Course Syllabus

GEOG*3320
Food Systems: Security and Sustainability
University of Guelph, Department of Geography

Fall 2016

Lectures
Thursdays 7:00-9:50pm
Room: MCKN 120
Exam: Take home

Course Introduction
This course examines current debates around the ecological and social sustainability of the food system and its capacity to feed the global population into the 21st century. We begin with an overview of the historic conditions that have—and continue to—shape our current food system. We will also explore how forces of globalization, trade and finance are impacting the food system further. Additionally, we will examine how social and structural inequities, such as racism and colonialism, are shaping how the food system functions, and in whose interests. Throughout the course we will integrate class discussions, guest speakers, and popular media to connect issues of agricultural sustainability and security to food system localization, access, global food trade, food movements and potential food and farming futures. This course will connect the dots between our food histories, current food system challenges and how communities are organizing to build more sustainable and equitable food futures.

Instructors
1. Sarah Rotz (srotz@uoguelph.ca) & Evan Fraser (frasere@uoguelph.ca)
2. TAs – Alex Therien (atherien@uoguelph.ca) & Jaida Regan (jregan@uoguelph.ca)

Office hours: TBA

Course objectives
1. To provide a thorough and critical evaluation of the issues and concepts underpinning global food system security and sustainability.
2. To critically explore political, social, economic, and ecological elements shaping the food system, while identifying debates between “mainstream” and alternative food system trajectories.
3. To enhance students’ ability to critically evaluate popular media on food related issues.
4. To provide training in writing short policy type documents.

Style of Teaching
This course aims to strike a balance between in-depth critical analysis and reflection on one hand, and active discussion and debate on the other. As a result, we will integrate in-class lecturing with discussion groups, panel sessions, and online media during class time. The lectures and in-class time will connect
and expand on concepts rather than summarize the readings. Therefore, students are expected to come to class having read the material. We very much welcome your participation, comments and feedback throughout the course. Even though the class is large, we hope we can cultivate a diverse, active and interesting class environment.

**Expectations:** We expect you to arrive on time, attend all classes, and invest an average of 8-10 hours per week in this course, in and outside of class. Since class lectures, panels, discussions, assignments, and quizzes will require you to apply information obtained from the readings, you are expected to complete all of the assigned readings, and to participate actively in class (We recognize that not everyone will feel comfortable speaking out in a large seminar class, but you can make up for this by participating actively in small group discussions when appropriate—which we will make as much room for as possible).

**Readings**

Evan Fraser’s graphic novel #foodcrisis is a required reading, and will inform a number of the week’s activities. These readings are brief and meant to set the context for the other readings and the in-class material for the week.

Copies will be available in the Hutt Building and will be made available for purchase during the first class on **September 8th. Bring $15 cash to purchase.**


All the other readings will be available online and are listed below on the weekly schedule.

**Evaluations**

This course will be assessed in the following ways:

1. Annotated bibliography of 2 assigned readings and 2 external articles (8%)
2. An essay critiquing the content of a mainstream documentary film on food (20%).
3. A policy brief where you propose solutions to the food crisis (20%).
4. An essay format take home exam (40%).
5. Attendance and participation in 2 in-class small group discussions (2x2% = 4%).
6. Pop quizzes: **IN CLASS** (3 quizzes = 8%)
7. In addition, we will award 3 bonus marks to any student who volunteers for 4+ hours with the Guelph food bank at some point over the term. Details on this will be presented early in term.

**E-mail Communication**

As per university regulations, all students are required to check their <mail.uoguelph.ca> e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the University and its students.

**When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement**

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or
compassionate reasons, please advise the course instructor (or designated person, such as a teaching assistant) in writing, with your name, id#, and e-mail contact. See the undergraduate calendar for information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration.

Drop Date
The last date to drop one-semester courses, without academic penalty, is November 4th. For regulations and procedures for Dropping Courses, see the Undergraduate Calendar.

