

Food: A Critical Geography (GEO 415)

Tuesday, Thursday 9:30-10:50am

Crouse Hinds 101

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 11:00am-1:00pm

or by appointment Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday only

Course Overview

This course takes a critical look at the global agro-food system. In general terms, we will follow the food commodity chain, beginning with food production and agriculture ('Growing Food'); move on to manufacturing, processing, and marketing ('Trading Food'); and then finally to the politics of food consumption ('Consuming Food'). This course does *not* aim merely to describe the current food system, nor does it adopt a neutral or 'objective' stance on it. Rather, the course puts forth a particular argument: it begins from the premise that the current globalized, industrial agro-food system creates profound problems for environmental degradation, animal welfare, worker safety, and consumer health. Moreover, the course takes as axiomatic that agro-food systems should promote social justice and environmental sustainability. As such, this course does *not* attempt to provide 'both sides' of the food system story. Rather, we will take a critical stance throughout. For the other side, you merely have to turn on the TV, go to the supermarket, or eat at McDonalds (or at a dining hall on campus!). We are inundated with this side of the story every day, often without even being aware of it. The goals of this course, then, are rather simple: to provide a more critical understanding of the global agro-food system, and to explore various alternatives and their viability.

The course will involve some field trips and 'field assignments' intended to get you out into the community, to examine agro-food issues in and around Syracuse. Upstate New York is a fantastic laboratory for food. It is one of the most important agricultural regions in the northeast, and is dominated by relatively small family farms and diverse production systems that include dairy, apples, and wine. Cornell University in Ithaca is the state's land-grant institution, and one of the world's leading agricultural and biotechnology research centers. Syracuse's huge regional farmer's market attracts a diversity of people from across Upstate New York (both vendors and customers), and there is a wide variety of alternative food networks such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, community gardens, food justice organizations and the Syracuse Real Food Cooperative. But upstate New York is also relatively poor: about 1 in 8 people in Onondaga county are food insecure and rely on food assistance on a regular basis, and the Food Bank of Central New York annually provides over 20,000 free meals to people in an eight-county region. Obesity rates, closely tied to poor nutrition and socio-economic class, are above the national average. In the class, we will explore these issues on a first hand basis, in the context of broader national and international processes and relationships.

Course Readings

There are two required texts for this class:

- *Food*, by Jennifer Clapp (Polity, Cambridge, UK, 2012) [“Clapp” in the course schedule]
- *Labor and the Locavore: The Making of a Comprehensive Food Ethic*, by Margaret Gray (University of California Press, 2014) [“Gray” In the course schedule]

All other readings will be available on Blackboard. These are labeled in the course schedule, below, listed by author’s last name and year of publication. Readings appear on Blackboard in the order in which you are to read them.

There is a moderate-to-heavy reading load for this course. You are expected to keep up with readings, so plan to dedicate a few hours each week to reading for this class. We will discuss the readings in class, and they will be incorporated into lectures. Your ability to discuss the readings thoughtfully will be assessed as part of your participation grade (see below). In addition, there will be four pop-quizzes during the semester that will cover the day’s reading. Quiz dates will not be announced ahead of time and there will be no make-up quizzes – if you are absent on the date of a quiz with no prior arrangement, you will *not* have an opportunity to make up those points.

Course Requirements and Grading

There are five writing assignments in this class. These include two are ‘field assignments,’ for which you will be required to get out into the community and observe aspects of the food system first hand, and two map assignments, in which you map particular aspects of the food system – the ingredients and commodity chain of a meal and the geography of hunger. These are worth 50 points each and you will receive detailed instructions for each assignment. There will also be a final group project on a topic of your (group’s) choice, worth 80 points. You can earn up to 40 points for class participation (attendance and active participation in class discussions), and there will be four unannounced reading quizzes, worth 15 points each. Finally, you will have present a ‘found object’ worth 20 points (see below).

To recap, your grade will be distributed as follows:

| | | |
|--|---|-----------|
| • Map Assignment #1 (food commodity chain) | = | 50 points |
| • Map Assignment #2 (hunger map) | = | 50 points |
| • Field Assignment #1 (farmer’s market) | = | 50 points |
| • Field Assignment #2 (supermarket analysis) | = | 50 points |
| • Final Assignment | = | 80 points |
| • Reading Quiz #1 | = | 15 points |
| • Reading Quiz #2 | = | 15 points |
| • Reading Quiz #3 | = | 15 points |
| • Reading Quiz #4 | = | 15 points |
| • “Found object” (presentation and write-up) | = | 20 points |
| • Class participation | = | 40 points |

Total = 400 points

Important dates to be aware of:

- September 17: Mapping Assignment 1 (commodity chain analysis) due in class
- October 9: Field Assignment 1 (farmer's market analysis) due in Geography Department office (144 Eggers Hall) by 4pm
- October 29: Field Assignment 2 (supermarket analysis) due in class
- November 19: Mapping Assignment 2 (geography of hunger) due in class
- December 12: Final Group Assignment due in Geography Dept. Office (4pm)

“Found Object”

Once during the semester, you are to present a ‘found object’ to the class, and a short (~1 paragraph) write-up to me. Think of this as show-and-tell for college students. I want you to bring in some food item that tells a story. That is, I want you to present and write about an everyday (or perhaps not so everyday) food, and describe what lay behind it: the hidden context, cultural meanings, political economic or socio-natural relationships it represents, the commodity chain behind its production and exchange, etc. Have fun with this and make it interesting. You will be able to sign up for a date to present.

Classroom Etiquette

Please use common sense and common courtesy in your behavior in class. Please arrive on time. If you *have* to arrive late, please enter the room quietly and don't let the door slam behind you. Please don't talk or read during class. Persons behaving in a discourteous manner will be asked to leave the classroom. Classroom behavior will be factored into your final grade.

Personal Electronics

The use of personal electronics is not permitted in this class. Please be sure that your cell phone is silenced *before* coming to class. Use of social media, texting, emailing, or browsing the web during class will not be tolerated. Unless needed for a specific in-class activity, use of laptops or tablets is not allowed in class. You should plan to take notes the old fashioned way: with pen and paper. If I see you using an electronic device inappropriately in class, I will deduct 10 points from your overall grade and I may or may not notify you. Persons repeatedly using electronic devices for inappropriate purposes during class will be asked to leave.

Learning Outcomes

This course is intended to improve your critical thinking skills and writing ability, as well as your environmental literacy. After completing this course, you should be able to: (1) Better understand contemporary geographical issues related to the global agro-food system; (2) Identify and critically analyze key social and environmental dimensions of food production, trade and consumption; (3) Write effectively and analytically about contemporary food issues.

Plagiarism and Academic Honesty

Plagiarism on course assignments is a serious offense, and is not acceptable. The easiest way to think of plagiarism is the written use of other peoples' ideas or words without proper citation. The University defines plagiarism as:

"The submission of any work by a student is taken as a guarantee that the thoughts and expressions in it are the student's own except when properly credited to another. Violations of this principle include giving or receiving aid in an exam or where otherwise prohibited, fraud, plagiarism, the falsification or forgery of any record, or any other deceptive act in connection with academic work. Plagiarism is the representation of another's words, ideas, programs, formulae, opinions, or other products of work as one's own, either overtly or by failing to attribute them to their true source" (Section 1.0, Syracuse University *Academic Rules and Regulations*).

Plagiarism is a very serious breach of academic honesty, and will not be tolerated in this class. **The first time a student is found to be plagiarizing, s/he will automatically receive a score of 0 for the plagiarized assignment. If the student is caught plagiarizing a second time, s/he will automatically receive an F for the course.** There will be no exceptions.

Students are responsible for knowing University definitions and rules regarding academic honesty. For more information on plagiarism and how to avoid it, please see:
<http://researchguides.library.syr.edu/content.php?pid=28194&sid=205457>

Disability-Related Accommodations

Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 304 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498. Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should provide a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to Dr. Perreault and review those accommodations with him. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, planning for accommodations as early as possible is necessary. For further information, see the ODS website, Office of Disability Services <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/>

Student Athletes

If you are a student athlete, I will do my best to accommodate your travel and competition schedule. Please provide me with necessary forms, and make arrangements with your TA, well in advance of your expected absences.

Course Withdrawals

Anyone wishing to withdraw from the class after the regular drop deadline must obtain the signature of the instructor *and* the Chair of the Geography Department on the withdrawal form. It is the policy of the Geography Department that students must obtain FIRST the signature of the instructor and THEN the signature of the department chair if they wish to drop or withdraw from this course.

COURSE SCHEDULE

| Date | Topic | Readings |
|--|--|--|
| <i>Growing Food Agriculture and Agrarian Questions</i> | | |
| Week 1 | | |
| Sept 1 | Course introduction: Food security, food sovereignty or food justice? | <i>Gray, intro chapter</i> <i>Holt-Giménez 2011</i> |
| Sept 3 | Domestication, Agricultural Revolution and the 'Columbian Exchange' | <i>Mintz</i> |
| Week 2 | | |
| Sept 8 | Peasant farming, agroecology & agrobiodiversity | <i>Altieri 1987 (pp. 69-75)</i> <i>Perreault 2005</i> |
| | Also read: http://www.theguardian.com/the-b-team-partner-zone/2015/may/12/smallholder-farmers-producers-agriculture-food-women | |
| Sept 10 | Agrarian Questions and the world food economy | <i>Clapp, ch. 1</i> <i>Gray, ch. 1</i> |
| Week 3 | | |
| Sept 15 | The rise of industrial agriculture | <i>Clapp, ch. 2</i> |
| Sept 17 | From the 'Green Revolution' to the 'Gene Revolution' | <i>Fitting (ch. 1)</i> <i>Altieri 2001</i> |
| <i>Mapping assignment #1 Commodity chain analysis due in class</i> | | |

