Principles for Transition:
Food, Fuel and Finance in a Biophysically Constrained, Ethically Challenged World
NRE 565, Fall “b” 2014
October 27 – December 10; 1 ½ credit hours
Mondays, Wednesdays, 6:00-7:30 pm
Room 2024, Dana Building
Instructor: Thomas Princen

Goals Principles for Transition examines contemporary shifts, biophysical and social, especially those that are discontinuous and irreversible, with an eye to the future. A primary purpose is to understand and prescribe measures for positive transition—that is, for effecting peaceful, democratic, just and sustainable changes in how societies North and South organize themselves.

Two overarching goals are to develop i. a grounded sense of urgency and possibility; ii. tools—historical, conceptual, practical—for positive transition.

Substantive topics include the contemporary food movement, the phase-out of fossil fuels, local finance, ethics of resource use, market redefinition, distancing, sustainability, entrepreneurship (business, behavioral, moral).

PREMISES
1. The world is in transition, a process that will intensify as a) the era of cheap energy comes to an end; b) payments for past environmental abuses come due; c) marginalized peoples and social entrepreneurs assert their sovereignty over food, fuel and markets.
2. Business-as-usual, however efficient, equitable and cooperative, can not be sustained.
3. Less consumption for the Global North and more consumption for the Global South is possible, desirable and just.
4. To avoid catastrophic loss, fundamental (not marginal) social change is necessary—and urgent.

These premises were developed in NRE 564/462, Localization, Fall “a.” Students who did not take that half-semester course will be given additional readings.

Readings A coursepack will be available after the first week from Dollar Bill Copying, 611 Church Street. Handouts and the complete syllabus will be distributed on the first day of class in class. There is no Ctools site. Contemporary and historical cases are intended to 1) show “the possible,” i.e., transitioning grounded in lived practice, across cultures, across time; and 2) be a source of principles for a peaceful, democratic, just and sustainable transition. Conceptual readings are intended to create a “language of urgent transition,” that is, ways of thinking about fundamental change, from the local to the global, from individual to collective, from North to South.

Methods The course combines features of a seminar (readings and discussion) and lecture. It uses extensive readings, cases, and personal and professional experiences. Students must prepare daily, engage in discussions (including written submissions), and support classmates in an atmosphere of mutual and collaborative learning.

Electronic devices policy: Laptop computers and other devices are not allowed.