

Getting from Field to Fork ECON3010 (4 credits)

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

This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description

Throughout history, ‘economy’ has meant different things. Aristotle used the term to describe a household’s social reproduction. Adam Smith used it to describe frugality, or the prudent use of resources. The modern use of the term to represent the relations of production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services within a country did not arise until the early to mid 20th century. But each of these conceptualizations of economy has something in common: they necessarily require thinking about interdependency in human and natural systems. Following Smith and other political economists, we often think of economic-ecological relations as being mediated by markets, but this wasn’t always the case. How did markets – for land, labor, water, and crops, among other things – come into being? What extra-economic factors facilitated the creation and prominence of markets in agriculture and food systems?

In this course we will answer these questions, examining specific historical periods and economic practices that shape relations among countries, landowners and tenants, growers and manufacturers, producers and consumers, and subsistence and communal means of production. To understand these relationships, we will pay special attention to capitalist processes of enclosure, accumulation, commodification, and privatization. We’ll examine the benefits of these processes as well as how people passively and actively resist them. And we will situate these processes in their colonial, neoliberal, and global contexts.

Our explorations of ‘economy’ are centered around agrifood systems: What economic factors contribute to food in/security? What economic models offer hope? And, for whom? Thus, we will pay close attention to how capitalist processes impact the daily lives of farm laborers, smallholder farmers, artisans, market vendors, city-dwellers, restaurant workers, cooks, and more. By considering economic questions from the perspectives of diverse stakeholders, this course will combine broad explanatory frameworks with economic processes that are unique to specific geographic locations and social positions.

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 capitalist processes which shape 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.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Identify, describe, and analyze major capitalist processes at work in global food systems.
- Explore the relationship between food systems, exploitation and the gendered division of labor.
- Develop methods for understanding the economics of food systems and food security that combine broad explanatory frameworks and unique lived experiences.
- Distinguish and compare ways in which economic processes play out in different geographical locations, social positions and across time.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English

Instructional Methods

SIT's teaching and learning philosophy is grounded in the experiential learning theory developed by Kolb (1984; 2015) and informed by various scholars, such as Dewey, Piaget, Lewin, among others. Experiential learning theory recognizes that learning is an active process that is not confined to the formal curriculum; "knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 2015, p. 49). Learning involves both content and process. Learning is holistic and happens through various life experiences upon which students draw to generate new ways of knowing and being. Learning involves a community and is a lifelong endeavor. Learning is transformational. The suggested four step-cycle of *a concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation* embedded in the experiential learning model is not linear and might not always happen in that specific order, as any learning is highly context dependent. These stages of taking part in a shared experience; reflecting on that experience by describing and interpreting it; challenging their own assumptions and beliefs to generate new knowledge; and ultimately applying new knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes in a variety of situations and contexts are important for students to engage in to become empowered lifelong learners.

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

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.

Comparative Political Economy Analysis

What have 'development' and 'globalization' meant for agriculture in Ecuador and Malawi? Consider the opportunities and challenges that economic connectivity presents for states and individual stakeholders. Your response should include supporting evidence from outside research as well as your observations from site visits, classes and guest lectures. Please use parenthetical citations and follow the citation guide provided in the course materials in Dropbox. Length: Approximately 1,250 words. Due date: TBD

Project on the Gendered Division of Labor

As we travel throughout the semester, note the gender dynamics that you see. These can relate to power, privilege, family, etc. Try to identify the assumptions you made in noting these relations. As we move through each country, we will apply readings from feminist critical theory to provide conceptual and analytical frameworks to the gender dynamics that we are observing. You are expected to read at least one of the pre-departure readings for Ecuador and Malawi that will allow you to respond to the questions below. In Malawi, we will take time to consider the gender dynamics observed across all four countries and the ways in which our own assumptions have been challenged through a final reflective project.

Ecuador Essay – Gender and the International System: Read one or more of the pre-departure readings for Ecuador. How do global systems of production and trade relate to the social relationships that we see within families and communities? Explain how the argument of the author(s) that you chose applies to your observations of gendered relationships within Ecuador. Support your arguments with evidence from site visits, lectures and your own observations of the people you have encountered while traveling. Please use parenthetical citations and follow the citation guide provided in the course materials in Dropbox. Approximate length: 750 words. Due date: TBD

Malawi Essay – Labor Valuation and the Household: Read one or more of the pre-departure readings for Malawi. What is the relationship between gender, labor and the valuation of labor? Drawing from the arguments of one or more of the readings, apply the author's critique to the gender dynamics that you observe in Malawi. Support your argument with evidence from site visits, lectures and your own observations of the people you have encountered while traveling. Please use parenthetical citations and follow the citation guide provided in the course materials in Dropbox. Approximate length: 750 words. Due date: TBD

Final Reflection:

The purpose of this final project is to reflect on the gender dynamics observed across the entirety of the semester and to explore additional aspects of gender that may not have been fully considered in the first two essays. The final project should include 1) observations of gender dynamics in all four countries and how they relate to structures of wealth, privilege and/or power; and 2) reflection on your own assumptions about gender and how they may have been challenged or changed by your experience this semester. You might ask yourself: Do you know why you have your assumptions? What could an alternative interpretation of your observations look like? You may submit this reflection in the form of a paper of approximately 1,250 words, but more creative submission formats are also acceptable *following consultation* with the traveling faculty. Alternative submission formats include – but are not limited to – videos, blogs or other forms of artistic expression. Students who are interested in sharing their final project will have the option to do so in the relevant class session in Malawi, but all students should come to that class prepared to discuss and analyze the arguments of the critical theorists and their relevance to your own observations. Due date: TBD

GMO Debate: Trade, Aid and Sustainability

We will hold an in-class structured debate in Malawi in which students will explore the multitude of controversies and perspectives around the use of GMOs. In our final class session in Malawi, students will be assigned to take on a particular role, such as a representative of a biotechnology corporation such as Bayer, a philanthropic organization such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, or a smallholder farmer such as those you will meet in Malawi. Students may be working in teams depending on the class size. Each student or team will be expected to conduct research to learn more about the policy position of their assigned role and to prepare a position paper that will be posted online ahead of the debate. The position paper should address questions that will come up in the debate such as: Are GMOs safe to consume, or should the precautionary principle apply? Are GMOs harmful to the environment? What are the socio-economic impacts of GMOs? Should GMO products be labeled? Should countries be able to restrict imports of GMO products? Should GMOs be used for emergency humanitarian relief?

Position Paper:

Position papers should be no more than 500 words, not including the bibliography/citations. They do not need to be a comprehensive response to all of the questions listed above but should accurately reflect the key interests of your assigned role. (The position papers are public documents that will be circulated to the other teams, so you may also wish to prepare a more comprehensive “cheat sheet” for yourself ahead of the debate that you can refer to in order to rebut the arguments raised by others.) Suggested resources to get you started will be provided, but position papers should also draw from your own independent research and include parenthetical citations and a bibliography. Due date: TBD

Debate:

The in-class debate will last for approximately one hour. Each team will be expected to make an opening statement of up to 2 minutes that highlights their key arguments. Once completed, the floor will be open for rebuttals and crossfire questioning. The topics of the debate may be guided by the faculty moderator to ensure sufficient coverage of topics. Shortly before the close of the debate, each team will be allowed to present a 2-minute closing statement. The remaining class time, approximately 30 minutes, will be spent on reflection. Did you agree with the arguments that you made while “in character”? Why or why not? What are the ethical, cultural and scientific questions that merit further consideration? How do you feel about the same set of questions listed above, in your own opinion? Due Date: TBD

Assessment

- 40% Reading, Preparation, Participation
 - Class participation 20%
 - Class writing 20%
- 15% Comparative Political Economy Analysis
- 30% Project on the Gendered Division of Labor
 - Ecuador Essay 10%
 - Malawi Essay 10%
 - Final Reflection 10%
- 15% GMO Debate: Trade, Aid and Sustainability
 - Team Position Paper 5%
 - Participation 10%

Attendance and Participation

Due to the nature of SIT Study Abroad programs, and the importance of student and instructor contributions in each and every class session, attendance at all classes and for all program excursions is required. Criteria for evaluation of student performance include attendance and participation in program activities. Students must fully participate in all program components and courses. Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the coordinator or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program.

Late Assignments

SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program.

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

Program Expectations

- 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.

SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Disability Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.

Course Schedule

**Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs*

Module 1: Ecuador

PRE-DEPARTURE: GENDERED DIVISION OF LABOR PROJECT (READ AT LEAST ONE)

- Gibson-Graham, J.K. (1996) *The End of Capitalism (as We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Chapter 1: Strategies pp. 1-23.
- Collins, Jane (2013) "A Feminist Approach to Overcoming the Closed Boxes of the Commodity Chain," in Wilma A Dunaway (ed.) *Gendered Commodity Chains: Seeing Women's Work and Households in Global Production*, Stanford University Press, pp. 27-37.
- Hartmann, Heidi (2016) *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union*, in McCann, Carole and Jun Seung-kyung (eds.) *Feminist Theory Reader*, 4th ed. New York: Routledge, pp. 214-228.

SESSION 1: TRADE AND AGRICULTURAL POLICY

Carlisle, L. et al. (2019). Transitioning to Sustainable Agriculture Requires Growing and Sustaining an Ecologically Skilled Workforce. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems* Vol. 3, article 96.