Copies of out-of-class assignments
Keep paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

Accessibility
The University of Guelph is committed to creating a barrier-free environment. Providing services for students is a shared responsibility among students, faculty and administrators. This relationship is based on respect of individual rights, the dignity of the individual and the University community's shared commitment to an open and supportive learning environment. Students requiring service or accommodation, whether due to an identified, ongoing disability or a short-term disability should contact the Centre for Students with Disabilities as soon as possible. For more information, contact CSD at 519-824-4120 ext. 56208 or email csd@uoguelph.ca or see the website: http://www.uoguelph.ca/csd/

Academic Misconduct
The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and it is the responsibility of all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. University of Guelph students have the responsibility of abiding by the University's policy on academic misconduct regardless of their location of study; faculty, staff and students have the responsibility of supporting an environment that discourages misconduct. Students need to remain aware that instructors have access to and the right to use electronic and other means of detection. Please note: Whether or not a student intended to commit academic misconduct is not relevant for a finding of guilt. Hurried or careless submission of assignments does not excuse students from responsibility for verifying the academic integrity of their work before submitting it. Students who are in any doubt as to whether an action on their part could be construed as an academic offence should consult with a faculty member or faculty advisor.

The Academic Misconduct Policy is detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar

Recording of Materials
Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded or copied without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a
classmate or guest lecturer. Material recorded with permission is restricted to use for that
course unless further permission is granted.

Resources
The Academic Calendars are the source of information about the University of Guelph’s
procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate, graduate and diploma
programs.
Course Outline

Sept 8th
Class 1: The State of the Food System

Read the introduction, and chapters 1-3 of the story, and essays 1, 2 & 5 in #foodcrisis, as well as the background information in the footnotes.


Sept 15th
Class 2: Food Systems in Context: Industrialization & Colonialism


Sept 22nd
Class 3: Agri-Food Governance and Finance

Read chapters 4-6 of the story in #foodcrisis and background essay 3, 4, and 6


Recommended:

Sept 29th  
Class 4: Food Security Panel – Speakers include: Adrianne Lickers, Our Sustenance; CSA Food Bank; Guelph Food Bank; & Meal Exchange


Adrianne Lickers. Our Sustenance: Learning & Growing at Six Nations. Available at: https://reimaginingthenewskool.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/46-49.pdf


**Assignment 1 due Monday October 3rd at midnight – all submissions to be uploaded to dropbox on courselink.**

Oct 6th  
Class 5: Food Inc. Screening

The TA will show a popular food documentary and lead a discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of this film. This will be useful in and of itself but also set the stage for assignment 1.

No readings.

Oct 13th  
Class 6: Class discussion  
*Perspectives on food system transitions: Local, GMO’s, or food sovereignty*

*Come having reviewed the information below and prepared to discuss the topics*

Chapters 6-9 in #foodcrisis and background essay 7 & 8.


Watch the technology and local food videos on www.feedingninebillion.

**Recommended:**


CBAN: http://www.cban.ca/
Oct 20th

Class 7: Inequity & Injustice in the Food System: Sarah will lead a discussion with Eduardo Huesca who works with migrant farm workers and Vanessa Grey who is Anishinaabe kwe from the Aamjiwnaang First Nation.


Recommended:


Oct 27th

Class 8: Localization & Sustainability Panel: Speakers include: Brendan Johnson from The Seed and the Guelph Neighbourhood Support Coalition; Lucas Bramberger, a graduate student researcher, and a local Ontario farmer


Assignment 2 is due on Monday October 24th at midnight – all submissions to be uploaded to dropbox on courselink.

Nov 3rd

Class 9: Food Waste Panel

Guest Speakers: Kelly Hodgins (Feeding Nine Billion), Tom Armitage (The Seed), Amy DeLorenzo (graduate student researching food waste)


Nov 10th
Class 11: Food Movements


**Recommended:**


Nov 17th
Class 10: Class Discussion: Food and Farming Futures

#foodcrisis background essay 12 & 13


**Assignment 3 is due on Monday November 21st at midnight in dropbox on courselink.**

Nov 24th
Class 12: Review
Assignment 1 – Annotated Bibliography

Due Monday October 3rd at midnight – all submissions to be uploaded to dropbox on courselink.

