SIT | Study Abroad

SYLLABUS

School for International Training | studyabroad.sit.edu
studyabroad@sit.edu | Tel 888 272-7881 | Fax 802 258-3296

Politics, Ethics, and Food Security

POLI 3010 (4 credits / 60 hours)

International Honors Program (IHP)
Food Systems: Agriculture, Sustainability and Justice

PLEASE NOTE: This syllabus represents a recent term. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from term to term.

Course Description

What makes an agrifood system sustainable and just? Why do we eat what we eat? How are food systems governed at the local, national and international levels? And how do the answers to these questions relate to global inequality, struggles for power and self-determination, use of natural resources, and cultural expression? As we seek answers to these questions, we are sure to encounter contradictions that will challenge our ideas, both individually and collectively, about food, land, and justice around the globe.

These concerns invite us into a semester-long exploration of the role of food in historical and contemporary politics. Throughout this inquiry, we will focus on understanding what comprises an agrifood system – from land and seed to local cooperatives and international institutions. Using a variety of frameworks, this course will explore the systems of governance, modes of production, and cultural politics that shape these agrifood systems. This includes such topics as food security, food sovereignty, settler and extractive colonialism, knowledge politics, enclosure, and food policy.

These concepts are complex and entangled, requiring an examination of *the social* and *the natural* as integrated phenomena. These topics also attract diverse academic interpretations, activist interventions, and business interests that interface with the daily experience of people whose livelihoods are at stake in global agrifood systems. This class will use required readings; classroom lectures/activities; field-based, experiential learning; and group and self-reflection to develop historical and theoretical understandings of the course themes. In addition, a key component of this course is to participate in a group inquiry project that will allow you to explore a topic of interest in greater depth while developing skills in research design, execution, and presentation. Empathy will be an especially important skill throughout this journey to understand food and agricultural systems as sites of self-expression, political contestation, and survival.

Course Goals

- Cultivate a community of respect, curiosity, and mutual support.
- Honor every member of our learning community as a whole human.
- Realize the ways in which we are all teachers *and* learners.
- Introduce students to different disciplinary and theoretical frameworks/approaches to agrifood systems.
- Encourage students to embrace and grapple with uncertainty and complexity.
- Promote empathy, self-reflection, and critical thinking as complementary and mutually reinforcing learning skills.
- Ask questions that genuinely interest you.

Learning Outcomes

- Identify ways in which racism, patriarchy, and other systems of power and oppression shape food systems in diverse contexts.
- Analyze the role of states, multinational institutions, the private sector and civil society in the politics of agrifood systems.
- Integrate experiences, literature, class concepts, and self-reflection into original ideas and arguments about major themes related to food systems.
- Build confidence and skills related to research and presentations.

Course Requirements

COURSE SCHEDULE

Module 1: California (16 hours)

SESSION 1: WHAT IS 'THE POLITICAL'?

Young, I.M. (2011) *Justice and the Politics of Difference.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Selected Chapter: "Five Faces of Oppression" pp. 39-65.

SESSION 2: WHO SHOULD EAT WHAT?

Allen, P. (2007). The disappearance of hunger in America. *Gastronomica* 7(3): 19-23.

DuPuis, M. (2007). Angels and Vegetables: A Brief History of Food Advice in America. *Gastronomica* 7(2): 34-44.

SESSION 3: ON WHAT GROUND? ENCLOSURE, LAND REFORM, AND LAND GRABS

Ostrom, E., et al. (1999). Revisiting the commons: Local lessons, global challenges. *Science* 284(5412): 278-282.

Lee, R. and T. Ahtone. (2020). Land-grab universities. *High Country News*, March 30. https://www.hcn.org/issues/52.4/indigenous-affairs-education-land-grab-universities

Module 2: Georgia (16 hours)

SESSION 1: RESEARCH DESIGN AND THE COMPARATIVE METHOD

Alkon, A. (2018.) "From Companion Planting to Cross-Pollination: Thoughts on the Future of Food Studies," Plenary Address. Graduate Association for Food Studies Conference. Graduate Journal of Food Studies. Vol. 5. No. 2. Available online: https://gradfoodstudies.org/2018/12/11/from-companion-planting-to-cross-pollination/

Lamont, Christopher. (2015). Research Methods in International Relations. London: Sage. Selected pages: Chapter 2: Research Questions and Research Design (pp. 30-48).

***In this class your inquiry group will present a draft of their research questions.**

SESSION 2: WHAT IS FOOD JUSTICE?

Alkon, A., and J. Agyeman (eds.) (2011) *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class and Sustainability.* Selected pages in Chapter 13: "Just Food?" pp. 283-302.

Edge, John T. (2017). The hidden radicalism of Southern food. *The New York Times*, May 6th. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/06/opinion/sunday/the-hidden-radicalism-of-southern-food.html

SESSION 3: FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND COLONIALISM

Grey, S. and R. Patel. (2015). Food Sovereignty as Decolonization: Some Contributions from Indigenous Movements to Food System and Development Politics, *Agriculture and Human Values,* 32(3): pp. 431-444.

