

**Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
COURSE SYLLABUS**

**STSS 4260 – FOOD, FARMS AND FAMINE
Fall 2012**

Tuesday and Friday, 2:00-3:50 pm, Sage Lab 2707

Instructor: Abby Kinchy

Campus address: Sage Lab Building, Room 5406

Phone: 518/276-6980

Email: kincha@rpi.edu

Office hours: Tues. and Fri., 12:30-1:30 pm, and by appointment

Course Description:

What does the food we eat say about who we are? Why are so many people hungry? How do corporations and globalization processes affect food and agriculture today? Does “sustainable agriculture” offer a viable alternative to environmentally-destructive farming practices? We will address these questions and more in this advanced undergraduate course that provides students with a wide-ranging understanding of the environmental and social context of food, farming and hunger. Drawing primarily on sociological concepts and research, the class will take a “food systems” approach, analyzing food as it travels from farm to table as part of an interconnected process. Students will examine the production, distribution, marketing, preparation and consumption of food to understand why we eat the way we do and how our food choices affect other people and the environment.

Semester Overview:

The theme of the course this semester is “food justice.” We will address this theme in two broad units, local food justice and global food justice, although you will come to find that “local” and “global” are hard to pull apart when we’re talking about food. Each unit of the course has a major assignment requiring original data collection and analysis. Through these projects, you will not only learn important research methods in the social sciences but also increase public understanding of crucial food issues. In the first unit, you will explore local food justice by contributing to a community food assessment for the City of Troy. In the second unit, you will examine global food justice by tracing the links in a “global commodity chain.” Throughout the semester, you will also keep a Food Justice Journal, a place to write and reflect on the issues and ideas you are encountering in the course.

Students enrolled in this course should be prepared to do a great deal of reading, writing, research, and speaking. This is an advanced undergraduate course, aimed at preparing students to do graduate level work and professional research. A major text of the course is *Food Justice* by Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi. Chapters from that book are assigned throughout the semester. We will use *The Atlas of Food* throughout the course, in order to make visualize global patterns and cross-national differences in food production, trade, and consumption. In addition, there are many articles and book chapters that are available for download on the course LMS. We will relax and have a little fun when we read the book *Fast Food Nation* by Eric Schlosser. On days marked “book club” in this syllabus, we will have informal, open discussion (with snacks!) about a section of that book.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

When students have successfully completed this course they will be able to:

- Recognize and apply key sociological concepts for analysis of food and agricultural issues, such as social class, social construction, gender, commodity chain, agri-food system, McDonaldization, food regimes, vertical and horizontal integration, globalization, and nutritionalization.
- Use sociological theories and concepts to interpret, explain, and critique the socio-cultural, political, economic, and philosophical factors that influence contemporary food production, distribution, and consumption.
- Use library resources and course materials to investigate, describe, compare, and contrast food commodity chains.
- Generate original hypotheses about the agri-food system—including possible solutions to problems such as hunger, environmental degradation, and rural poverty.

Required Texts:

Readings for this course include three books and an assortment of articles. The articles will be made available online through the course LMS site. Please purchase the following books, available at the RPI bookstore.

Eric Schlosser (2005) *Fast Food Nation*. Harper Collins Publishers.

Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi (2010) *Food Justice*. The MIT Press.

Erik Millstone and Tim Lang (2008) *The Atlas of Food*. University of California Press.

Grading:

Final grades will be based on student performance on the following assignments (see descriptions, attached)

Food Justice Journal – 30%

Troy Food Assessment – 30%

Commodity Chain Analysis – 30%

Classroom Participation – 10%

You will receive a final letter grade, based on the following scale:

A = 4.0 = 94-100%

A- = 3.7 = 90-93%

B+ = 3.3 = 87-89%

B = 3.0 = 84-86%

B- = 2.7 = 80-83%

C+ = 2.3 = 77-79%

C = 2.0 = 74-76%

C- = 1.7 = 70-73%

D+ = 1.3 = 67-69%

D = 1.0 = 64-66%

F = 0.0 = 0-63%

Attendance and Participation Policy:

This class will primarily follow a discussion format. All students are expected to contribute to classroom discussion, both in small groups and the full class. Your class participation grade will also be based on your demonstration of respectful listening to one another and serious consideration of diverse viewpoints. Although attendance will not explicitly be taken, I expect students to attend class regularly and to come to class having completed the readings and prepared comments and questions.

