heritage Grains course handcraft bread and practice the art of breadmaking in the welcoming Sterling kitchen and with live fire and retained heat in a wood-fired oven. Sterling's location in a regional grain system allows us the opportunity to experiment with a variety of locally grown and milled grains. Our production of hand-crafted hearth breads will be interspersed with visits to artisan bakers with community-based approaches to the ancient crafts of milling and breadmaking. We'll all be lucky to visit the renowned Elmore Mountain Bread and New American Stone Mills -- two local enterprises at the forefront of a national artisan bread and heritage grain revival.

Join Richard Miscovich, baker and educator, on this journey that starts with bread baking fundamentals but also explores whole grain, fresh milled, naturally leavened breads and sprouted grains. We'll discuss different ways to schedule bread baking and control fermentation so it fits more conveniently into your schedule and is still beautiful, nutritious and delicious. Along the way, we'll discuss the history, significance and community-building power of bread and wood-fired ovens. Dough will be mixed and ovens will be tended.

This course is suitable for students with a range of experience levels. No prior culinary or baking experience required. Home cooks with more passion than experience will learn the fundamentals. Aspiring and professional chefs/bakers who want to make bread with natural leaven and bake it in a woodfired oven will walk away with new knowledge and skills.

Info

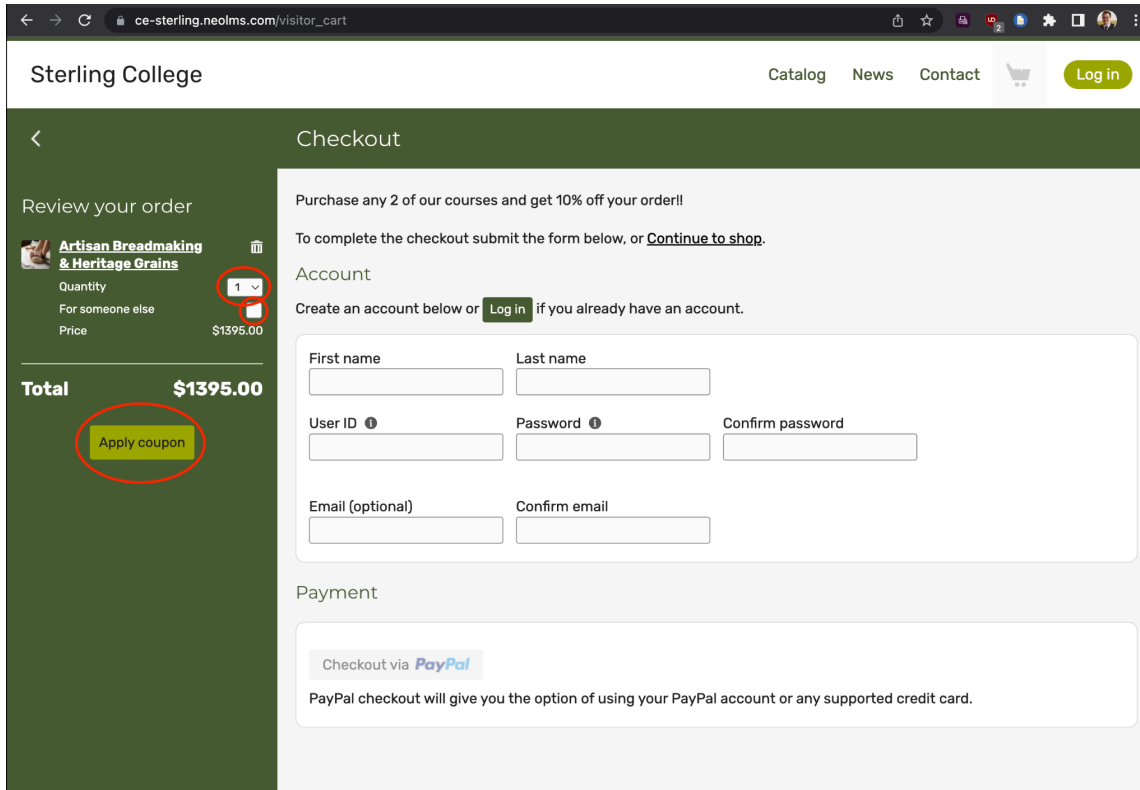
📅 Jul 11, 2022 - Jul 15, 2022

🌐 Time zone: Eastern Time (US & Canada)

👤 Style: Instructor

🏠 Category: [School of the New American Farmstead](#)

Once you have selected to purchase the course you will either be prompted to login to your Sterling Cypher for Academia (formerly called NEO) account (if you have taken a course with us before), or to create an account. You may also select the number of “seats” you would like to purchase for that course and whether you would like to purchase the course for someone else. If there are any coupons for the course you may also apply them via the “apply coupon” button.



