

**GEO 4354: GEOGRAPHY OF THE GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEM**

Office: SIPA 319  
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Hours: T/TH 11:00-noon  
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*About the Course*

Food is the universal commodity and our most direct link to the natural environment. Today this link is increasingly mediated by transnational corporations, which control much of the production process from the patenting of seeds to the transcontinental shipment of agricultural commodities to the delivery of ready-to-eat products to our tables. This course explores how the spatial organization of the global food system is critical to our understanding of the development of the world economy, from the first New World sugar plantations to NAFTA and the WTO. Ranging in scale from the level of the individual to national and global levels, the course will examine issues of food security, food sovereignty, trade, and environmental sustainability. We will trace the historical development of food production and distribution on a global scale, marking important developments such as the petrochemical revolution, the Green Revolution, genetic modification, and fast food marketing. We will consider how, at the global level, hunger is now increasing while climate change, oil prices and the diversion of food crops to fuel production point toward worsening crisis. Finally, we will look at proposals and initiatives to improve the food system in terms of sustainability, nutrition and affordability, from the local scale to the international system.

*Learning Goals:*

Students will learn about the central importance of food and agriculture in structuring human relationships to one another, to other species, and to the natural environment at multiple geographic scales, from the individual to the global level. By looking at the food system in terms of its historical development, its political economic structure, its environmental impacts, and the social and geographic differences that characterize it, students' ability to analyze the food system, including their own participation in it, will be enhanced. We will also examine alternatives to globalizing trends so that students, as informed citizens, will become aware of choices and options and possibilities for change.

*Learning Outcomes:*

Students will develop awareness of the significance of food and agriculture to processes of globalization and the impacts of globalization in transforming agrarian relations and food systems.

Students will acquire global perspective in analyzing their place in the global food system, in historical and geographical context.

Students will demonstrate global engagement by analyzing the relationship between national and global agendas in potentially competing visions for food security and food sovereignty.

### *Course Grading and Requirements*

1) Participation & Assignments	40%
2) Exam One	30%
3) Final Exam	<u>30%</u>
	100%

### *Required Texts*

Mintz, Sidney. (1985) *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Viking Penguin.

Young, E.M. (2012) *Food and Development*. London: Routledge.

We will make extensive use of readings posted on Blackboard, articles accessed via the FIU library and newspapers available on-line. Therefore, make sure that your FIU library card is activated!!

### *Important Dates*

Due: Personal Food Essay	January 26
First Exam	February 23
Due: Food Security Brief	March 23
Due: Topical Research Paper	April 20
Final Exam	April 25

### **Weekly Schedule of Topics & Readings**

#### **Part I: The modern food system: how did we get here?**

#### **WEEK 1: JANUARY 10/12 THE WORLD FOOD SYSTEM: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

**READING:** Sidney Mintz, 1985. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Viking Penguin, Introduction and Chapters 1 & 2.

January 10: Introduction: as a class, we construct a **top ten list** of reasons to study food.

January 12: Lecture: making the modern food system...the 20,000 year road to the Oreo.

#### **WEEK 2: JANUARY 17/19: DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORLD FOOD SYSTEM: THE CASE OF SUGAR**

**READING:** Sidney Mintz, 1985. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Viking Penguin, Chapters 3, 4 & 5.

January 17: Lecture: the historical geography of sugarcane in the Americas and the rise of its competitor, the sugar beet.

January 19: Discussion of *Sweetness and Power*.

### **WEEK 3: JANUARY 24/26: SWEETNESS & POWER/THE RISE OF THE INDUSTRIAL MEAT SYSTEM**

**READINGS:** Richard H. Robbins, 1999. “The Story of Beef” from his book, *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon; William Cronon, 1991. “Annihilating Space: Meat” from his book, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. New York: Norton; Michael Pollan, 2002, Power Steer, *New York Times*, March 31 AND Gary Taubes, Is Sugar Toxic? *New York Times*, April 13, 2011.

January 24: Lecture and discussion on the environmental transformation of the U.S. West with the rise of the industrial meat system, linking historical development to contemporary meat production.

January 26: In-class activity: in small groups, link the historical development of the commodities sugar and beef to contemporary issues and problems raised by their consumption. We will reconvene as a class to discuss the power behind sweetness and beef.

### **WEEK 4: JANUARY 31/FEBRUARY 2: WHITE BREAD?/WHAT ARE “FOOD REGIMES” AND “DIETARY REGIMES”?**

**READINGS:** Aaron Bobrow-Strain, 2008, White bread bio-politics: purity, health and the triumph of industrial baking. *Cultural Geographies* 15: 19-40. Harriet Friedmann, 1994. “The International Relations of Food: The Unfolding Crisis of National Regulation,” pp. 174-204 in B. Harriss-White and R. Hoffenberg, eds. *Food: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Oxford: Blackwell; Philip McMichael, 2000. “Global Food Politics” in *Hungry for Profit* (New York: Monthly Review); and Anthony Winson, 2014, Between Producers and Eaters: Shaping Mass Diets, chapter one in *The Industrial Diet: The Degradation of Food and the Struggle for Healthy Eating* (New York University Press)

January 31: First, discuss “White bread”. Second, in class small group activity based on the personal food essay assignment: identify, through individuals’ experiences, the myriad ways our relationship to food is shaped and structured, from levels ranging from personal choice to global political economic structures. Regroup and discuss as an entire class, using students’ life experiences to illustrate national and regional differences in the global food system.