Please avoid disruptions such as arriving late or packing your bag before the end of class. Turn off cell phones and do not use text messaging during class time. These behaviors will be considered in your participation grade.

Policy on Laptops:

Laptop computers have an important place in the classroom, but the potential for misuse is very high. Students may use laptops in class for the following purposes: taking notes on the lecture/discussion, referring to readings available on LMS, or completing classroom assignments. Use of email, instant messaging, searching the internet for material unrelated to classroom activities, and doing work for another class are not permitted during class time. Although it would be difficult and excessively invasive to monitor each student's computer activities during class, I am counting on each one of you to recognize the value of this policy and adhere to it. If it appears that laptops are being used repeatedly for non-course-related activities, I will create a no-laptops policy.

If you feel that it is difficult to take notes on your computer without being drawn into multi-tasking (chatting, Facebook, etc.), I strongly recommend that you avoid temptation by taking notes on paper.

Expectations for Reading:

Students are expected to come to class having thoroughly read and studied the assigned text(s). What do I mean by "studied"? That means: think about what you read, ask yourself questions, make note of points that need clarification, prepare comments that you might make in class, and commit key names and concepts to memory. The following is a list of questions that should be helpful to keep in mind as you read and prepare for class discussion:

- What is the argument that the author is trying to make?
- What do the author's assumptions seem to be?
- Why was this text written? How is it important or not?
- In what ways is the argument persuasive or not to you? Why?
- What do you think the author failed to consider about the issue? Why?
- Where do you agree or disagree with the author, and why?
- What strikes you as particularly interesting, curious, insightful, irritating, etc.?
- How does the author's argument relate to other things you have read?
- How does this reading relate to your own experiences and to current events?

Expectations for Writing:

Even if you are an experienced writer, I strongly urge that you take advantage of the research and writing assistance resources available of this campus. Visit the Center for Communication Practices and familiarize yourself with the services it offers (info at <http://www.ccp.rpi.edu/>). The library also has excellent reference and research resources (info at <http://library.rpi.edu/update.do?artcenterkey=562>).

All materials handed in should be typed, double-spaced, 12 point font, Times New Roman, with standard one-inch margins. References should be cited using APA style (details at <http://www.ccp.rpi.edu/apa.html#citations>).

Academic Integrity:

Student-teacher relationships are built on trust. Students must trust that teachers have made appropriate decisions about the structure and content of courses they teach, and teachers must trust that assignments that students turn in are their own. Acts that violate this trust undermine the educational process. Any acts of plagiarism will have grave consequences. The *Rensselaer Handbook of Student Rights and Responsibilities* defines various forms of academic dishonesty and you should make yourself familiar with these. In this class, all individual assignments that are turned in for a grade must represent the student's own work. Any instances of plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the assignment. Repeated instances of academic dishonesty will be grounds for failing the course. Plagiarism includes purchasing term papers; copying or handing in the writing of another student (current or former); using sentences verbatim from a published source without appropriate referencing (when in doubt, cite the source); and presenting as one's own the detailed argument of a published source. "Recycling" papers written in other courses is also forbidden.

Schedule of Assignments:

Please note the following:

- All reading assignments must be completed before the class meeting on the date indicated.
- Assignments may change at the instructor’s discretion. Any changes and adjustments to assignments will be announced in class. Be sure to ask me or a classmate about any changes if you miss class.
- The dates of field trips have not yet been finalized and are subject to change. This may affect the schedule of assignments.