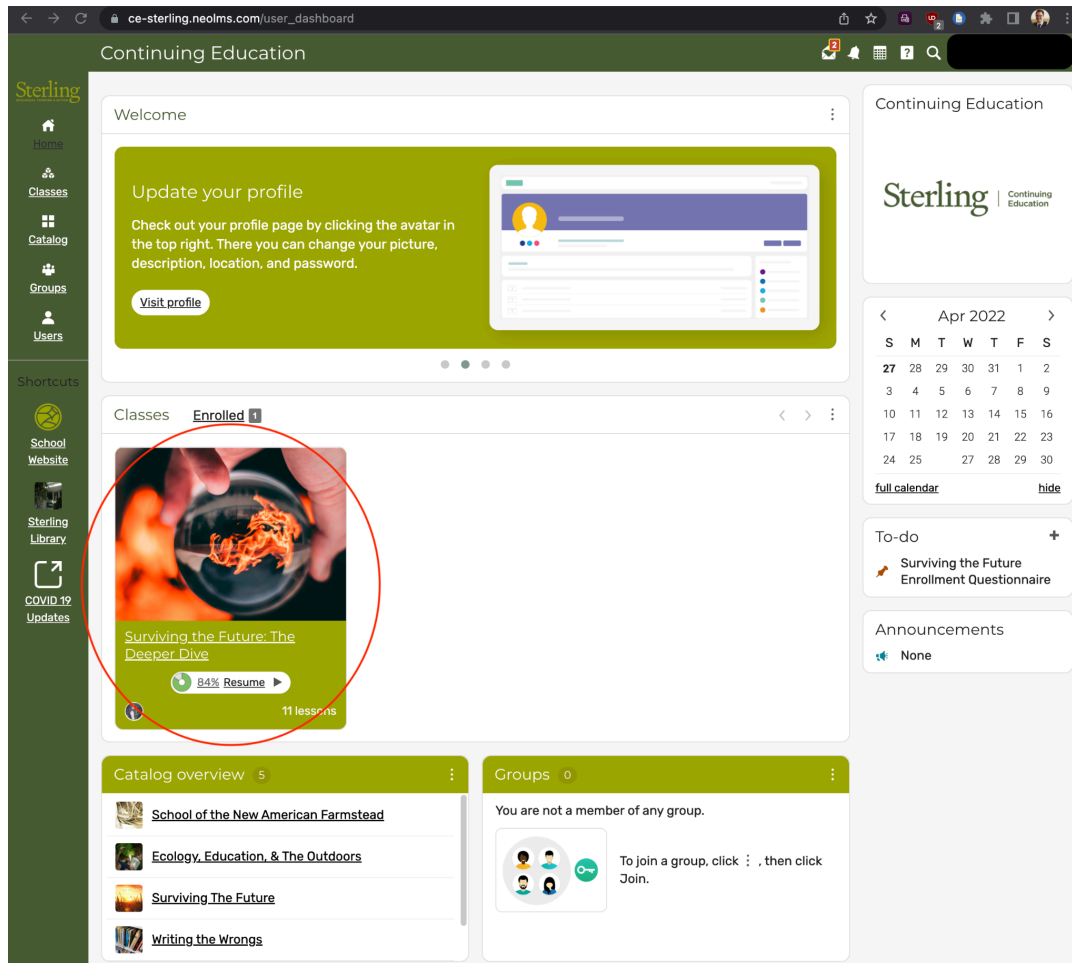
Once you have paid and your payment has been confirmed you will automatically be enrolled in the course and will be ready for the course when it starts.

Accessing Course Information & Materials

To access your course you will need to log in to Cypher for Academic/NEO. You can do this by accessing the [Sterling Portal page](#).

Once you are logged in you will be shown your dashboard. There, in the middle of the screen you will see the courses you are currently enrolled in. If you are enrolled in an asynchronous course you will have access to the course content immediately and can begin your course. If the course has a set date, you may not have access to the material of the course before the start date.

To access your course, you will need to select it from your dashboard.



From there you can access the modules of your course by selecting them. Note: some courses are programmed to allow/unlock access to modular content in a specific order so you'll have to start with the first one and proceed sequentially. Other courses allow learners to access content in whatever order they choose.

You can navigate through and engage with the content within via the "previous" and "continue" buttons on the upper left and upper right side of the screen respectively.

Start

Teachers

Students

Portfolio

Shortcuts

School Website

Sterling Library


COVID 19 Updates

Surviving the Future: The Deeper Dive

Lessons [Calendar](#)

Lessons


Lessons and sections can be completed in any order.



