GEOG 3320: Food Systems: Issues in Security and Sustainability

Instructor: Dr. Philip Loring
Meets: Tues/Thurs 1:00-2:30 PM
Room: MCKN 120
Email: phil.loring@uoguelph.ca | Office: Hutt 352 | Ext: 54315

Course Description

This class provides students with historiographic and social-ecological perspectives on contemporary food systems challenges around the world. The class is taught in two phases: the first attends to food systems historically and in comparison. Hunting and gathering, slash and burn agriculture, pastoralism and transhumance, and other small-scale/peasant systems are explored with respect to environmental and social dimensions, concluding with a critical exploration of the agricultural revolution. In phase two, the contemporary industrial/chemical global food system complex is interrogated alongside issues such as food insecurity, hunger, population growth, the Green Revolution, and the emerging emphasis on big data. The class concludes with a discussion of how to move forward in addressing the food systems challenges of the 21st Century.

We will draw on a variety of readings, activities, and other materials in this course, including writing from geography, anthropology, philosophy, and Indigenous studies. We will also engage with art, literature, and self reflection. The course will be structured primarily in a seminar discussion style, where students will discuss and share in small breakout groups as a prelude to class-wide discussion.

It is important that this class engage with people’s interests if the experience is to be a positive one for all. As such, we will make effort to steer the course in the direction of student’s interests. The final structure of the course from meeting to meeting depends largely on the final enrollment and what is possible and preferable as a mode of interaction given the number of us in the group. In general, the course will be characterized by discussion and individual assignments, though group work will be common throughout the semester.

Anticipated Learning Outcomes

- Working familiarity with key concepts including food systems, food security, carrying capacity, tragedy of the commons, agroecology, etc.
- Knowledge of historical and contemporary food systems.
- Ability to identify and discuss the root causes of food insecurity, hunger, and population growth.
- Familiarity with debates regarding intellectual property, genetically modified organism, and small versus large scale solutions.
Course Materials

Books (required):


Course Topics and Schedule (subject to change):

Introductions

Wk1: Getting started: personal introductions, class aims and objectives, class survey. We get the bad news out of the way.

Wk2: Food systems & sustainability

History and in Comparison

Wk3: Early food systems, agricultural origins

Wk4: When food systems succeed and fail (and why): ecology and evolution

Wk5: When food systems change (and why): society and culture

Contemporary Issues

Wk6: Introduction to contemporary issues

Wk7: Population, hunger, and food production

Wk8: Intellectual property and genetic modification

WK9: Local/alternative food systems

Wk10: Climate change and food systems

Wk11: Food Sovereignty, Indigenous issues

Wk12: Final Project

Course Assignments

Standpoint [15%]: You are to write a short personal statement that describes not just your thoughts / philosophy on food-related issues, but how you think you have come to think this way. You may not entirely know, or you may only have just started thinking about these things. That’s OK. There’s no right or wrong answers here, just evidence that you’re thinking carefully and critically about this. The assignment can be written, drawn, or involve some other form of multimedia Creative work is highly encouraged for all parts of this assignment.
Dense Questions (x4) [20%, 5% ea.]: A dense question is a short (300-600 word) essay that ends with a thoughtful and discussion-provoking question. You will post this in the online discussion group. Your question can be drawn from any of the assigned readings to date. It is intended to make your peers really think, and writing these is an excellent study habit.

System Diagram [15%]: You will construct a systems diagram (based on one of several introduced approaches) that details your understanding of some food system challenge. This should seek to identify issues such as feedbacks, dependences, and illustrate the role of scale.

Midterm [20%]: Pro/Con/Rise Above Part 1: What is an issue in food, food systems, and sustainability that you care about? Develop an outline, summary, and 5 references that will help you present the major arguments and identify a path for rising above.

Final [20%]: Pro/Con/Rise Above Part 2: For this “UnEssay” assignment, you must produce some informational material, be it a factsheet, or short video or buzzfeed listicle, or some other creative product, building on the midterm assignment that explores a conflict in food systems.

Participation (online and in-class) [10%]: You are expected to participate in conversations in class and/or on the discussion board. When posting, you will pose at least one question or comment regarding the material and respond to at least one posted by your fellow classmates. This will give you the opportunity to think critically about the class discussions and material and provide your perspective in a low-pressure environment.