Date/Topic	Readings	Journal Topic	Bring to Class
Tue., Aug. 28 – Coming to the Table	Syllabus. We will visit a photography exhibit on campus.		
Fri., Aug. 31- Introducing Food Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Food Justice</i>, Introduction • E. Melanie DuPuis, et al, “Just Food?” • <i>The Atlas of Food</i>, Introduction and Part I (read text and study the diagrams) 	Reflect on your reaction to the readings. Comment on the meaning of “food justice.” Is this a new concept for you? How does it compare to other ideas of justice you might have?	Go online and find at least three organizations working on “food justice.” How do they define “food justice”? Bring the definitions and their sources to class.
Tue., Sept. 4 - Community Food Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What’s Cooking in Your Food System: A Guide to Community Food Assessment</i> • Clark, et al., “Food Insecurity in Troy, NY” 		Today we will begin planning our Pilot Troy Food Assessment. Attendance is essential!
Fri., Sept. 7 - Farm Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Food Justice</i>, Ch 1 • Arturo Rodriguez, “Cheap Food: Workers Pay the Price” • Coalition of Immokalee Workers, “About CIW” 	How much do you know about the labor involved in producing the food you eat? Choose one meal you ate this week and reflect on the labor process that must have been involved in getting it to your plate.	
Tue, Sept. 11 - Food Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Food Justice</i>, Ch 2 • Mark Nord and Mark Prell, “Struggling to Feed the Family: What Does It Mean To Be Food Insecure?” • Chris Churchill, “Food deserts in a land of plenty” • Gina Kolata, “Studies question the pairing of food deserts and obesity” • Mari Gallagher, “Response” 		

Fri., Sept 14 - Consuming Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Food Justice</i>, Ch 3 • Julie Guthman, "Whose Problem is Obesity?" • Jennifer Lisa Falbe and Marion Nestle, "The Politics of Government Dietary Advice" 	Reflect on your own experiences related to body fat and nutrition. How do you think your experiences are affected by your social class, race/ethnicity, gender, nationality, and location?	
SATURDAY, SEPT. 15 – FIELD TRIP	We will visit the following food assets in Troy: The Farmers Market, The Veggie Mobile, and The Collard City Growers. Arrange your own transport. Details will be provided in class.	What did you observe on the field trip? How are the three food assets we visited similar? Different? Who benefits from each?	
Tue., Sept. 18 – No class meeting	This is a good time to set up meetings with Prof. Kinchy to make sure you are on track to complete your Troy Food Profile.		
Fri., Sept. 21 - Food Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Food Justice</i>, Ch 4 • Janet Poppendieck, "Want amid Plenty: From Hunger to Inequality" 	Reflect on the research and observations you have done so far. How is your experience as an RPI student different from that of other Troy residents, when it comes to food issues? What food issues and assets are shared by RPI and the broader Troy community?	Due: Troy Food Profile
Tues., Sept. 25 - Farm Policy POSSIBLE TRIP TO PRODUCE PROJECT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michael Pollan, "You are what you grow" • Julie Guthman, "Does Farm Policy Make You Fat?" 		Turn in Food Justice Journal for review.
Fri., Sept. 28 - Growing Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Food Justice</i>, Ch 6 • Alfonso Morales, "Growing Food and Justice" • Linda C. Majka and Theo J. Majka, "Organizing U.S. Farm Workers: A Continuous Struggle" 	Reflect on the food justice successes you have seen and read about. What makes these projects successful? What obstacles did they face? Are there lessons to be drawn from these examples?	
Tues., Oct. 2 - New Food Routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Food Justice</i>, Ch 7 • Dan Halpern, "Citizen WalMart: The Retail Giant's Unlikely Romance with Small Farmers" 		

