

**Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
COURSE SYLLABUS**

STSS 4964 – FOOD, FARMS AND FAMINE

Fall 2010

Tuesday and Friday, 10:00-11:50 am

Sage Lab 2701

Instructor: Abby Kinchy

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Office hours: by appointment

Course Description:

What is the future of food on this planet? How will we feed a growing population? 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.

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 nutritionism.
- 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 other research methods to investigate food commodity chains.
- Identify, summarize, and critically review the social science literature pertaining to food, agriculture, and hunger issues.

Required Texts:

Readings for this course include four books and an assortment of articles. The articles are available online through the course LMS site. Students often report that they have a difficult time reading texts online, and prefer reading articles on paper. It is essential that you underline important passages and write comments in the margins, so that you are actively learning from and reflecting on the readings. It is possible to do this with some PDF readers; however, some students find it clunky and difficult. Furthermore, it is helpful to have the readings at your fingertips when discussing them in class. For all of

these reasons, I strongly recommend that students print out the readings. This does mean an added expense, therefore I do not require it. However, if you find that it is frustrating to try to read the articles on the computer, and you do not wish to bring your laptop to class every day so that you can access the readings, please reserve a budget for printing out course readings.

In addition, please purchase the following books, available at the RPI bookstore.

John Germov and Lauren Williams (2009) *A Sociology of Food and Nutrition: The Social Appetite*, Third Edition

Karl Weber, ed. (2009) *Food, Inc.: A Participant Guide: How Industrial Food is Making Us Sicker, Fatter, and Poorer-And What You Can Do About It*

Michael Pollan (2006) *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*

Frances Moore Lappe and Anna Lappe (2002) *Hope's Edge: The Next Diet for a Small Planet*

Also, please purchase a package of 3x5 cards. You will need one for each class meeting.

Major Assignments:

Assignment 1: Follow that food – Due 9/28

For this assignment, you will work with a partner to investigate the route that your food takes from the farm to your mouth, and you will present your findings to the class. Choose one ingredient that you both consume frequently (for example, if you eat a lot of pizza, investigate pepperoni or mozzarella cheese). Use the library to find out as much as you can about what is involved in producing your chosen food. Remember, most foods travel a long way and undergo many transformations before they get to your plate, and your paper should report these steps (e.g. calves are born and separated from their mothers; cows are fed corn, are injected with hormones, and are milked by machine twice a day; the milk is taken by truck to a dairy cooperative; a cheese maker purchases the milk; milk is made into cheese at a factory; it is then shipped to a Pizza Hut distributor, etc...). To identify those steps, you may need to be creative: call the company, ask the restaurant manager, read industry and activist websites, etc.

You will prepare a ten-minute presentation (using Power Point) summarizing your findings for the class. In addition to reporting what you learned about where your food comes from, your presentation should touch on some larger questions that have been addressed so far in the course. For example, what are the environmental consequences of producing this food? How is production of this food affected by globalization or corporate concentration?

Assignment 2: Culinary culture – Due 10/22

There are two options for this assignment. Choose one.

1. Explore your own culinary culture. Interview an older member of your family or community (e.g. a grandparent) about the ways that diets have changed over time. What foodways have remained the same? What foodways have been abandoned? How have traditions (such as holiday meals) been maintained or changed over time? Write a four to five page paper about what you learn. In the paper, apply at least three concepts from the readings, such as globalization, social identity, hybrid cuisine, class or stratification.
2. Explore an unfamiliar culinary culture. Visit a restaurant or food market that sells food from a culinary culture to which you are not accustomed. For example, have a meal at a Jamaican, Puerto Rican, German, or Turkish restaurant, if you have never done so before. Before trying

the food, do some background research about the culinary culture that you are going to explore. After your meal, write a four to five page paper about what you experienced and learned. Use the experience to reflect on the ideas of McDonaldization, cosmopolitanism, and globalization, and apply additional concepts from the course readings as relevant.

Assignment 3: Critical literature review – Due 11/30

You will write a five to seven page paper that critically reviews the social science literature on a topic that has been introduced in this course (such as world hunger, food deserts, globalization of agriculture, nutrition guidelines, fair trade, farm workers, organic standards, food safety, etc.). A critical literature review involves 1) investigating the research that has been done on a particular topic and 2) summarizing *and evaluating* what you have found. You will be expected not only to report the findings of published studies, but also to synthesize it (look for patterns and connections) and to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of what has been written on the chosen topic. You should draw conclusions about the implications of this body of literature and you may suggest further research that is needed to fill in gaps of knowledge. You are expected to use a minimum of ten peer-reviewed sources (academic journal articles, books published by academic presses). There are three deadlines:

Get approval for topic (11/2)

Get approval for list of articles and books to be reviewed (11/12)

Turn in final paper (11/30)

Food, Farms and Famine blog

All students in the class will contribute to a public blog dealing with food topics (<http://rpi-fff.blogspot.com>). Students will sign up for blog posting dates at the beginning of the semester. You are required to contribute at least one original blog post addressing a food-related topic in the news. The post should link to a recent news article (preferably from a reputable newspaper) and provide original commentary on it. Your commentary should be informed by course readings and concepts discussed in class, and *you should offer a broader perspective or alternative perspective on the topic of the news story*. Keep in mind that blog posts are usually short and to the point, not lengthy essays. There is no need to write more than two or three short paragraphs, and they may be written in a conversational style.

