People, Ethics, and Food Security

POLI 3010 (4 credits / 60 hours)

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

Course Description

What does “food security” mean and why do we need to rethink it? In doing so, can we identify the kinds of politics that are required and enabled by the concept of food security, and whether they are democratic and fair?

Along the same lines: What makes an agrifood system sustainable and just? Why do we eat what we eat? 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? What do racism, patriarchy, and capitalism have to do with it all? 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 geopolitics. Throughout this inquiry, we will focus on understanding what comprises an agrifood system – from land and seed to table and bathroom. 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, settler colonialism, aid and development, pastoralism, knowledge politics, enclosure, food safety, 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; written and creative assignments; and group and self-reflection to develop historical and theoretical understandings of the course themes. 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, describe, and analyze major components of agrifood systems and how they relate to food security.
- Identify ways in which racism, patriarchy, and other systems of power and oppression shape food security 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 security.
- Build your self-assessment and self-awareness capabilities.

Course Requirements

COURSE SCHEDULE

Module 1: USA (12 hours)

In our first session, we will discuss what political analysis of agrifood systems might entail and situate ourselves within the context of US settler colonialism. Please review pre-departure materials before coming to Berkeley.

PRE-DEPARTURE: WHAT IS ‘THE POLITICAL’?


SESSION 1: WHO SHOULD EAT WHAT?


SESSION 2: WHAT IS FOOD JUSTICE?

Module 2: Ecuador (16 hours)
To read before arrival:

SESSION 1: THE ‘FEED THE WORLD’ NARRATIVE: WHY FAMINES PERSIST

SESSION 2: COOPERATION AND FRAGMENTATION IN GLOBAL FOOD GOVERNANCE

SESSION 3: IS SCIENCE REAL? KNOWLEDGE AND POWER IN FOOD SYSTEMS

Module 3: Malawi (16 hours)
To read before arrival:

SESSION 1: FOOD AND COLONIALISM

SESSION 2: SEED POLICY AND POLITICS

SESSION 3: ON WHAT GROUND? ENCLOSURE, LAND REFORM, AND LAND GRABS
Module 4: Italy (16 hours)

SESSION 1: ACTIVISM AND RESISTANCE

SESSION 2-3: RTTP FINAL PROJECT
Readings to be handed out upon arrival in Torino.

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.

Short responses
Write two: each one no more than 750 words
1. What have ‘development’ and ‘globalization’ meant for agriculture in Ecuador? Using a specific example, describe the opportunities and challenges that economic connectivity presents for individuals. Your response should include parenthetical citations and follow the citation guide provided in the course materials in Dropbox. Due date: TBD

2. Identify two of the most important processes that have shaped the current agricultural situation in Malawi. Define and explain how each has impacted a specific agricultural issue. Your response should include parenthetical citations and follow the citation guide provided in the course materials in Dropbox. Due date: TBD
Feminist cooking show

Reflection memos:
As we travel throughout the semester, note where you see feminism in action. What are people using feminism to contest and how? What resistance do they face? How could you represent this using the medium of a cooking show? Consider how a cooking show, through a variety of functions and formats, might look different in each of our settings, as well as how it might be perceived by audiences in each place we visit. Write two short memos (400 words) in response to these prompts. Additionally, provide a list of two or three absurd ☺ ideas for a feminist cooking demonstration/show. Due dates: TBD

Video:
Design a feminist cooking demonstration/show that is about 7 minutes long. You should create a video that links class readings and daily activities to broader themes related to feminism and food systems. You will be assigned to groups based on your homestay locations. Each group will be assigned a specific analytical focus that must inform your cooking show. You will be graded on your ability to connect theory and daily life through representation of your analytical focus; the quality of your video; and the ability to answer questions and discuss your and your peers’ videos during class. I will provide more information about this when we arrive in Torino. Due date: TBD

Reacting to the Past debate: Feeding Africa (2002)

Reacting to the Past is a historical role-playing game. In Italy, students will be given elaborate game books which place them in a moment of historical controversy and intellectual ferment – the 2002 debate over the use of GM maize as food aid for famine relief in Southern Africa. The classroom will become the setting of a meeting that took place in Johannesburg, South Africa, at the time. Students will be assigned the role of a specific attendee and try to advance that attendee’s policy agenda in order to achieve their victory objectives. To do so, they will undertake research, write speeches and position papers, give formal speeches, participate in informal debates and negotiations, and otherwise work to win the game. More information about the game will be given in Torino.

ASSESSMENT
40% Reading, preparation, and participation
   Class participation 20%
   Class writing 20%
20% Short responses
15% Feminist cooking show
   Memos 5%
   Video 10%
25% RTTP debate

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.
- 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.