Fri., Oct. 5 - Transforming the Food Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Food Justice</i>, Ch 8 	<p>Reflect on your experience preparing for, conducting, and analyzing the interview. What worked well? What could you have done better? What did you learn by doing an interview that you might not have been able to discover otherwise?</p>	<p>Due before class: Post full interview transcript and summary on the LMS site for classmates to view.</p>
Fri., Oct. 12 – A New Food Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Food Justice</i>, Ch 9 & 10 	<p>Reflect on how your own diet, in the course of your life, may have been shaped by public policies and government programs. What aspects of your diet today are shaped by forces out of your control? Are there ways to start exerting control over those forces?</p>	
Tue., Oct. 16 – Fast Food Nation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast Food Nation, Introduction and Part I 		<p>Come to class ready to discuss Fast Food Nation. Bring a tasty food to share with your classmates.</p>
Fri., Oct. 19 – Field Trip	<p>Read about Radix Ecological Sustainability Center: http://radixcenter.org/virtual-tours-of-sustainable-systems/. We will take a trip to Radix in Albany, NY. Arrange your own transport. Meet there at 2:00 (end at 5)</p>	<p>Write up your observations of Radix. How does Radix address food justice? Did the field trip bring up any other ideas we have discussed so far in the course?</p>	<p>Due: Troy Food Issues and Assets: Stakeholder Perspectives</p>
SATURDAY, OCT. 20 – STORY HARVEST	<p>You are invited to participate in a special event in Troy. Details to be provided in class.</p>	<p>Write up your observations of the Story Harvest event. Do your observations resonate with any of the ideas we have discussed so far in the course?</p>	
Tue., Oct. 23 – The commodity chain as a way to study the food system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philip McMichael, “Introduction: “Development and Globalization” • Deborah Barndt, “Across Space and Through Time: Tomatl Meets the Corporate Tomato” 		<p>Turn in Food Justice Journal for review</p>

Fri., Oct. 26 – Commodity chain case studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michael Pollan, “Power Steer” • Steven Topic and Mario Samper, “The Latin American Coffee Commodity Chain” 	<p>Propose an idea for a commodity chain analysis. What would be interesting about tracing the path of the commodity you suggest? What links or nodes in the chain would you focus on and why? What is your tentative thesis about this commodity?</p>	<p>Bring your commodity chain idea to class. We will form teams today.</p>
Tue., Oct. 30 - World hunger: scope of the problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E.M. Young “The contemporary nature and geography of malnutrition” • <i>Atlas of Food</i>, Map (not page) # 2, 3, 6, 7, 17, 18, 30, 31 		
Fri., Nov. 2 - World hunger: explanations and solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frances Moore Lappe, “World Hunger: Its Roots and Remedies” • Fred Buttel, “Ending Hunger in Developing Countries” 	<p>Is world hunger a matter of “food justice”? Return to your first journal entry about food justice. Has your understanding of food justice changed? Try to articulate what this phrase means to you.</p>	
Tue., Nov. 6 - The development project and food resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vandana Shiva, “Science and Politics in the Green Revolution” • Philip McMichael, “The Development Project: International Dimensions” 		
Fri., Nov. 9 - Globalization and dietary changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Food Justice</i>, Ch. 5 • E.M. Young, “Globalization, development and malnutrition” • <i>Atlas of Food</i>, Part 3 	<p>Do you think it helps or hurts the people of less wealthy countries to be connected to global food commodity chains?</p>	<p>Due: Commodity Chain Analysis Project Proposal</p>
Tue., Nov. 13 – Agribusiness and corporate concentration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • William Heffernan, “Concentration of Ownership and Control in Agriculture” • Geoffrey Lawrence and Janet Grice, “Agribusiness, Genetic Engineering and the Corporatization of Food” • <i>The Atlas of Food</i>, Part 4 		