As a class, we will periodically discuss “food current events.” Your blog contributions will be the starting point for these discussions. You are welcome, but not required, to contribute more than one post. Indeed, in previous semesters, students have found that the blog is a fun way to share interesting news items, tell others about food-related YouTube videos, announce campus events, etc. If there is a news item you would like to bring up in class, you can simply post a link to the article or video clip on the blog.

To make the blog a lively space for discussion, you are also encouraged to post comments in response to other students’ posts. I will also be reading and contributing to the blog throughout the semester.

Discussion questions

This class will primarily follow a discussion format. I expect students to attend class regularly and to come to class having completed the readings and prepared comments and questions. All students are required to suggest questions and topics to discuss in class. At the start of the semester, you should purchase a package of 3x5 cards. After completing the readings before each class, write on a card at least one question that you would like to raise in class. I will collect the cards at the beginning of each class and use them to guide the discussion. A good discussion question is open-ended – it should lead to

debate and more questions, not a definitive answer. The discussion questions at the end of the articles in *A Sociology of Food & Nutrition* should give you an idea of the kind of questions you should aim to write (but please write your own original questions). You will get a half-point for each card you turn in with a reasonably good question that demonstrates that you thought about the readings (up to 13 points).

Class participation

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. Please avoid disruptions such as arriving late or packing your bag before the end of class. Close laptops (unless in use for an assigned classroom activity), turn off cell phones and do not use text messaging during class time. These behaviors will affect your participation grade. Generally, students who follow these guidelines and are frequent contributors to discussion will get all 12 participation points. Students who never or infrequently speak in class, are disruptive, often come to class late, or fall asleep in class generally do not receive any participation points.

Attendance

Attendance will be taken. Two unexcused absences are permitted. Every unexcused absence after the first two will result in a five point grade deduction. Students with more than five unexcused absences will receive a failing grade. Documentation for *excused* absences is now processed by the Student Experience office (these were previously processed through the Dean of Students office). If you need an official excuse, contact the Student Experience office – 4th floor of Academy Hall, x8022, se@rpi.edu.

Grading:

Final grades will be based on the following:

Assignment 1 – 20 points
Assignment 2 – 20 points
Assignment 3 – 30 points
Blog – 5 points
Discussion questions – 13 points
Class participation - 12 points

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

A = 4.0 = 94-100 points
A- = 3.7 = 90-93 points
B+ = 3.3 = 87-89 points
B = 3.0 = 84-86 points
B- = 2.7 = 80-83 points
C+ = 2.3 = 77-79 points
C = 2.0 = 74-76 points
C- = 1.7 = 70-73 points
D+ = 1.3 = 67-69 points
D = 1.0 = 64-66 points
F = 0.0 = 0-63 points

Paper Formatting:

Both papers (Assignments 2 and 3) should be typed, double-spaced, 12 point font, Times New Roman, with standard one-inch margins. To conserve paper, please print on both sides. References must be cited using APA style (details at <http://www.ccp.rpi.edu/apa.html#citations>). See section below on plagiarism.

Help with Research and 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>).

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 Reading 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.
- Readings not in the textbooks are marked with an asterisk (*) and will be distributed electronically on the LMS site.

8/31	Introductions	
9/3	Entry points	*Raj Patel, <i>Stuffed and Starved</i> pp. 1-20 AND John Germov and Lauren Williams, "Exploring the Social Appetite: A Sociology of Food and Nutrition" in <i>A Sociology of Food...</i>

