



In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**  
**Leah Gibbons**

Will defend her dissertation

**Shifting the Sustainability Paradigm:  
Co-creating Thriving Living Systems  
Through Regenerative Development**

**Abstract**

Sustainability research and action in communities should be holistic, integrating sociocultural, biogeophysical, and spiritual components and their temporal and spatial dynamics toward the aim of co-creating thriving living systems. Yet scientists and practitioners still struggle with such integration. Regenerative development (RD) offers a way forward. RD focuses on shifting the consciousness and thinking underlying (un)sustainability as well as their manifestation in the physical world, creating increasingly higher levels of health and vitality for all life across scales. However, tools are nascent and relatively insular. Until recently, no empirical scientific research studies had been published on RD processes and outcomes.

My dissertation fills this gap in three complementary studies. The first is an integrative review that contextualizes regenerative development within the fields of sustainability, sustainable design and development, and ecology by identifying its conceptual elements and introducing a regenerative landscape development paradigm. The second study integrates complex adaptive systems science, ecology, sustainability, and regenerative development to construct and pilot the first iteration of a holistic sustainable development evaluation tool—the Regenerative Development Evaluation Tool—in two river restoration projects. The third study builds upon the first two, integrating scientific knowledge with existing RD and sustainable community design and development practices and theory to construct and pilot a Regenerative Community Development Framework.

Results indicate that the RCD Framework and Tools, when used within a regenerative landscape development paradigm, can facilitate: (1) shifts in

thinking and development and design outcomes to holistic and regenerative ones; (2) identification of areas where development and design projects can become more regenerative and ways to do so; and (3) identification of factors that potentially facilitate and impede RCD processes. Overall, this research provides a direction and tools for holistic sustainable development as well as foundational studies for further research.

Thursday, June 27, 2019  
9:00 AM  
Wrigley Hall, Room 401

Faculty, students, and the public are invited.

Supervisory Committee:  
Dr. Scott Cloutier, chair  
Dr. Dan Childers  
Dr. Paul Coseo