Fri., Nov. 16 – Fast Food Nation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Fast Food Nation</i>, Part 2 	Do you think that sustainability and food justice can be achieved in large and complex commodity chains like those controlled by Wal-Mart and McDonalds?	Come to class ready to discuss <i>Fast Food Nation</i> . Bring a tasty food to share with your classmates.
Tue., Nov. 20 – Fair Trade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dan Jaffee, “Better, But Not Great” • Laura T. Reynolds “Mainstreaming Fair Trade Coffee: From Partnership to Traceability” 		
Tue., Nov. 27 – Agroecology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vandana Shiva, “The Seed and the Spinning Wheel” • Miguel Altieri, “Ecological Impacts of Industrial Agriculture and the Possibilities for Truly Sustainable Farming” • <i>The Atlas of Food</i>, Part 2 		Bring a first draft of your commodity chain analysis to class for peer review.
Fri., Nov. 30 – Alter- Globalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Via Campesina, “The International Peasants’ Voice” • International Forum on Globalization, “A Better World is Possible!” 	What values have driven agricultural research and development in the last half-century? How are these values challenged by the alter-globalization movement and critical scientists like Shiva and Altieri?	
Tue., Dec. 4 – Catch- up/student choice			Due: Individual Final Report on Commodity Chain Analysis
Fri., Dec. 7 – Catch- up/student choice			Turn in Food Justice Journal for review
Finals Week			Final Exam: Group Presentations

STSS 4260: Food, Farms, and Famine
Food Justice Journal

You will maintain a journal this semester, and turn it in for review at designated intervals. Journal entry topics are provided throughout the syllabus, and these are meant to prepare you for classroom discussion and to advance ongoing projects. Therefore, it is important that you write your journal entries before the date on which they are listed, even though you will not always turn in your journal on those dates.

You must write journal entries for all of the questions posed in the syllabus. You may write additional entries (and I encourage you to do so if it helps to advance your understanding). The journal assignment is meant to provide you with an opportunity to engage in a more active learning process than is provided by the ordinary classroom experience. The object is to get your thoughts down on paper. For this assignment, you should not worry about achieving a “proper” or “elegant” writing style. Use your own voice. If you have something to say, say it. If you have an emotional response, put it down. The goals are analysis, communication, and making connections among issues, theories, data, and experiences.

If, after completing an entry, you think you should rewrite it, both versions should be maintained in the journal. Ideally, the complete set of journal entries will constitute a record of academic growth during the semester. For this reason, it is a good idea to occasionally review your journal and write an entry evaluating the progress you perceive.

You will hand in a hard copy of your journal (all entries) on the following dates: September 25, October 23, December 7. It should be printed out (double-sided if possible), double-spaced, with one inch margins and 12-point font. Staple the pages together or put them in a thin, lightweight binder or report cover. Each entry should have a title and a date. Each time you hand in the journal, include the previous journal entries, including my comments and any responses or revisions you may have written.

**STSS 4260: Food, Farms, and Famine
Community Food Assessment (Pilot Project)**

This semester we have a unique opportunity to conduct original research that will benefit the Troy community. You will work individually on this project. However, for the second part of the assignment, you will all share your interview data with one another in order to write a report. In addition, I will choose three students who submitted the most outstanding work to co-author a report to share with stakeholders in the City of Troy and to present the work in public forums. The deadlines are as follows:

Week of September 18: Make an appointment to discuss your research with Prof. Kinchy

September 21: Troy Food Profile, a report characterizing the city's food issues and assets. You will access quantitative data sources that are available online, interpret this data in light of broader questions about community food security, and write a report that provides an interpretation and assessment of your findings. This is part one of the assignment and counts for 50% of the grade.

October 5: Stakeholder Interview Transcript, a transcript of a stakeholder interview, indexed [this will be explained in class], and summarized. The transcript and summary will be shared with everyone in the class for their use in writing the final report.

October 19: Troy Food Issues and Assets: Stakeholder Perspectives, a report characterizing the city's food issues and assets. Working with a partner, you will conduct at least one interview with a key stakeholder in the City of Troy. You will work together to transcribe, index, and summarize the interview(s), and share the transcripts and summary with your classmates. Each person will then work individually to write a report, using all of the interviews. The report will identify the most prominent food issues and assets in Troy, discuss key areas of agreement and disagreement among the stakeholders, and make recommendations for a future Community Food Assessment. This is part two of the assignment and counts for 50% of the grade.