Module 3: Ecuador (16 hours)

PRE-DEPARTURE READING: ECUADOR BACKGROUND

Nehring, Ryan (2012). Politics and Policies of Food Sovereignty in Ecuador: New Directions or Broken Promises? [http://www.ipc-undp.org/pub/IPCPolicyResearchBrief31.pdf]

SESSION 1: THE 'FEED THE WORLD' NARRATIVE: WHY FAMINES PERSIST

Sen, Amartya. (2001). *Development as freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 7: Famines and Other Crises, pp.160-188.

SESSION 2: FOOD AND WATER – COMMODITIES OR HUMAN RIGHTS?

Beuchelt, T.D. and D. Virchow (2012) Food Sovereignty or the Human Right to Adequate Food: Which Concept Serves Better as International Development Policy for Global Hunger and Poverty Reduction? *Agriculture and Human Values,* 29:2, pp. 259-173.

Bakker, K. (2007). The "Commons" versus the "Commodity": Alter-globalization, Anti-privatization and the Human Right to Water in the Global South. *Antipode* 39(3): 430-455.

SESSION 3: WHAT NOW?

Alkon, A. (2014). Food Justice and the Challenge to Neoliberalism. *Gastronomica* 14(2): 27-40.

Ideas: https://foodtank.com/news/2020/03/20-heroines-revolutionizing-food-activism-to-improve-the-planet/

Additional Recommended Readings for Ecuador Sessions:

Van Esterik, Penny (1999) Right to Food; Right to Feed; Right to Be Fed. The Intersection of Women's Rights and the Right to Food, *Agriculture and Human Values,* 16(2), ppp. 225-232.

Schiavoni, Christina. (2017). The contested terrain of food sovereignty construction: toward a historical, relational and interactive approach. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 44(1): 1-32.

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

ASSESSMENT TASKS

Reading, preparation, and participation

This course depends on you being prepared for class discussion. For each class, you should read the assigned readings, prepare one or two questions, and raise them in class. These may be clarifying, reflective, or provocative questions about the readings, and can relate to your experiences outside the classroom. You will be assessed based on your contribution to group discussions, including your questions and responses to peers' questions, as well as your active listening and sharing of air-time.

Class writing

These are writing exercises that I will use at the beginning of each class to assess reading comprehension. You will be asked to define concepts and/or connect the readings to larger class themes expressed in site visits and lectures. Each exercise will be no longer than 10 minutes.

Group Inquiry Project

Your group inquiry project will guide you through the research process while allowing you to conduct an in-depth examination of a topic of interest related to food systems. Starting in our political science class in California, we will brainstorm topics of interest for further exploration throughout the semester. Based on shared research interests, you will be assigned to a group that will develop a research project following the steps described below. A core component of this research project will be stakeholder interviews, and time in each country will be set aside for you to speak with officials, activists and local citizens. Furthermore, you should seek information related to your research question during site visits, classes and through your own independent research and observation. You will present the results of your research to the class and program staff at the retreat session in Ecuador.

Research Process:

Research Question: Before our first political science class in Georgia, you are expected to have come up with a specific research question with your team that you will present to the class. In this presentation, you should explain why this question is intellectually interesting and worthy of deeper analysis. In addition to your overarching research question, you should think of secondary questions that will help you answer your overarching question and break your project down into smaller parts. You should also include any ideas or themes that you will test as you gather evidence in each country. The class session will be used to receive peer feedback for your project idea, but research questions should be finalized by the due date set shortly after this session so that your team is prepared to move forward with research design and data collection. After the feedback session your group should email the traveling faculty with your final research question for formal approval by the date noted here. **Due date: TBD**

Research Prospectus: Once your research question has been approved, you should prepare a detailed document that catalogues your expectations for each country. On this document you should: 1) restate your approved research question; 2) state your falsifiable hypotheses (or the main ideas that you will test); 3) include a section for each country that indicates what you hope to learn in order to answer your question, what type of people you would ideally be able to interview (note: this does not mean you will necessarily have access to them); and what you expect your research to uncover. Keep in mind that you are not expected to have detailed knowledge about the food systems of each location in advance of arrival, but it can be useful to document your assumptions ahead of time for reflection once you have completed your data collection. Approximate length: 3 pages or 750 words. **Due date: TBD**

Interview Protocol: Before you begin your first interview, you should prepare an interview protocol. The interview protocol is meant to identify a set of questions used for all interview subjects to facilitate comparison and to set a process for the interview structure. However, in reality your protocol may need to be adjusted to different sites/subjects and should be reviewed before beginning an interview. Please see the sample interview protocol on Dropbox and this link for additional guidance: https://csed.engin.umich.edu/assets/InterviewProtocol-CoreContent-3.pdf It provides more in-depth suggestions on style, content and methodology than are included here. Each student will be expected to conduct at least three interviews (See Stakeholder Profiles below) that will allow use of the protocol to be applied in practice. **Due date: TBD, but before first interview**

