



UHI | PERTH

Centre for
Mountain Studies

MSc Sustainable Mountain Development



Since 2004 the Centre for Mountain Studies has run a successful MSc programme in Sustainable Mountain Development, hosted entirely online to enable candidates living and working in mountain areas across the globe to enrol and join a lively community of interest.

The programme attracts those already engaged in mountain-related work, as well as those seeking to move into the field. Full-time and part-time study options provide the flexibility to fit learning around existing professional and personal commitments.

The MSc offers an interdisciplinary grounding in all aspects of mountain sustainability. Students begin with the module Global Mountain Geographies, which examines the world's mountains from a global perspective — covering biophysical characteristics before moving into social and economic dimensions. Further core modules explore sustainability discourses and policy applications, while a diverse range of electives covers natural resources, extreme weather, community development and research methods.

CMS staff are all active researchers, ensuring strong research-teaching linkages. Students benefit from the Centre's broad and ongoing mountain research activity, including personalised supervision throughout their dissertation project. Alongside the MSc, CMS offers stand-alone professional development modules in deer management, water resources and land use.

One graduate described their experience: “I often had the sensation of being in a living classroom, in that I encountered the material/themes we discussed during the week in the mountains where I lived. This interconnection of theory and practice made the program very invigorating and helped me recognize the mountain environment with a depth of vision, functioning on many levels below the surface—whereas previously I'd seen and interacted only on a surface level.”

For an informal conversation and further information, contact rosalind.bryce.perth@uhi.ac.uk or info.cms.perth@uhi.ac.uk

We accept applications to start in January and September. To apply:
<https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/courses/msc-sustainable-mountain-development/>



Reflecting on the meaning and value of mountain studies.

Mountains represent complex systems for examining both biophysical and social dynamics at multiple scales. River catchments are considered a suitable scale for land use planning and management, where ecological processes can be tracked from summit to sea. The biological communities and integrity of upland soil systems influence downstream hydrology for example, with far-reaching implications for lowland communities and ecosystems. Upland woodland planting and peatland restoration can alleviate flood risk for those lowland communities. Mountains are considered the water towers of the world, and beacons of change in relation to the impact of climate change on processes such as glacier melt. Humboldt's *Tableau Physique* (1807) was one of the early visualisations of the vertical stratification of plant life in the tropical Andes and beautifully captured key montane ecological principles in a single image. Well managed and healthy riparian corridors, linking Highland and Lowland, enhance ecological connectivity allowing species to migrate and disperse.

The variable spatial scales of upland-lowland ecosystem processes raise questions for how ecosystem management and natural resources can be justly governed. Aside from water resources, claims to rights and access to upland and mountain areas for energy regeneration, mineral extraction and cultivation are highly contested. Mountains also host the beginnings and end of migrations, both human and non-human. Climate change is driving many species uphill as their niches creep inexorably towards the limits of habitability. Mountain systems encourage us to think in multiple dimensions; across spatial scales, both horizontal and vertical; furthermore it is difficult to imagine another landscape where the earth's deep history is quite so evident. The integrative approach that aligns so well with mountain studies can be aptly captured by Aldo Leopold's 'thinking like a mountain' concept which encourages us to seek balanced relationships between land and communities. A question: in aiming higher with our hopes and aspirations for Scotland, what new perspectives can mountain studies bring to our contested rural futures?

Module	Module Leader	Core/Optional
Semester 1 (September-January)		
Global Mountain Geographies	Rosalind Bryce	Core
Understanding the Policy Environment	Eilidh MacPhail	Core
Communities, Nature and Sustainability	David Skene	Optional
Quantitative research and data analysis	Edward Graham	Optional
Sustainable Land Use	Bobby Macaulay	Optional
Water Resources in a Changing Climate	Richard Gosling	Optional
Semester 2 (January – May)		
Understanding Sustainability Discourses	Rebecca Smith	Core
Agroecology: Regenerative Food Systems	David Skene	Optional
Biodiversity Management	Matthew Curran	Optional
Extreme Weather	Edward Graham	Optional
Qualitative Inquiry	Kara Smith	Optional
Sustainable Deer Management	Mike Daniels	Optional
The Economics of Community Wealth Building	David Skene	Optional
Working with Communities	Eilidh MacPhail	Optional
Semester 1/2 (over two Semesters)		
Dissertation	Eilidh MacPhail	MSc level



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