Purpose: to compare and contrast articles and to effectively execute external research. Also, this assignment is meant to set the stage for, and to get you thinking about, your final essay.

Activity: Choose 2 assigned readings from EITHER class 2 OR class 3 (in other words, both of the readings should be from the same week. Indeed, we want you to compare and contrast articles with similar topics). Then, use these papers as a springboard to gather 2 external articles of a similar topic to include in the annotated bibliography (i.e. its kind of hard to effectively compare an article on land grabbing or financial speculation with an article on colonialism in 200 words!). We encourage you to find at least one article that focuses on your assigned country (the country assigned to you for the final exam) to get you thinking and researching on your country early on in the course. For instance, if you choose the industrialization/colonialism week, search for articles that address these topics in the context of your country. You will then compare and contrast these 4 articles in the form of 4 annotated bibliographies. Each annotation should be around 200 words. The assignment should be between 800-1000 words total, 1000 words MAX.

Evaluation: Do not only summarize articles. A very brief summary is necessary, but focus on explaining the value and relevance of the articles. Also, compare articles between each other, and explain whether/how the assigned readings were useful for understanding the conditions of your assigned country. Hence, this assignment should set the stage for your larger final essay research.

Assignment 2 – Evaluating the Claims of Food Inc.

Due on Monday October 24th at midnight – all submissions to be uploaded to dropbox on courselink.

Length – 2000-2500 words

Purpose: to critically reflect on the claims and solutions presented in the mainstream documentary Food Inc.

Activity: Please watch the movie Food Inc. We will screen the movie during the Oct 6th class, and will follow-up the screening with a discussion that will be helpful for the assignments. If for some reason you are unable to make the class, the university library has a copy. You can also rent it on itunes or stream it.

While you are watching the film, keep a list of the arguments that are made about (1) the problem with the current food system; (2) the solutions they propose.

Food Inc. covers a huge amount of ground. So, to make this assignment manageable, I’d then like you to chose a few points or themes that are in the movie and that you think are worth following up on and do some research focusing on whether the claims the filmmakers make are scientifically accurate (note: while I love this film and agree with 80% of it, I also think there are a number of times where they overstate their case, and even in a couple places make claims that I believe are just plain wrong. Also, the breadth of the film means that in several instances, they do not provide adequate depth to the issues. You might also consider how the filmmakers’ biases and social positions enter into the way they frame the topics.)
What I’d recommend is that you identify one to three themes from the movie (i.e. they talk about “seed cleaning” in one part of the movie, animal welfare and industrial livestock production in another segment, and food safety in another) and then look into the scientific literature to see if the way the film makers depicted these issues is accurate and whether their solutions are realistic or useful.

The format for your essay is up to you. However, the following structure might be useful: (1) an introduction where you introduce the specific topics that you want to critically explore; (2) present an overview of Food Inc.’s argument on each of these topics; (3) explore the scientific (peer reviewed) literature on these topic; (4) reflect on whether you think the movie’s position is justified visa vis the academic literature.

Your work will be evaluated using the following criteria:

1. Evaluation of the claims: Have you critically, and with reference to peer reviewed sources, examined one or more of the themes within Food Inc.?
2. Structure: Is your paper coherently laid out with a strong and easy-to-follow structure?
3. Mechanics: Is your paper professionally presented, with appropriate referencing, accurate spelling, grammar, etc.

Assignment 3: Policy Brief

Due on Monday November 21st at midnight in dropbox on courselink.

Length – 1 piece of paper (both sides) MAXIMUM. You may also add (if you feel this is useful) a short appendix of supplementary material, title page, list of references.

Purpose: To write a two page policy brief advocating for a series of policies you think will help lead to a more sustainable and secure food system.