General Policy on Late Assignments / Make-up Tests

All writing assignments are to be submitted via the Courselink dropbox no later than 4pm on their due date. Late assignments will not be accepted without prior communication related to some legitimate and verifiable issue. Begin your writing assignments early so that you have plenty of time to organize your submissions to the Courselink dropbox. Only under very specific and rare occurrences will computing challenges be accepted as a reason for an extension to the due-date. Students are expected to make every effort to meet deadlines. That said, when you find yourself unable to meet a deadline because of illness or compassionate reasons, please inform the course instructor and the teaching assistant by way of email or in person immediately, prior to the due date of a given assignment. We are only able to make accommodations if we are aware of your situation, so please keep the lines of communication open as early and often as possible.
**Academic Integrity Statement**

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and it is the responsibility of all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. University of Guelph students have the responsibility of abiding by the University’s policy on academic misconduct regardless of their location of study; faculty, staff and students have the responsibility of supporting an environment that discourages misconduct. Students need to remain aware that instructors have access to and the right to use electronic and other means of detection.

For the purposes of this class, plagiarism is defined as the theft of the intellectual creation of another person without proper attribution. It is the use of someone else’s words or ideas or data without proper documentation or acknowledgment. Quotations must be clearly marked, and sources of information, ideas, or opinions of others must be clearly indicated in all written work. This applies to paraphrased ideas as well as to direct quotations. A student must acknowledge and fairly recognize any contributions made to their personal research and scholarly work by others, including other students.

- Any direct copy of text, beyond 4-6 consecutive words, is considered plagiarism
- Uncited use of photos or drawings or other visual materials is considered plagiarism
- Presenting an idea, concept, or theory as your own, even if in your own words, when it clearly was pulled from someone else’s work, is also plagiarism.

To combat plagiarism it is best to practice “generous scholarship”, which seeks to err on the side of caution in giving people credit for their work. Your work is stronger, not weaker, if it is heavily cited.

There are many resources on campus to assist you with proper citation and paraphrasing. Please see the instructor for help with these. These include the software TurnItIn, which we will not use for final assignments, but you are free to use in order to check your work.

When in doubt about a citation requirement or your approach to paraphrasing, ask your librarian or your course instructor or your academic supervisor for assistance.

Before you submit any written work, review it against the following checklist:

- I have acknowledged the use of all ideas with accurate citations.
- I have used the words of another author, instructor, information source, etc., and I have properly acknowledged this and used proper citation.
- In paraphrasing the work of others, I have put the idea into my own words and did not just change some words or rearrange the sentence structure.
- I have checked my work against my notes to be sure that I have correctly referenced all quotes or ideas.
- When using direct quotations I have used quotation marks (or other means to clearly identify the quoted text) and provided full citations.
☐ Apart from material that is a direct quotation, everything else in the work is presented in my own words.

☐ When paraphrasing the work of others I have acknowledged the source or the central idea.

☐ I have checked all citations for accuracy (e.g. page numbers, journal volume, dates, web page addresses).

☐ I have used a recognized reference style (i.e. APA, MLA, Chicago etc.) consistently throughout my work.

☐ My list of references/bibliography includes all of the sources used to complete the work.

☐ I have accurately and completely described any data or evidence I have collected or used.

☐ I fully understand all of the content (e.g., terms, concepts, theories, data, equations, ideas) of the work that I am submitting.

☐ The content of the work has not been shared with another student, unless permitted by the instructor.

☐ The content of the work reflects wholly my own intellectual contribution or analysis and not that of another student(s), unless the instructor approved the submission of group or collaborative work.

☐ If another person proofread my work it was for the sole purpose of indicating areas of concern, which I then corrected myself.

☐ This work has not been submitted, whole or in part, for credit in another course or at another institution, without the permission of the current course instructor(s).

**Student Accessibility Services**
The University of Guelph is committed to creating a barrier-free environment. Providing services for students is a shared responsibility among students, faculty and administrators. This relationship is based on respect of individual rights, the dignity of the individual and the University community’s shared commitment to an open and supportive learning environment. Students requiring service or accommodation, whether due to an identified, ongoing disability or a short-term disability should contact Student Accessibility Services as soon as possible. For more information, contact SAS at 519-824-4120 ext. 56208 or email csd@uoguelph.ca or see the website.