February 2: Lecture and discussion on food regimes and dietary regimes

### **WEEK 5: FEBRUARY 7/9: WE ARE WHAT WE EAT?!**

**READING:** Eric Schlosser, 2001. Selected chapters from *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*; Anthony Winson, 2014, “The Spatial Colonization of the Industrial Diet” and “Meals Away from Home” in *The Industrial Diet: The Degradation of Food and the Struggle for Healthy Eating*.

February 7: In class film and discussion: King Corn

February 9: Discussion of readings on Industrial Food, Fast Food, Supermarkets and Food Away from Home.

## **WEEK 6: FEBRUARY 14/16: SUPERSIZE PROFITS!**

**READINGS:** Finish Eric Schlosser, 2001. *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*; and Michael Moss, The Extraordinary Science of Addictive Junk Food. *New York Times*, February 20, 2013 and Dignity: Fast Food Workers and A New Form of Labor Activism, William Finnegan, *New Yorker*, September 15, 2014.

February 14: In class film, Soul Food Junkies.

February 16: Discussion of soul food, fast food, junk food, and labor. In class debate: The ethical responsibilities of food producers: are junk food corporations comparable to cigarette companies?

## **WEEK 7: FEBRUARY 21/23: REVIEW/EXAM 1**

**Part II: Whose food system is it? Who wins, who loses? How do we change it?**

## **WEEK 8: FEB. 28/MARCH 2: HUNGER & MALNUTRITION/FAMINE & OBESITY**

**READINGS:** E.M. Young, 2012. *Food and Development*. London: Routledge. Chapters 1 through 3 and Guthman, J. (2012) Doing Justice to Bodies: Reflections on Food Justice, Race, and Biology. *Antipode* 46(5): 1153-1171.

February 28: Lecture on the politics of hunger and malnutrition, Malthusian perspectives, the “nutritional transition” and “obesogenic environments.”

March 2: Discussion: how do we explain inequalities in access to food? Why do differences in explanation matter? How do differences in ideology shape explanation? What are the proximate and structural determinants of food security?

## **WEEK 9: MARCH 7/9: FOOD & POWER AT MULTIPLE SCALES OF ANALYSIS**

**READING:** E.M. Young, 2012. *Food and Development*. London: Routledge. Chapters 4 through 6; and Food Banks Take on a Contributor to Diabetes: Themselves, *New York Times*, June 17, 2016.

February 21: In class film: *A Place at the Table*

February 23: Discussion linking film and readings. How does corporate globalization impact agricultural production and food consumption? What role do food aid organization and/or food banks play?

## **WEEK 10: SPRING BREAK!! MARCH 13-18**

## **WEEK 11: MARCH 21/23: GENDER/CONFLICT/ALTERNATIVES**

**READING:** E.M. Young, 2012. *Food and Development*. London: Routledge. Chapters 7 through 9 and *Hunger on Campus: The Challenge of Food Insecurity for College Students*.

March 21: Lecture on 1) the role of gender relations in the food system; 2) on the impact of conflict situations on access to food and 3) the relation between food aid and food security.

March 23: In small groups, students discuss *Hunger on Campus*. How might we study hunger on a campus, for example, at FIU? What are some of the causal factors of campus hunger? How can we remedy it? We reconvene as a class to discuss and strategize.

## **WEEK 12: MARCH 28/30: WHAT WOULD A SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM LOOK LIKE?**

**READINGS:** Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter, UN General Assembly. 12/20/10; Brian Halweil. Farming in the Public Interest (*State of the World 2002*); Knowing Good Food: Immigrant Knowledge and the Racial Politics of Farmworker Food Insecurity, Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern (2012) *Antipode* 46(5) 1190-1204; and Lengnick, L. (2015) The vulnerability of the US food system to climate change. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences* 5(3): 348-361; John Bowe, 2003. Nobodies: Does Slavery Still Exist in America? *New Yorker* & articles TBA.

March 28: Lecture on sustainable agriculture and climate change.

March 30: In class activity: each small group presents an assigned reading. Then the entire class discusses and analyzes the readings as a whole.

## **WEEK 13: APRIL 4/6: SAFE FOOD?**

**READINGS:** Begin Marion Nestle, selected chapters, (2003) *Safe Food: Bacteria, Biotechnology, and Bioterrorism* & selected news articles TBA.

April 4: Lecture and discussion on food safety, regulation, and technologies.

April 6: In class film, *The World According to Monsanto*

## **WEEK 14: APRIL 11/13: GM FOOD: WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHY?**

**READINGS:** Finish Marion Nestle, *Safe Food: Bacteria, Biotechnology, and Bioterrorism* & Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele, 2008, Monsanto's Harvest of Fear in *Vanity Fair* @ <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2008/05/monsanto200805> ; & Mark Shapiro, 2002. Sowing Disaster? How Genetically Engineered American Corn Has Altered the Global Landscape. *The Nation*, October 28 @ <http://www.thenation.com/article/sowing-disaster> & articles on GMO salmon.