Activity: (1) Choose a senior figure you would like to talk to about creating a more sustainable and secure food system (e.g. if you are most interested in international policy, pretend that you are about to talk to the head of the Food and Agriculture Organization. If you are more interested in federal policy, pretend you are going to talk to a relevant federal cabinet minister. If provincial level politics is what interests you, imagine a meeting with a provincial cabinet minister. Or a member of the Loblaw/Wal-Mart board of directors if you are mostly interested in how the private sector may be important. Or the mayor of a municipality.) (2) Pretend that you have an opportunity to meet with this senior person and think in very concrete terms about what sort of policy or policies you would like them to pass to help promote a more sustainable and secure food system. (3) Write up, justify and defend these suggestions in the form of a 2 page (maximum) policy brief.

In your write-up you will need to (1) present your policy recommendations – make sure these are quite specific, concrete action plans that you think the head of an organization can actually do. (2) justify why this is the “right thing to do”. (3) Describe how you will monitor in the future whether this policy / these policies are actually having the intended consequences. You will also need to identify to whom your brief is intended (so make it clear in the title or on the title page who you are pitching this at).
All this has to be compressed into 2 pages, plus a title page and (if you want, but this part is optional) a page of supporting or supplementary material. Note: you have to also remember that senior people are very VERY busy and rarely read much. So, I do not recommend you simply hand in two pages of unformatted paragraph style text. Rather, I recommend you think creatively about bullets, images, columns, text boxes, and make the document interesting to look at. Don’t worry, though: sample policy briefs will be posted on course link.

Your work will be evaluated on the following criteria:

1. Recommendations: Did you clearly articulate one (or more) doable, pragmatic and concrete policy recommendations?
2. Justification: Did you effectively and persuasively justify why your policy recommendations are “the right thing to do”?
3. Monitoring plan: Did you describe how to monitor whether your policy recommendations into the future?
4. Mechanics: Did you include a title page where you state who your intended audience is (ie you need to let us know whether you are imagining this brief is going to be read by a Loblaw executive or the head of the UN). Is your paper professionally presented, with appropriate referencing, accurate spelling, grammar, etc.

**Assignment 4: Final Project**

At the beginning of the semester you will be assigned to a specific country. Near the end of some of the classes, the instructors will pose a question, and you will have the opportunity to spend the rest of the class working on your own or with fellow students through that question (multiple people will have the same country, so you could certainly work with others who have been assigned the same country as you).

For the final project, you will choose 5 of 8 questions and write-up a final report on the state of agriculture in your assigned country, along with an opening executive summary. In terms of informational resources, you will start with the readings and the material delivered in-class and use this as a springboard for your analysis (from here, it is up to you to do the country-specific research). **Class readings and in-class material must be referenced adequately in each section of the assignment, which will be accounted for in the grading process.**

For the final report, each section/question will be between 500-800 words, therefore the total assignment length should be between 3000 and 4500 words, with an **absolute maximum** length of 5000 words. We encourage you to work through this throughout the term rather than leave it to the end!

In order to gauge your progress, you will have the opportunity to submit the drafts that you’ve completed thus far to the TA between week 5 and 7 for formative feedback.

**Participation in Discussion Groups**
Current research on education suggests that it is vital for people to express ideas and topics if a teacher wants to have any chance of the material they present sinking in. Therefore, we have scheduled two small group discussion sessions.

In the discussion sessions we will ask that you read some material and watch a few short animated youtube videos and come to **two one-hour group discussion sessions** where you must be prepared to discuss the content. These discussions will be held during in class time and schedules will be made up dividing the class into smaller groups each of which will meet during one of the three hours.

If you attend and participate in these sessions you will receive 4/4.

**Pop Quizzes**

There will be **three pop quizzes** throughout the semester. **The questions will be presented in-class only** and you will then answer them on courseslink. They will be quite simple: basically, if you attend the classes and read the material you should receive the full 3 marks with no problem. Courseslink will be open for a window of time during class, and for a short time after class to accommodate those who do not have access to technology during the class. During these days the class will also end a bit early so that those who do not have access to courseslink in class can go to the library and complete the quiz.