2013

ENST 594.06: Graduate Seminar: The Politics of Food

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Overview of the Course

The contemporary food and agricultural system is contested terrain, and a wide variety of actors are now engaged in the politics of food. In this case, “politics” broadly refers to the ways that various actors with different beliefs, principles, or interests try to advance or defend their positions in the very complex sphere of food and agricultural systems. That is, these actors—governmental entities, businesses, institutions, and organizations—create and try to influence food policy. Thus, the purpose of this graduate seminar is to study and analyze some of recent debates regarding the agrifood system and the politics surrounding those debates.

Through a selection of interdisciplinary scholarship often referred to as “agrifood studies” and through critical reflection and discussion on the readings, I aim to provide you with a solid grounding that will enable you to pursue academic and civic work on these issues in the future. In addition, the course gives you a chance to learn more about a topic related to the politics of food that interests you. In-class presentations at the end of the term will help you to improve your public speaking skills.

Accessing the Readings

The required readings are listed on the attached schedule, and will be posted on our Moodle site for this course. The syllabus is also posted at the top of the Moodle site so you can go there to access any hyperlinks easily if you want.

Requirements and Opportunities

Class participation: The course is organized as a seminar, which means it is discussion focused (although I will lecture some, especially at the start). Its quality greatly depends upon the active participation and contributions of all members. This is a graduate level seminar, therefore, you must be prepared to read, think, and take responsibility for your learning. In addition, all of us have a responsibility to use this opportunity to learn from the experiences, insights, and values of others in the course.

My aim is to create a learning community in which we will grapple seriously and critically with the issues presented by the readings. There is no one way to make this happen, but a few things will help us along:
• Recognizing that we are all learners (there are no experts). We are just in different “places,” we bring different backgrounds, and we are going to be learning different things along the way.

• Learning requires an investment of time and effort. It is essential that we each put in the intellectual labor, if you will, before each of our class sessions. This means carefully reading all materials prior to each class session. Take notes on what you read and jot down questions you have about the work.

• Learning also requires a willingness to question assumptions – including our own – and an interest in exploring different and multiple perspectives on a given topic.

• Attending class consistently is essential to your learning and your contribution to others’ learning.

**Discussant papers:** To facilitate our discussions, each participant in the seminar will prepare one discussant paper over the course of the semester. Each paper will address the readings for a specified class period, and should be about 500 words in length. Based on your analysis of the assigned readings, your paper should identify several concrete issues, topics and/or questions that could be taken up in class discussion. It should not be necessary to summarize the readings.

You will email your discussant paper to all of the other members of the class and to me in advance so that we can read and reflect on the issues you raise. **Discussant papers for Tuesday classes will be due the previous Sunday at 7 pm and for Thursday classes will be due the previous Tuesday at 7 pm. Plan accordingly!!** Logistics will be discussed in class. I will ask you to sign up for these opportunities for sharing and helping to shape our group discussion.

**Analytic Essays/Assignments:** Two essay assignments will ask you to think critically about what you read, to synthesize the material covered, and perhaps do some extra research. I will distribute the question(s) that I want you to cover near the start of each section. More specific guidance on these papers will be distributed at that time. Typically, these papers should be five to seven pages, typed, and double-spaced with normal margins and fonts. I expect these papers to be well organized, grammatically correct, and completely referenced.

**Term Papers:** The term projects provide an opportunity for you to delve more deeply into a topic related to food policy and politics that interests you. In 15-20 pages, cover any topic that is of interest to you, as long as it is sufficiently focused so that you can go into some depth. Perhaps you will want to explore and evaluate a particular social change strategy and learn about an organization pursuing it. Maybe you want to learn more about a particular environmental or social problem in agriculture (e.g., pesticide contamination of water; soil erosion). Perhaps you will want to learn about a particular crop grown in Montana (e.g., Flathead cherries) and explore its production and marketing. Maybe you want to learn about an alternative farming technique, such as management intensive rotational grazing. Or you could look at a program within the Farm Bill and explore its prospects within the current Farm Bill debate. Perhaps you will want to conduct a commodity chain analysis and compare/contrast two versions of the same foodstuff (e.g., local pasture-raised broiler chickens compared with Tyson-brand broilers); I can provide you with more specifics on how to do a commodity chain analysis.

It’s up to you, but I strongly encourage you to focus as much as possible.

**Paper Proposals:** In an informal proposal due on Sept. 17, please tell me which topic you have chosen, why it is of interest to you, what key resources you have already identified, and any questions you may have of me regarding leads and so on.

**Guest speakers and field trips:** Guest speakers will be added as appropriate. I would like to organize one or two field trips depending on your level of interest. Also, see below for information on AERO Annual Meeting, Oct. 25-27. Let’s go!
**Advising:** If I can be of assistance, please come see me during my office hours. I have a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board across from my office door. If my office hours are impossible for you, contact me about setting up an appointment.

**Grading:** Please note the following grading procedures, and mark the due dates on your calendar so you can plan accordingly. I will use the plus/minus grading system (A, A-, B+, B, B-, and so on).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment:</th>
<th>Due:</th>
<th>Possible Points:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation (includes discussant papers)</td>
<td>Throughout</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two analytic essays (up to 50 points each)</td>
<td>Oct. 1, Nov. 15</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Project Presentation</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term Papers</td>
<td>Dec. 10</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total possible points</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
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COURSE MENU
(Subject to change at the whim of the chef and diners)

1. Tues., Aug. 27 – What's on Our Plate? What are the Politics of Food?

PART ONE: AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRIALIZATION

2. Thurs., Aug. 29 – Agrarianism and Industrialism


Supplemental:

4. Thurs., Sept. 5 – Real Costs. In class: I will explain assignment for next Tuesday on the Farm Bill.


Supplemental:

5. Tues., Sept. 10 – The Farm Bill.
Note: In addition to this reading, I will also ask each person to do a bit of research to learn about particular parts of the Farm Bill currently being debated. Stay tuned.


Clarren, Rebecca. 2008. “Pesticide drift: Immigrants in California’s Central Valley are sick of breathing poisoned air.” Orion July/August: 56-63.


Supplemental:

8. Thurs., Sept. 19 – The Promise of GE


Supplemental:


11. Tues., Oct. 1 – ESSAY #1 DUE.

PART TWO: FOOD SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

12. Thurs., Oct. 3 – No class scheduled due to Big Timber trip. Please read this chapter, however!
13. Tues., