

## ***Food Production, Sustainability & Social Justice in the American South***

POLI 3010 (3 credits)

International Honors Program (IHP)  
**Food Systems 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, 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:

##### **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.

\*We will also brainstorm research questions in this session, using the following reading:

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/>

##### **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:

### **SESSION 1: 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 6<sup>th</sup>. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/06/opinion/sunday/the-hidden-radicalism-of-southern-food.html>

### **SESSION 2: WHAT HAPPENED TO THE FAMILY FARM?**

- Daniel, P. (2013). Farmland blues: The legacy of USDA discrimination. *Southern Spaces*, October 30. <https://southernspaces.org/2013/farmland-blues-legacy-usda-discrimination>

- \*TO LISTEN TO BEFORE SITE VISIT TO RESORA: Southern Foodways Alliance [podcast]. (2015). Fighting for the promised land: A story of farming and racism. Gravy, episode 29. <https://www.southernfoodways.org/gravy/fighting-for-the-promised-land-a-story-of-farming-and-racism-gravy-ep-29/>
- \*TO WATCH BEFORE SITE VISIT TO RESORA: Arc of Justice FILM (20 min) <https://www.arcofjusticefilm.com/>

### **SESSION 3: THE 'FEED THE WORLD' NARRATIVE**

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

### **SESSION 4: 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.

### **SESSION 5: 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 6: 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/>

# 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 beginning stages of a research process that sets you up for an in-depth examination of a topic of interest related to food systems. Starting in our first political science class, 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 prospectus following the steps described below.

#### Research Process:

**Research Question:** Before our third 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. 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. **Due date: TBD**

**Research Prospectus:** Once your research question has been approved, you should prepare a detailed document that catalogues your expectations for methodology and data collection. On this document you should: 1) restate your approved research question; 2) state your hypotheses (or the main ideas that you will test); 3) include a literature review; and 4) outline what you hope to learn in order to answer your question, what type of people you would ideally be able to interview, 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 site/person/case you will investigate, but it can be useful to document your assumptions ahead of time for reflection once you have completed your data collection. Approximate length: 1000 words. **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?
- 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 will be 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**

**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 move forward if you were to continue this project at the graduate level. What are the greatest strengths of your group project and your individual research? What are the weaknesses? What did you learn about research design and methodology, and what challenges arose as you thought about putting your research plan into action in the field? Length: approximately 750 words. **Due date: TBD**

## ASSESSMENT

50% Reading, Preparation, and Participation

Class participation 25%

Class writing 25%

50% Group Inquiry Project

Research Question 10%

Research Prospectus 20%

Peer review 10%

Reflection paper 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](mailto: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](http://www.studyabroad.edu/disabilityservices).