

# Leveraging Social-Ecological Narratives for Sustainability Insights: How Do Environmental Conditions and Perceptions Interact Along Maine's Storied Coast?

**Award Year:**

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**Principal Investigator:**

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**Associated Program:**

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This Graduate Pursuit aims to explore the role of narratives within social-ecological system dynamics. We define these social-ecological narratives as the stories through which communities understand their interactions and co-dependencies with an ecological system. Social-ecological systems (SES) research recognizes the importance of understanding relationships within and between systems (Liu et al., 2007; McGinnis & Ostrom, 2014; Ostrom, 2009). While SES research has made great strides in linking natural sciences and social sciences, the integration of cultural factors dealt with by the humanities has occurred more slowly. The persistence of this gap is partly due to methodological challenges. Many of the sources indicative of cultural dynamics are seen as messy and interpreted in a way that is difficult to synthesize with traditional formats of ecological and more quantitative social data (Himes-Cornell, Maguire, Kasperski, Hoelting, & Pollnac, 2016; Lyons, Carothers, & Reedy, 2016). To address this gap, we propose to a) define and explore the concept of a "social-ecological narrative" and its role within a social-ecological system; b) refine methods for data integration and analysis across natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities--in particular the processing of under-utilized data from literary sources; and c) apply these approaches to the case-study of oysters (*Crassostrea virginica*) in coastal Maine. We anticipate that the scholarly contributions of concept and method development could be extended beyond the proposed case-study. The insights from this project could help elucidate ongoing discussions that are shaping future coastal systems in Maine and elsewhere (e.g. shifting social dynamics along working waterfronts).

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