9/7	Origins of modern food	*Geoff Tansey and Tony Worsley, "Modern Food: Where did it come from?" Research workshop – we will go to library in 2nd hour of class.
9/10	The American food system	Michael Pollan, <i>The Omnivore's Dilemma</i> , pp. 32-119
9/14	Ecological impacts	*Geoff Tansey and Tony Worsley, "Food and the Biosphere" AND *Miguel Altieri, "Ecological Impacts of Industrial Agriculture and the Possibilities for Truly Sustainable Farming"
9/17	Globalization of agriculture	*Philip McMichael, <i>Development and Social Change</i> , pp. xxiii-xxxix AND *Deborah Barndt, "Tangled Routes: Women, Work, and Globalization on the Tomato Trail."
9/21	World hunger	Frances Moore Lappe, "World Hunger: Its Roots and Remedies" in <i>A Sociology of Food...</i> AND *Amartya Sen, "Nobody Need Starve"
9/24	Agribusiness and corporate concentration	*William Heffernan, "Concentration of Ownership and Control in Agriculture" AND Geoffrey Lawrence and Janet Grice, "Agribusiness, Genetic Engineering and the Corporatization of Food" in <i>A Sociology of Food...</i> Film: Food, Inc.
9/28 PRESENTATIONS DUE	Genetic engineering	*Jason Delborne and Abby Kinchy, "Genetically Modified Organisms" AND Peter Pringle, "Food, Science, and the Challenge of World Hunger" in <i>Food, Inc.</i>
10/1	Agriculture-based fuels	Robert Bryce, "The Ethanol Scam: Burning Food to Make Motor Fuel," in <i>Food, Inc.</i> AND *Eric Holt-Gimenez and Anni Shattuck, "The Agrofuels Transition: Restructuring Places and Spaces in the Global Food System" Guest speaker: Arcelia Gonzalez Merino
10/5	Culinary cultures and social class	Stephen Mennell, "Culinary Cultures of Europe: Food, History, Health and Identity" in <i>A Sociology of Food...</i> AND John Germov, "Food, Class and Identity" in <i>A Sociology of Food...</i> Film segment: People Like Us
10/8	McDonaldization	<i>Fast Food Nation</i> , pp. 1-28 AND *George Ritzer, <i>The McDonaldization of Society</i> (Sage, 2006): "The McDonaldization of Society" (pp. 1-20)

10/12	No class – Monday schedule	
10/15	Globalization of food cultures	*Jeffrey M. Pilcher, “Industrial Tortillas and Folkloric Pepsi: The Nutritional Consequences of Hybrid Cuisines in Mexico” AND *Melissa L. Caldwell, “Domesticating the French Fry: McDonald’s and Consumerism in Moscow”
10/19	Nutrition and dietary advice	Jennifer Lisa Falbe and Marion Nestle, “The Politics of Government Dietary Advice” in <i>A Sociology of Food...</i> AND *Georgy Scrinis, “On the Ideology of Nutritionism”
10/22 PAPERS DUE	Obesity and the thin ideal	Williams and Germov, “Constructing the Female Body” in <i>A Sociology of Food...</i> AND Sobal, “Sociological Analysis of the Stigmatization of Obesity” in <i>A Sociology of Food...</i>
10/26	Supermarkets	*Konefal, et al. “Supermarkets and Supply Chains in North America” AND *Gwen Sharp, “The Story of the Shopping Cart,” http://contexts.org/socimages/2009/12/15/the-story-of-the-shopping-cart/
10/29	Food deserts	*Jennifer Wehunt, “The Food Desert,” http://www.chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine/July-2009/The-Food-Desert/ AND *Policy Link, <i>The Grocery Gap</i> AND *Morton and Blanchard, “Starved for Access”
11/2	US hunger	*Janet Poppendieck, “Want amid Plenty: From Hunger to Inequality” AND *Mark Nord and Mark Prell, “Struggling to Feed the Family: What Does It Mean To Be Food Insecure?”
11/5	US farm workers	Arturo Rodriguez, “Cheap Food: Workers Pay the Price,” and Pesticide Action Network North America, “Fields of Poison: California Farmworkers and Pesticides,” in <i>Food, Inc.</i> AND *Linda C. Majka and Theo J. Majka, “Organizing U.S. Farm Workers: A Continuous Struggle”
11/9	US food workers	* <i>Fast Food Nation</i> , pp.59-88 and 169-190
11/12	Organic agriculture	<i>The Omnivore’s Dilemma</i> , pp. 123-184 AND Gary Hirshberg, “Organics – Healthy Food and So Much More”

		in <i>Food, Inc.</i>
11/16	Agroecology	<i>The Omnivore's Dilemma</i> , pp. 185-238
11/19	Fair trade	*April Linton, Cindy Chiayuan Liou and Kelly Ann Shaw (2004) "A Taste of Trade Justice: Marketing Global Social Responsibility via Fair Trade Coffee," <i>Globalizations</i> 1(2): 223-246 AND Lappe and Lappe, <i>Hope's Edge</i> , chapter 8 MOVIE: Black Gold
11/23	Vegetarianism	Deidre Wicks, "Humans, Food, and Other Animals: The Vegetarian Option" in <i>A Sociology of Food...</i> AND Humane Society of the United States, "The Dirty Six" in <i>Food, Inc.</i> AND Michael Pollan, "The Ethics of Eating Animals" in <i>The Omnivore's Dilemma</i>
Thanksgiving		
11/30 PAPERS DUE	Hopeful alternatives	<i>Hope's Edge</i> , chapters 1-2 <i>Food, Inc.</i> , pages 169-207
12/3		<i>Hope's Edge</i> , chapters 3-5
12/7		<i>Hope's Edge</i> , chapters 6-7
12/10		<i>Hope's Edge</i> , chapters 9-11