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>
- Holt-Gimenez, E. and H. Kleiner. (2019). What is parity? (And why you should care). *Food First*. <https://foodfirst.org/what-is-parity-and-why-you-should-care/>
- Pechlaner, G. and G. Otero (2015) "The Political Economy of Agriculture and Food in North America: Toward Convergence or Divergence?" in Alessandro Bonanno and Lawrence Busch (eds.) *Handbook of the International Political Economy of Agriculture and Food*, Northampton: Edward Elgar. pp. 131-155.

SESSION 3: WHAT IS 'THE ECONOMY'?

Popkin, S. (1979) *The Rational Peasant*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapter 1: pp.1-31.

SESSION 4: THE PARADOX OF DEVELOPMENT

McMichael, P. (2012). *Development and Social Change: A Global Perspective*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2012. Selected chapters (2 and 3): “Instituting the development project” and “International framework”

SESSION 5: NEOLIBERALISM IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Ferguson, J. (2010). The Uses of Neoliberalism. *Antipode* 41(1): 166-184.

Duggan, L. (2003). *The Twilight of Equality*. Introduction: p. ix-xxii.

Wendy Brown on Neoliberalism and the destruction of democracy:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMMJ9HqzRcE>

Module 2: Malawi

PRE-DEPARTURE: GENDERED DIVISION OF LABOR PROJECT (READ AT LEAST ONE)

Bernstein, Jennifer (2017) On Mother Earth and Earth Mothers: Why Environmentalism Has a Gender Problem, *Breakthrough Journal*, No. 7.

Christie, Maria Elisa (2008) *Kitchenspace*, Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 27-41.

Mies, Maria (2007) Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale – Revisited, *International Journal of Green Economics*, Vol. 1, No.3/4, pp. pp.268-275.

SESSION 1: THE LONG GREEN REVOLUTION

Patel, R. (2013). The Long Green Revolution. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 40(1): 1-63. (Pages 1-26, 30-37 and 48-52 are required; you are encouraged to scan the full article available in Dropbox)

SESSION 2: SMALLHOLDER RISK AND EFFICIENCY

Tucker, B. (2014). Rationality and the Green Revolution. *Applied evolutionary anthropology: Darwinian approaches to contemporary world issues*. Eds. Gibson, A. Mhairi and W. David Lawson. New York, NY: Springer New York. p. 15-38.

SESSION 3: PATHOLOGIES OF FOOD AID / GMO DEBATE PREP

Murphy, S. and K. McAfee (2005) U.S. Food Aid: Time to Get it Right, Minneapolis: IATP.

[\[https://www.iatp.org/files/451_2_73512.pdf\]](https://www.iatp.org/files/451_2_73512.pdf)

Recommended Additional Reading for Malawi Sessions:

Schneider, Howard (2012, January 25) “Bill Gates Pushes ‘Green Revolution’ for Small Farms in the Developing World,” *Washington Post*, [\[https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/bill-gates-pushes-green-revolution-for-small-farms-in-developing-world/2012/01/24/qIQAiuFXRQ_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.1375977722b3\]](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/bill-gates-pushes-green-revolution-for-small-farms-in-developing-world/2012/01/24/qIQAiuFXRQ_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.1375977722b3)

Holt-Gimenez, Eric and Lauren Tate Baeza (2016) A Tale of Two Pigeon Peas: Bill Gates’ Failing Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, [\[https://foodfirst.org/a-tale-of-two-pigeon-peas-bill-gates-failing-alliance-for-a-green-revolution-in-africa/\]](https://foodfirst.org/a-tale-of-two-pigeon-peas-bill-gates-failing-alliance-for-a-green-revolution-in-africa/)

Bezner Kerr, R., C. Hickey, E. Lupafya, and L. Dakishoni. (2019). Repairing rifts or reducing inequalities? Agroecology, food sovereignty, and gender justice in Malawi. *Journal of Peasant Studies* (online).

SESSION 4: CORPORATE CONSOLIDATION AND FINANCIALIZATION OF THE FOOD SYSTEM

Clapp, J. and S. Isakson (2018) Risky Returns: The Implications of Financialization In the Food System, *Development and Change*, 49(2), pp. 437-460.

Clapp, J. (2018) Mega-Mergers on the Menu: Corporate Concentration and the Politics of Sustainability in the Global Food System, *Global Environmental Politics*, 18:2, pp.12-33.

SESSION 5: GMO DEBATE: TRADE, AID AND SUSTAINABILITY

Zerbe, Noah (2004) Feeding the Famine? American Food Aid and the GMO Debate in Southern Africa, *Food Policy*, 29:6, pp. 593-608.

Paarlberg, Robert (2014) A Dubious Success: The NGO Campaign Against GMOs, *GM & Food*, 5:3, pp. 223-228.

Read the Team Position Papers

SESSION 6: GENDERED DIVISION OF LABOR PROJECT REFLECTIONS

Ackery, Brooke (2008) Feminist Methodological Reflection. In Klotz, A. Prakash D. (eds.) *Qualitative Methods in International Relations*. Research Methods Series. Palgrave Macmillan, London.