1. Welcome to the Deeper Dive!
A warm welcome, and getting your bearings

Completed ✓

4 sections



2. Course overview and resources
An overview of what we'll be doing together, plus access to the resources you might want to refer back to as we move through the weeks

Completed ✓

5 sections



3. Week One: Getting to know each other and the
Jan 31st - Feb 6th

49% Resume ▶


14 sections



4. Week Two: Growth, Energy and Technology
Feb 7th - Feb 13th

75% Resume ▶

16 sections



5. Week Three: Growth, Energy and Technology
Feb 14th - Feb 20th

Completed ✓

18 sections



6. Week Four: Nature and Humanity (part one)
Feb 21st - Feb 27th

Completed ✓

14 sections



7. Week Five: Nature and Humanity (part two)
Feb 28th - Mar 6th



8. Week Six: Culture and Story (part one)
Mar 7th - Mar 13th



9. Week Seven: Culture and Story (part two)
Mar 14th - Mar 20th

Activity

A user
Viewed lessons overview

Progress

84%

Announcements

None

Status unenroll

Enrolled: Jan 22, 2022

ce-sterling.neolms.com/student_lesson/show/3045753?lesson_id=14549662§ion_id=53685182

Surviving the Future: The Deeper Dive

Welcome to the Deeper Dive!

In a nutshell - Surviving the Future: The Deeper Dive

Welcome!

Our annual Deeper Dive is a flexible, interactive online course for those seeking new insights and allies to help themselves and their localities through these times of profound change.

It offers a long moment – an 8-week opportunity – to slow down, pull back, and explore responses as part of a small global community, among and alongside some of the world's leading thinkers and doers.



Since we're all familiar with the tantalizing vision held out in the late David Fleming's book *Surviving the Future: Culture, Carnival and Capital in the Aftermath of the Market Economy*, this is an opportunity to go further: applying, questioning, and reforging his principles in the context of the varied realities we are facing today in our diverse home communities.

Some may choose to pursue the possibilities unveiled in Fleming's works, while others will use them as a springboard for finding their own unique pathways to confronting the climacteric.

Unusually perhaps, the course itself – and the community we create within it – will be shaped by all of us. And we'll inform our conversations by gathering with some of the most compelling folk who've been engaging with these issues for a long time, to hear why they've chosen to walk the paths they do.

It's good to have you with us!

Course Components

Convened and facilitated by [Shaun Chamberlin](#), our online format includes:

- Live webinars for discussion with our guest teachers
- Weekly reading assignments and audio/video content
- Live small-group reflection webinars with Shaun
- Facilitated written discussion forums
- Experiential exercises designed to take us out of the online 'no-place'
- Guided – and open – access to [LeanLogic.online](#)
- Live social sessions for smaller-scale breakout conversation within a group
- Supplementary live conversational sessions hosted by Surviving the Future alumni

Cancellation & Rescheduling

On rare occasions, an EcoGather course or workshop may be rescheduled or canceled due to low enrollment or other unforeseen circumstances such as issues related to health and well being of the course instructor. In instances where courses or workshops are rescheduled, EcoGather will communicate a new date at the earliest possible opportunity. If you have paid for access to an event or offering that is rescheduled and the new date is not workable for you, you may request a full refund or credit to your account.

Refunds

If you have registered for and can no longer attend a course or workshop, we will refund your payment less a minimum deposit (equal to 25% of the total fee) **up to 30 days** before the course start date for courses held in the United States. Please contact

ecogather@sterlingcollege.edu for cancellations within 30 days of the course start or event date.

Refunds are generally processed and issued within 30 business days by the Business Office. Inquiries regarding refunds should also be directed to ecogather@sterlingcollege.edu.

EcoGather Course Access Policy

Asynchronous Courses

Learners will have access to fully asynchronous online courses for one calendar year starting at the date of purchase/access.

Synchronous Courses

After the completion of a synchronous online course, learners will have 60 days to continue to access course content.

If you wish to download any of your work from our Learning Management System, Cypher for Academia (formerly called NEO), you should plan to do so within these time parameters.

Providing Feedback - Course Evaluations

Course evaluations are vital and help us to improve the quality of our offerings. Feedback provided is anonymized and evaluates the course/workshop in totality, and the instructor. Course evaluations are distributed and collected by the Learning Network Associate or another staff member on the final day or near to the conclusion of a course or workshop.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

EcoGather participants with learning differences can obtain accommodations in a course or program that minimizes disability-related barriers based on individual needs, pursuant to the terms of and processes set forth in **Sterling College's Accessibility, Disability, and Reasonable Accommodation Policy and Section 504 Grievance Procedures**, which are found in the [Student Handbook](#)

EcoGather participants who are interested in requesting accommodations or obtaining learning support may contact Craig Wilson, Director of Learning Support & 504 Coordinator at Sterling College (cwilson@sterlingcollege.edu; 802-586-7711) for support in navigating the process of documenting a disability, requesting reasonable accommodation, as well as for all other learning support needs. The EcoGather Director will collaborate with the Director of Learning support to support accessibility and inclusion.

Code of Online Conduct

EcoGather and Sterling College aim to ensure the safety, security and well-being of our community and its members. To this end, this Code of Online Conduct details both the appropriate and inappropriate conduct that influences the virtual, as well as physical, spaces we inhabit together.

This Code of Online Conduct represents Sterling College's expectations of undergraduate students, participants in EcoGather lifelong learning programming, faculty, staff, instructors and/or facilitators in virtual (online) environments.

Note that the Code of Online Conduct is incorporated into and has been excerpted from Sterling College's [Student Handbook](#) and Employee Handbook and dovetails with Sterling College's Community Behavioral Guidelines.

Expectations and Agreements

By affirmatively selecting to participate in any Sterling College-sponsored or affiliated virtual interaction, including without limitation undergraduate, continuing education courses or EcoGather offerings in remote or hybrid modalities, workshops, webinars, online discussion fora and community hubs, chats, or messaging services, you agree to do the following:

- Help to establish and maintain a safe and compassionate learning environment;
- Treat all program participants, instructors and/or facilitators, administrative staff and their perspectives with respect and cultural sensitivity;
- Be responsive and participate in courses to the best of your ability;
- Make contributions to the course or session that are germane to the topic being discussed;
- Be open to receiving and giving constructive feedback to other program participants, instructors and/or facilitators and administrative staff; and
- Comply with all policies designed to secure and protect our digital spaces, including, without limitation, EcoGather's [prohibition on the use of AI-Powered Tools and Bots](#).

You also agree to refrain from the following behaviors or scenarios:

- Intimidation, bias-based behavior, bullying/cyberbullying, harassment, threatening behavior directed toward instructors, fellow program participants or administrative staff;
- Inappropriate or repeated disruption of teaching, learning, or idea generation and exchange;
- Disorderly conduct and/or disruptive behavior;
- Sexual misconduct of any kind:
 - "Sexual misconduct" means any type of sexual behavior that occurs in the absence of consent or that uses control or intimidation to cause harm to another person. Consent must be affirmatively given and not implied. Types of sexual misconduct include but is not limited to sexual harassment, sexual violence, nonconsensual sexual intercourse, nonconsensual sexual contact, stalking. Sexual misconduct in the online environment includes unwanted

sexual advances, sexualization of participants, and the sharing of lewd, sexually suggestive, or pornographic materials in any form.

- Violation of Sterling College [Student Handbook](#) policies or EcoGather Handbook policies;
- Violation of instructor's parameters for course conduct, as stated in a syllabus, course description, or explained in classroom settings;
- Inappropriate use of learning and social platforms, discussion fora, and/or audio/video conferencing tools, e.g. spam messages, unauthorized advertising, dissemination of promotional material;
- Plagiarism and academic dishonesty; and
- Dissemination of any Sterling-exclusive content outside of closed social platforms.

Online Étiquette (“Netiquette”)

To support the co-creation of an inclusive and inviting virtual learning environment, Sterling College and EcoGather have established clear online communication expectations rather than presuming shared norms. These guidelines should inform how program participants and instructors or facilitators communicate with each other on online learning and social platforms. Above all, we seek to create an environment in which everyone is treated with respect while also generating conversations that have “[good heat](#)” (to borrow a term from [Priya Parker](#)), and increasing our tolerance for generative discomfort and respectful disagreement.

If this seems less than clear to you, choose kindness in the moment and reach out to a member of the EcoGather team to further discuss or unpack the interaction.

- Use a person's preferred name when addressing or referring to them. If unsure, check in with them;
- If using pronouns, ensure that you are using a person's correct pronouns;
- Use clear, concise and respectful language;
- Use humor or sarcasm cautiously, as these may be misinterpreted unless you affirmatively indicate your tone or intent;
- Share your own personal information with discernment;
- Do not share the personal information of other program participants, instructors and/or facilitators;
- Make posts or provide comments that are responsive to structured conversations, within the scope of the course, or closely related to course topics and themes;
- Read all of the messages within a thread before responding;
- Be respectful of the opinions of others, even – and especially – when they diverge from your own ideas;
- Never intentionally use racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist, abusive or offensive language when communicating; and
- Cite your sources when sharing information that originated elsewhere.

Video Conferencing Best Practices (For Synchronous Participation)

In addition to the online etiquette provided above, the following practices will help you and other participants get the most out of online learning experiences that feature synchronous video interaction. Some of these practices can also help you record higher

quality video content to post into forums.

- Log in a few minutes before the start of a class or gathering (if possible)
 - Remote learning will invariably involve tech hiccups. To avoid missing out on class or burning time with a long arrival period, please click the class Zoom link 3-5 minutes before the official class start time.

- Be mindful of background noise
 - To help keep background noise to a minimum, you should generally mute your microphone when you are not speaking.
 - When your microphone is not muted, avoid activities that could create additional noise, such as shuffling papers, typing unnecessarily, or moving around.
 - Press and hold your spacebar to temporarily unmute. This can be a quick way to pipe up if you get called on, but it only works if your Zoom window is the active one.

- Show your face! (most of the time)
 - Using video makes us all feel more engaged because we can glimpse each other's reactions and get a better sense for resonance, dissonance, and levels of engagement. This has the effect of immediately humanizing the virtual space.
 - Without video, the instructor cannot tell if dead silence is due to a tech issue, a lack of attention, exasperation, or agreement. Facial expressions go a long way toward enabling responsive remote teaching.
 - To help us foster a more closely connected learning community, students are strongly encouraged to keep their videos on during class. At the same time, instructors recognize that a student may need to go video-off from time to time to avoid creating a distraction, tend to a personal matter, or manage a poor connection.
 - If the video-on default expectation creates a participation barrier or causes negative emotions to arise please let your instructor know. Without requiring you to delve into the sources of your discomfort, your instructor can support you in identifying inclusive work-arounds, such as limited video-on time, active participation in the chat, or alternative sharing of recorded (audio or video) or written content generated by the student.

- Position your camera properly
 - When using a web camera, be sure it is in a stable position and aligned at eye level. If possible, align your camera with the screen you are most often looking at. Doing so helps create a more direct sense of engagement with other participants.

- Check your background
 - Many students will be joining class from makeshift workspaces in the midst of what may otherwise be private, residential areas. Make sure that you've looked behind yourself to confirm that the image you are broadcasting into

class is one you are comfortable with and which is not likely to be distracting or disturbing to others in the class.

- If you are not comfortable showing your background to others you can use the [Virtual Background feature in Zoom](#).

- Limit distractions & conserve bandwidth
 - You can make it easier to focus during synchronous sessions by turning off notifications, closing or minimizing running apps, muting your smartphone and keeping it out of arm's reach.
 - Your instructor may decide to enable or disable group or private chat features during synchronous sessions to facilitate additional interaction. Use chat tools judiciously to support your learning; avoid them if they distract you.

- Avoid multitasking
 - You will retain the discussion better if you refrain from replying to emails or text messages during class and wait to work on other things until after class ends. Imagine you are in a small face-to-face seminar and behave accordingly.
 - If the prospect of staring at a screen for over an hour is stultifying, consider a single distraction. Some people do better if they sit on an exercise ball, doodle, knit, etc. while in class. If these things help you focus, go for it.

- Prepare materials in advance
 - If you will be sharing content during class, make sure you have the files and/or links ready to go before class begins.

Take the Lessons, Leave the Identifiers

With respect to student contributions, all participants are expected to abide by a general confidentiality commitment designed to encourage a courageous space for shared exploration. When discussing or relaying interactions, conversations, and exchanges that happened in an EcoGather space, we expect that you “take the lessons, leave the specifics and identifying information.” (This is specific to the contributions of your fellow students/learners/participants. EcoGather instructors, personnel and facilitators who are specifically engaged and compensated for holding the space and sharing their specialized knowledge can be referenced specifically beyond the original setting.) In other words, do not attribute classmates’ in-class comments to them outside of class without permission. Resist the tempting pull of gossip, cancellation, abstraction, and decontextualized derision or judgment. A shared commitment to doing so is necessary to create and maintain the kinds of spaces that allow true discourse.

Live Session Recordings

Please be aware that, in many cases, **class sessions will be recorded** to make sure that learners can access class content even when they are not able to participate synchronously. Please do not let this discourage you from engaging in open discourse and making frank contributions. The recordings will only be used for educational purposes associated with Sterling College and/or EcoGather.

Sometimes our participants say the most brilliant, stirring, or thought-provoking things during a live session and we are moved to share them with the wider world. If we are inclined to excerpt bits of a recorded session for use beyond our courses, we will first seek and obtain permission from those who are directly and personally featured in the excerpt.

While we obtain permission to publish excerpts of our facilitators, consultants, scholars, and guest lecturers ahead of time, if the excerpt is particularly juicy or on a topic they've not already addressed publicly, we typically inform them of our intent to excerpt and seek permission to share.

This is another way we aim to strike a balance between conditions that create courageous spaces for exchange and resisting the enclosure of learning and educational opportunities.

Tips for Online Learning Success

Below are a list of tips that a learner can use when participating in an online course at Sterling College.

- Check the email you used to register for your online course regularly (at least once a day) for updates, scheduling, and any changes made to the course.
- Plan to spend at least 1-2 hours per module on the content of the modules (specific times will vary from course-to-course)
- For courses with discussion boards:
 - The more you put into it the more you will get out of it.
 - When responding to other learners do not simply agree or disagree. Ask questions, dig deeper into their ideas, challenge them on their beliefs (all respectfully).
 - Be sure you have engaged with the module content before engaging with the discussion unless told otherwise in your course.
- Be respectful:
 - Fully asynchronous communication through mostly text can seem cold, aloof, or sometimes condescending when there is no inflection. Use emojis or content modifiers to help get your intent across to your fellow learners or your instructor
- If you are able, set a dedicated, quiet space for your online learning. It may seem tempting to do this work in a distracting environment, but this will hinder your learning experience.
- If you are able, set a dedicated time every day to engage with your online learning content. It may not be the same amount of time every day, but being consistent will help you keep pace with the course and help you keep track of the flow of information module-to-module.
- Many online Sterling continuing education courses give you tools to go do the things that you're being taught and to report back. Fully engage in those activities as they are integral parts of the learning experience.

Reporting Concerns Relating to the Online Learning Environment

We cannot anticipate every possible online interaction. Accordingly, we encourage course participants to check in with their instructor in moments of uncertainty to address any concerns or confusion. Alternatively, you may share any concerns that you have about another program participant, or about the learning and social platforms with the Instructor/Facilitator or the EcoGather Director.

To share any concerns that you have about the instructor or facilitator, EcoGather Participants should contact the EcoGather Director.

Concerns regarding sexual misconduct in an online learning environment may fall under Sterling's policy on **Sexual Misconduct, Intimate Partner Violence, Stalking** and its related **Title IX Policies**. As mentioned above and addressed in detail in the Sterling College [Student Handbook](#), reports regarding the same should be directed to Sterling's Title IX Coordinator (currently, Sterling's Director of Dining Services, Elizabeth Chadwick, 802-586-7711)

Again, further information on learner/participant support, problem solving, reporting, and accountability are provided [below](#).

Resources & Support for Continuing Education Students

The EcoGather Team

The very small EcoGather Team is responsible for the development, coordination, and management of Sterling's lifelong learning (continuing education credit and non-credit programs, courses, convenings and other offerings). As of February 2024, our full-time team consists only-but-powerfully of:

- [Nicole Civita](#), the EcoGather Network Weaver & Creative Collaboration Director ("EcoGather Director" for short), ncivita@sterlingcollege.edu;
- [Nissa Coit](#), the EcoGather Learning Network Steward, ncoit@sterlingcollege.edu;
- Erik Tasso-Johnson, EcoGather Learning Network Associate & Gathering Guide, ejohnson@sterlingcollege.edu;
- Emily Shaljian, EcoGather Learning Network Associate, eshaljian@ecogather.edu.

Our work is supplemented, supported, and deepened by a team of Consulting Scholars, EcoGathering Facilitators, and Contributors. We are also enriched by the offerings and insights of five founding partner organizations, countless wisdom holders, good trouble-makers and skill-sharers. We always seem to be making – and making learning resources with – new friends.

You can learn more about the people of EcoGather on the "[Our EcoGatherers](#)" page of our website, which features bios for our staff, as well as our consulting scholars and facilitators, and gratefully identifies our contributors and guests.

First Point of Contact

The Learning Network Associate is the first point of contact for all EcoGather participant support services. This includes, but is not limited to, general course inquiries, course registration, and billing. The Learning Network Associate works closely with all staff and internal and external instructors across the College. This staff member also regularly monitors the general ecogather@sterlingcollege.edu email account and can be reached there.

IT Help & More Technical LMS Questions

For any and all questions related to our Cypher for Academia (formerly NEO) learning management system, please review our support resources first.

The Learning Network Associate (ecogather@sterlingcollege.edu) is also available to support basic questions regarding billing, account status, access, and course content/functionality.

More highly technical questions may need to be directed or copied to ITHelpDesk@sterlingcollege.edu or even brought to Cypher for their support. The EcoGather team remains involved in these conversations and to support learners to the best of our ability in navigating technical issues that may be beyond our own expertise and capacity.

A Note Regarding Our In-House Technical Prowess

Please remember that we are educators, content experts, and humans – not tech wizards! We aim for advanced literacy and comfortable proficiency with the digital tools that make our cosmological learning network and exchanges across geographies possible, but we are not experts in information technology, coding, or emergent digital technologies. We appreciate your patience with us and trust in our good faith efforts to harness digital tools in ways that reflect our shared values and aims.

Online and Information Security; Privacy

Your online security – and your comfort with the same – is important to EcoGather and Sterling College. We want you to have an understanding of the measures we take to keep your information safe and as such, this policy serves as a guide to how that is collected, used and disclosed.

Payment Security

Your payment and personal information is safe when used on the Sterling College website. Our Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) software is the industry standard and among the best software available today for secure commerce transactions. It encrypts all of your personal information, including credit card number, name, and address, so that it cannot be read over the internet.

(To facilitate efficient online transactions, Sterling and EcoGather sometimes, though not as a default and always with notice, utilize third party payment platforms, such as PayPal. These platforms have their own privacy policies with which you may wish to acquaint

yourself.)

Third-Party Platforms

Additionally, students, instructors and other program participants may use a number of third party platforms, instructors and program participants in connection with their EcoGatherpursuits. By visiting (accessing, browsing, downloading) these platforms you consent to the collection of certain data. These sites each have their own privacy policies you should become familiar with.

- [Zoom](#)
- [Neo by Cypher Learning](#)
- [Node BB](#)

Privacy

Sterling College respects and is committed to protecting your privacy. We may collect personally identifiable information such as your name, address, email address, telephone number, emergency contact details, demographic data, social media ID, etc when you visit our site. We also automatically receive and record information on our server logs from your browser including your IP address, cookie information and the page(s) you visited.

Please be assured that **Sterling College and EcoGather will not sell your personally identifiable information to anyone.**

Learner/Participant Services & Support

TheEcoGather Staff offers the first layer of response and support for our learners/participants. The EcoGather Director is typically able to field most support requests and needs, to interpret and enforce EcoGather policies, and to address and resolve issues and conflicts.

In these efforts, the EcoGather Director is supported by Sterling College's Dean of Community, who is responsible for promoting and cultivating a safe, productive, supportive social environment on the Sterling College campus and supports the same within EcoGather. This includes ensuring that community guidelines are upheld, and that discussions of community are incorporated throughout. The Dean of Community and Interim Director of Student Life work with students who have violated community guidelines, using accountability procedures to help students move forward while also making any necessary repairs. The Dean of Community and Interim Director of Student Life also work with the Community Council to promote community dialog and elicit input on campus life and College-wide issues, and collaborates with faculty advisors to ensure student success.

Problem-Solving Procedures

Sterling recognizes that occasionally a student may feel that they have been treated unfairly or that an error has been made in the interpretation or application of a policy. When this situation occurs, Sterling wants each student, including all EcoGather participants, to be aware that the problem solving procedure described below is available to assist in reaching an equitable resolution. There is a different process in place for for complaints of

sexual harassment, discrimination or violence, which should be directed immediately to the Title IX Coordinator (again, see the [Student Handbook](#)).

- 1) When appropriate, a student should bring any concerns or complaints directly to the attention of the person in conflict to try to resolve the situation. This should be done in a timely manner relative to the action or incident that is the basis for the complaint.
- 2) Though most problems will be solved by informal discussions, a student who still feels dissatisfied may bring the concern to the attention of the EcoGather's Network Weaver & Creative Collaboration Director. We will endeavor to respond promptly but, because we are a very small team, we may use discretion in prioritizing responses based on the significance and time sensitivity of the issue raised.

Community Accountability

The guiding philosophy and approach to student conduct at Sterling College and EcoGather is one that encourages compassion, care, and reflection, focusing on personal development through shared growth and accountability for behavior.

Our aim is to support our participants as they become the people they want to be in the world. We are committed to providing the tools, resources, and support for students to make informed decisions about their lives and their interactions within the community. The processes for addressing violations of Community Behavioral Guidelines are designed to support student accountability and to balance the rights of the individual with that of the health and safety of the community.

Behavior that threatens or comprises the physical or mental health, security, privacy, property, or learning experience of other members of the community will not be tolerated.

Addressing Harm: Incident Reporting and Accountability

You may report any incidents or other violations of EcoGather policies or Sterling College community behavior guidelines on campus or in connection with EcoGather programming by submitting a report through the most appropriate form/channel described below.

- **Community Accountability Report:** *This form provides as one method of communicating concerns about behaviors that negatively impact individuals or the community. To the extent possible, the identity of the person submitting the form will remain confidential. Note, however, that the College is obligated to respond to all safety concerns, and may not be able to fully respond to hearsay*
- **College Incident Report:** *This form is for reporting illnesses, injuries, behavior incidents, near-misses, and property damage.*
- **Sexual Misconduct & Title IX Report Form:** *This form is specifically for lodging complaints that involve or are about incidents or patterns of sexual misconduct, including assault, harassment, stalking, intimate partner violence, and exploitation.*

IMPORTANT NOTE: All of these forms should be used **after** an emergency situation has stabilized. They are not a substitute for altering Sterling College's On-Call Emergency Pager by dialing (802) 290-9931, calling 911, or seeking situationally appropriate emergency response services.

The EcoGather Director and the Dean of Community will investigate accusations of violations of community behavior guidelines as reported through [Community Accountability Reports](#) and / or [College Incident Reports](#). Investigations may result in a variety of sanctions including a Community Review contract. These individualized contracts may include mediation, counseling, a fine, or service, and are reflective of the nature and severity of the incident. A student may choose not to honor the conditions of the Community Review contract, and may be asked to withdraw from the College. Additionally, a student who chooses to consistently or frequently disregard Community Guidelines may be removed from EcoGather courses and from the College.

It is the right of students and administrators overseeing processes to request and recommend the use of a Council or Task Force if there are *questions of fact* in a particular case, or if the violations present a significant concern within the community as a whole. Interim measures may be taken for community safety following an incident and until a case can be heard.

A Community Care Task Force (CCTF) may convene at the request of the Dean of Community when it is determined that deeper conversations around violations of community behavior guidelines are necessary. The CCTF will discuss the issue at hand by asking: *Where is the harm? Who has been harmed? What are their needs? Whose obligations are these? What should be done to repair the harm? Which systems created or supported the environment that allowed or necessitated the behavior?* This process allows all parties to express how they have been affected by the issue, and for the CCTF to hold itself accountable for the well-being, safety, and integrity of our community. The Community Care Task Force will examine whether and how existing systems have caused or contributed to harm, and will identify paths toward restoration, reparation, and transformation.

CCTFs exist to strengthen accountability procedures, establish educational opportunities, and to create and resource a culture of care, consent, connection, accountability, and transformative justice.

- Issues of sexual assault, harassment, discrimination, and violations of Community Review contracts will not be brought to a Community Care Task Force.

Felony Charge Notification Requirement

While enrolled in any course or program affiliated with Sterling College, including EcoGather, learners must inform the College of any occasion on which they are charged with a felony by state or federal authorities. Failure to do so may itself result in disciplinary action.

NC SARA-Compliant Complaint Policy

The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) is a nonprofit organization that helps expand students' access to educational opportunities and ensure more efficient, consistent, and effective regulation of distance education programs.

SARA consumer protection provisions require the institution's home state, through its SARA State Portal Entity, to investigate and resolve allegations of dishonest or fraudulent activity by the state's SARA-participating institutions, including the provision of false or misleading information.

Students have the right to lodge a complaint or grievance. Sterling College will ensure that all concerns and complaints of students are addressed fairly and are resolved promptly. Student complaints relating to consumer protection laws offered under the terms and conditions of the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA), must first be filed with Sterling College to seek resolution. Complaints may be submitted in writing to the Dean of Academics.

If resolution is not found, the student would contact the institution's home state SARA Portal Entity. NC-SARA maintains a directory of SARA [State Portal Entities](#).

SARA reviews complaints resulting from distance education courses, activities and operations provided by SARA-participating institutions to students in other SARA states come under the coverage of SARA. Complaints about a SARA institution's in-state operations are to be resolved under the state's normal provisions, not those of SARA.

For more information about the SARA Complaint Process visit the [NC-SARA Complaint Page](#).

Emergency Protocols: Vermont

While most EcoGather programming is virtual, we are based and sometimes convene in Vermont. As such, it is useful to include some local-to-Vermont information pertaining to Emergencies & related protocols in the EcoGather handbook. Also refer to the more comprehensive and regularly updated resources in the [Student Handbook](#) and, for Sterling Employees, the Sterling College [Emergency & Crisis Response Handbook](#).

As always:

If someone needs immediate medical attention or there is immediate danger CALL 911, then call Sterling College's On- Call Emergency Pager at 802-290-9931

Public Safety Contact Information

Vermont State Police: 802-988-4315
Hardwick Police Department: 413-477-6708
Craftsbury Fire Department: 802-586-7786
Vermont Game Wardens: 802-828-1483

Mental Health Emergency

ASSESS THE SITUATION...

When helping a person in crisis/distress it can be hard to know what level of support is needed. Take time to assess the situation by asking questions. Listening non-judgmentally and staying calm can assist you in getting to the most helpful response. Sometimes it requires calling 911. Sometimes all a student needs is someone to sit with while they are upset and to validate how they are feeling.

IF THE PERSON NEEDS IMMEDIATE MEDICAL OR PSYCHIATRIC ATTENTION...

Call 911 and then call Sterling College's On-Call Emergency Pager at 802-290-9931

- **Remain calm** and provide comfort to sick or injured person. Do not leave them alone.
- **Be sure to provide an address** and do not hang up until the dispatcher does.
- **Provide First Aid** if you are certified.
- **Follow directions** from Emergency Personnel.

IF YOU'RE NOT SURE BUT ARE CONCERNED...

Contact Sterling College's On-Call Emergency Pager at 802-290-9931 to receive assistance in assessing the situation

IF THEY ARE "SAFE" AND YOU WANT TO PROVIDE RESOURCES...

Phone Services

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-8255 (TALK) TTY: 800-799-4889
- Trevor Lifeline: 866-488-7386 (A national 24 hour, toll free confidential suicide hotline for LGBTQ youth)
- AWARE: 802-472-6463 (Confidential Domestic & Sexual Violence Services Hotline based in Hardwick, VT)

Text & Web Chat Services

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
Chat: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat/> (Connects individuals with counselors for emotional support and other services via web chat, free, 24/7)
- Crisis Text Line: Text "VT" TO 741741 Free, 24/7, confidential
- Steve Fund Crisis Text Line for People of Color: Text "STEVE" to 741741 A 24/7 text line for young people of color
- Trevor Text for LGBTQ Youth: Text "START" to 678678 A national 24 hour, text for LGBTQ youth to connect to a counselor.