Progress Reports for Peer Review: Each group is expected to prepare a progress report with your preliminary findings that is approximately 5 pages or 1,250 words in length. In this progress report, be sure to remind the reader of your research question and secondary questions, the hypotheses you tested, the data collected in each country and your preliminary findings. At this time you also should have a working thesis statement, or an argument that provides an answer to your research question. Explain what revisions you may have needed to make to your project design and why. Each group will turn in their progress report and 2-3 students will provide written feedback. **Due date: TBD**

Peer Review (Individual Assignment): Each student will be expected to provide feedback to one of the inquiry groups. The group you are reviewing will be assigned to you. The feedback should be provided in the form of a 1-2 page single-spaced document. (It can be longer if you have more to say, but should not be shorter than one single-spaced full page.) You have some freedom with respect to how to format your feedback. It might be a more narrative critique of the project; or you can respond individually to some of the questions listed below. You should focus your feedback on whatever points you feel are most useful for the authors to hear in order to make their paper stronger, so you are not limited to the questions below. However, if you are having trouble getting started, you may wish to consider the following:

- Are the research question and thesis statement clearly stated?
- Does the thesis answer the research question?
- Is the thesis compelling – does it present a thought-provoking argument that is likely to be supported through the presentation of evidence?

- Do you have a good idea of why the authors find this project interesting and worthy of study?
- Are the key concepts defined? Do you have a clear idea of what the authors are studying?
- Is it clear what evidence is being used to support the argument? Does this evidence clearly relate to the research question and the thesis statement?
- Do you have general suggestions for the researchers to strengthen their project (e.g., sources you are aware of, arguments or counterarguments that you can think of, areas that you find confusing or unclear)?
- What are the greatest strengths of the project? What are the greatest concerns or potential weaknesses that should be considered before the final presentation?
  Due Date: TBD

Stakeholder Profiles (Individual Assignment): You will create three stakeholder profiles, each worth 4% of your grade. In each site, ask to interview someone you meet or learn about through our field trips or guest lectures who is engaged with a theme relevant to your final project. You should base your interaction on the prepared interview protocol; however, you should also determine whether it is more appropriate to conduct the interview formally or informally (as a conversation). Based on the information you learn about this person, create a profile. The profile may include: the person's name, background demographics (e.g. age, occupation, education, farm size), a photograph, affiliations, their motivation to engage with the theme of your project, the specific ways they engage with the theme, what is unique about their perspective or work, their goal(s), and challenges they face. You must share the profile with the person and incorporate their feedback before submitting it for a grade. Please provide evidence that you did this or, if providing written documentation might not be possible, discuss alternative arrangements to demonstrate ethical conduct with the traveling faculty before conducting the interview. During your interview, be sure to ask how to share the profile and what an appropriate timeline for feedback is. Each profile should be visually compelling, easy to read, and highlight key pieces of information. Ideally, the format of each of your profiles is similar enough so that the collection is cohesive. You may not profile IHP faculty and staff. Do not exceed 1000 words. **Due dates: TBD**

Final Presentation: Prepare a twenty-minute group presentation in which you present an original argument about the theme of your inquiry project. Your presentation should include your research question and thesis, key findings, and reflect on your research methodology. You may integrate, compare, and contrast the stakeholder profiles, field trips, and program activities from each location but should focus on key takeaways and lessons rather than presenting the details of each interview. Be sure to rehearse your presentation and include appropriate visual materials. You will present your project to the class, faculty and Program Director at the retreat. **Due date: TBD**

Reflection Paper (Individual Assignment): Your reflection paper is an opportunity to take stock of what you have accomplished with your inquiry project and how you might improve upon it if you were to continue this project at the graduate level. What were the greatest strengths of your group project and your individual research? What were the weaknesses? What did you learn about research design and methodology,

and what challenges arose in putting your research plan into action in the field? What lessons would you incorporate to improve upon your research if you were continuing this project in a fifth country or planning to build on it for a graduate research project? Length: approximately 750 words. **Due date: TBD**

ASSESSMENT

40% Reading, Preparation, and Participation
- Class participation 20%
- Class writing 20%

60% Group Inquiry Project
- Research Question (on time)
- Research Prospectus 5%
- Interview Protocol 5%
- Progress Report 10%
- Peer Review 5%
- Stakeholder Profiles 15% (5% each)
- Reflection Paper 10%
- Final Presentation 10%

Grading Scale

94–100%	A
90–93%	A-
87–89%	B+
84–86%	B
80–83%	B-
77–79%	C+
74–76%	C
70–73%	C-
67–69%	D+
64–66%	D
below 64%	F

Expectations and Policies

- Show up prepared.
- Complete assignments on time. Late assignments will receive a deduction of 5 percent per day
- Be attentive, engaged, and respectful with hosts, lecturers, and everyone else you meet.
- Do not cheat or plagiarize.
- Respect difference.
- Take ownership of your own learning as an individual and as a group.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment, and the academic appeals process.

Disability Services: Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Services at disability services@sit.edu for information and support in facilitating an accessible educational experience. Additional information regarding SIT Disability Services, including a link to the online request form, can be found on the Disability Services website at: www.studyabroad.edu/disabilityservices.