Week 4

| | | |
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| Sept 22 | Guest speaker: Alejandro Camargo Water grabbing, small-scale fishers and peasant farming in Colombia | <i>Camargo 2014 a</i> <i>Camargo 2014b</i> |
| Sept 24 | Google Earth exercise (bring your laptops and tablets) | <i>no new readings</i> |

Week 5

| | | |
|---------|-------------------------------|---|
| Sept 29 | Food policy and the Farm Bill | <i>Imhoff (pp. 16-56)</i> <i>Stiglitz 2013</i> |
| Oct 1 | Farm work and farm workers | <i>Gray, ch. 2-3</i> |

Week 6

| | | |
|-------|---|-------------------------|
| Oct 6 | Guest speaker: Fabiola Ortiz Farmworkers and the dairy industry in New York State | <i>Rodriguez et al.</i> |
| Oct 8 | <i>No class today – work on your field assignments</i> | <i>No new readings</i> |

*****Field Assignment 1: Farmer's market ethnography due in Geography Department office (144 Eggers Hall) by Friday, October 9 at 4:00pm*****

Week 7

| | | |
|--------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Oct 13 | Eating Animals 1: CAFOs | <i>Hauter (ch. 9-10)</i> |
| Oct 15 | Eating Animals 2: Fishing + NY Times articles ("outlaw ocean", parts 3 & 4): http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/27/world/outlaw-ocean-thailand-fishing-sea-slaves-pets.html http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/28/world/a-renegeade-trawler-hunted-for-10000-miles-by-vigilantes.html | <i>Greenberg</i> <i>Bestor</i> |

Trading Food
The Making of the Global Food System

Week 8

| | | |
|--------|--|--------------------------|
| Oct 20 | Food aid | <i>McMichael</i> |
| Oct 22 | Food trade and corporate consolidation | <i>Clapp, chap. 3, 4</i> |

Week 9

| | | |
|--------|---|----------------------------|
| Oct 27 | Supermarkets and super marketing | <i>Patel</i> |
| Oct 29 | From global South to global North: Export agriculture and luxury consumption | <i>Freidberg (ch.1, 2)</i> |

*****Field Assignment #2 (Supermarket analysis) due in class*****

Consuming Food
You Are What (and Where) you Eat

Week 10

| | | |
|-------|---|--|
| Nov 3 | The meaning of food 1: Culture and consumption | <i>Lind & Barham Roseberry</i> |
| Nov 5 | The meaning of food 2: Food and nationalism | <i>Fitting (ch. 2)</i> |

Week 11

Nov 10 Hunger and food insecurity 1 *Poppendieck, chap. 2*

Also read: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/15/opinion/how-to-feed-the-world.html?pagewanted=all>

Nov 12 Hunger and food insecurity 2 *Poppendieck, chap. 3*
Field trip to the Food Bank of Central New York

Week 12

Nov 17 Hunger and food insecurity 3 *Poppendieck, chap. 7*

Nov 19 No class today –
Finish your mapping assignment *No new readings*

***Mapping Assignment 2: Mapping hunger due
(leave it for me in the Geography Department office, 144 Eggers by 4pm)***

Week 13

Nov 23-27 *Thanksgiving Break – no class*

Week 14

Dec 1 Food justice revisited *Gray, ch. 5*
Clapp, ch. 6

Dec 3 Group presentations 1 *no new reading*

Week 15

Dec 8 Group presentations 2 *no new reading*

Dec 10 Group presentations 3 *no new reading*

***Final Assignments due Friday, December 11**
(leave them for me in the Geography Department office, 144 Eggers Hall, by 4:00pm)*

Bibliography

Altieri, Miguel A. 1987. *Agroecology: The Scientific Basis of Alternative Agriculture*. Boulder: Westview Press.

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Perreault, Thomas 2005. Why *chacras* (swidden gardens) persist: Agrobiodiversity, food security and cultural identity in the Ecuadorian Amazon. *Human Organization*, 64(4): 327-339.

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Roseberry, William 2005. The rise of yuppie coffees and the reimagination of class in the United States. In James I. Watson and Melissa Caldwell (eds.), *The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating: A Reader* (London: Blackwell), pp. 122-143.

Stiglitz, Joseph 2013. "The insanity of our food policy." *New York Times*, 16 November.