More details about how to complete the assignment will be distributed in class.

STSS 4260: Food, Farms, and Famine Commodity Chain Analysis

For this assignment we will divide into groups of 3-4 students. Each group will research a commodity of interest to its members. Your analysis must focus on at least two nodes (stages) in the commodity chain (i.e. research and development, production, processing, shipping, marketing, consumption, disposal, etc.) and it should include at least two countries. You may examine political, economic, social and cultural dimensions of the commodity chain. Each group will present their findings to the class and each member of the group will turn in a 5-7 page (double-spaced) paper that summarizes these findings and reflects on the implications of the case for food justice and environmental sustainability. I will evaluate the written papers individually. The final grade for this assignment will consider both the written work and participation in the group presentation of the poster. There are several deadlines:

October 26: Team Formation

We will spend approximately ½ hour in class forming 3-4 person teams for the reports. You should come to class with ideas for a project and each team should adopt a preliminary idea. To prepare for Phase II (due in two weeks) you will make plans with your team to investigate your preliminary idea, identify the sources you will use, and develop a provisional thesis.

November 9: Project Proposal

Each team will turn a proposal of 1-2 double-spaced pages, addressing the following issues:

- 1) What will you study? (What is your research topic?)
 - a) What commodity will you focus on?
 - b) What “nodes” of the commodity chain do you plan to study?
- 2) Why is this commodity of interest? What is its scholarly and/or practical significance?
 - a) How is this commodity involved in processes of globalization? How is it related to food justice? to sustainability?
 - b) What is your provisional thesis about this commodity chain?
- 3) What sources will you use?

Week of November 12: Team Meetings with Prof. Kinchy

Each team will sign up for a meeting time to discuss how their project is progressing.

November 27: Peer Review

Bring a complete draft of your individual paper to class for peer review.

December 4: Individual Final Report

Each report should be 5-7 double-spaced pages. It must include:

- 1) Introduction: lays out your goals and states your thesis
- 2) Background and Context: enough to enable an intelligent reader to understand your case, including information on the history of the supply chain and an overview of key actors.
- 3) Body of the paper: presentation of evidence in support of your thesis. This evidence should include information on at least two stages of the commodity chain in at least two countries. You should use specific evidence from your sources (properly cited) to support and build your arguments. The organization of this central section is essential, so think carefully about the points you wish to raise and the clearest order for these points.

- 4) Conclusion: brings together your biggest “take home messages” and explains the relevance of your paper’s argument.
- 5) Bibliography: You should use and cite at least 3 scholarly sources that are not on the class syllabus (you may also use class sources).

The paper grade will be based on: 1) analysis; 2) organization and structure; 3) evidence and support; and 4) mechanics and style. The paper will count for 50 percent of the grade for the commodity chain analysis project.

Finals week: Poster session (final oral exam)

The group will design and present a poster that includes: 1) a graphic representation of the commodity chain; 2) a brief history of the chain, 3) a description of key actors and any social movements involved. The poster should generate and provide evidence for a thesis, which you will explain to the class and to invited participants in the poster session. Your thesis should say something about the implications of some aspect of the chain for food justice and/or environmental sustainability.

Each team will have approximately 10 minutes to present the poster and 5 minutes for questions and discussion. You should divide up speaking responsibilities so that each team member speaks for roughly the same amount of time. Your primary audience is your fellow students. You need to educate and engage them, realizing they know far less than you do about this topic.

Poster presentations will be evaluated based on four criteria: 1) analysis; 2) organization and structure; 3) evidence and support; and 4) mechanics and style. The poster presentation will count for 50% of the grade for this assignment.

The best posters will be selected to display in a prominent location on campus during the Spring 2013 semester.