April 11: Discussion of the history, politics, and terminology of genetically modified foods and the differing national and international responses to GMOs.

April 13: In class debate on labeling genetically modified organisms in the US food system: to label or not to label, that is the question.

## WEEK 15: APRIL 18/20: TOPICAL PAPERS/EXAM REVIEW

April 18: On the menu: Topical Papers! Each student has a chance to present the question that drove their topical paper exploration and their most interesting, surprising, and/or important finding.

April 20: Exam Review and Discussion.

**FINALS WEEK: THE FINAL EXAM IS ON TUESDAY APRIL 25 @ 9:45.**

### *Assignments*

#### **1) Personal Food Essay:** Placing Yourself in the Global Food System.

Three pages typed, double-spaced. This is not a food diary but rather an essay reflecting on your relationship to the global food system. **First:** Discuss key concepts from readings, lecture and class discussion that shed light on your food habits, such as, for example, Sidney Mintz's ideas regarding the relationship between the historical rise of the modern food system and changes in food culture and consumption. **Possible themes:** You might discuss how your culinary habits are shaped by family structure, culture, geography, and/or lifestyle. How do you get your food? What do you know about it? Who prepares it? What are your concerns or fears with regard to food? How have your food habits changed over time and place? How does your diet reflect the globalization of the food system? Where do you get information regarding food issues and how does this affect your choices?

**2) Food Security/Food Sovereignty Brief:** Prepare a five page (double-spaced) brief on the critical food security/sovereignty issues facing a single country of your choice. **First:** provide a definition of each term ("food security" and "food sovereignty"), identifying your sources, and explain the difference between them. **Second:** use ideas from lectures and class readings to outline the critical food security and food sovereignty issues facing the country you have chosen. Use international agency websites, government documents, academic texts, and journalistic reports as data sources. You need to include in-text citations and a bibliography to document your sources. Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

[http://www.fao.org/spfs/faq\\_en.stm](http://www.fao.org/spfs/faq_en.stm)

<http://www.foodsecurity.net/gateway.html>

<http://www.developmentgateway.org/node/130622/>

<http://www.eldis.org/food/>

<http://www.worldhungeryear.org>

<http://www.foodfirst.org/>

<http://www.foodsovereignty.org/new/>

<http://viacampesina.org/en/>

<http://www.grain.org/>

<http://usfoodsovereigntyalliance.org/member-organizations/>

As you write your brief, think of it as a concise report that you might be preparing for a nongovernmental organization, a policymaker or an activist who is interested in the food problems of a particular country. Therefore you need to outline the scope of the problem. For example, who in the country is suffering from food insecurity? Is there a geographic dimension, a particular region or a distinct rural/urban pattern? You also need to discuss the proximate and structural causes of

food shortages. How does access to food reflect and intensify patterns of inequality? How does food sovereignty enter into the power relations within the country and also between it and the international system? In your brief, you may address issues relating to food production, distribution, exports and imports. You might discuss previous attempts at solving the problem and potential remedies. In the case of a country that is making progress on alleviating hunger, you can document their successes.

**3) Topical Research Paper on the Global/Local Food System:** 5 to 7 pages (double-spaced) plus bibliography. **This paper begins with a question that you pose.** The final paper gives you a chance to explore further an issue raised in class or address an aspect of the food system that we did not cover. One strategy is to look at an aspect of the local food system. If you choose to do this you can use primary material such as an interview or site visits as a significant component of your research. The **main requirement is that you choose a topic that you find compelling** and that the paper you produce is scholarly and original. This means that you can use popular sources but you also **MUST** refer to some scholarly sources. We will discuss potential topics in class.

Here are a few of the many interesting and useful food-related websites:

<http://www.foodtank.org/>

<http://www.foodroutes.org/>

<http://foodchainworkers.org/>

<http://www.growingpower.org/>

<http://www.urbanoasisproject.org/>

<http://www.fairfoodprogram.org/> organized by <http://www.ciw-online.org/>

#### *A Note on Requirements*

All of the assigned readings are mandatory. You are responsible for all information, materials, and instructions disseminated during the class period. Lectures, films and readings are complementary but not identical, and the exams will be based on all sources. Therefore, attendance is essential to doing well in this class. At various times throughout the semester I will take attendance at the beginning of class.

#### *Electronic Devices*

Cell phones must be off for the duration of the class. Laptop use is permitted **ONLY** for the purpose of taking notes.

#### *Make-Up Policy*

No make up exams without either 1) a note from a doctor that a student was incapable of attending for medical reasons or 2) documentation of a death in the immediate family.

#### *Policy on Plagiarism*

Plagiarism is cheating. Don't do it. The disciplinary action that will be taken in the case of plagiarism is explained in the section on "Academic Misconduct" in the *Student Handbook*. If you are uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism, check out the FIU library website:

<http://library.fiu.edu/assistance/plagiarism>. In addition, we will spend time in class demonstrating and discussing proper use and citation of sources.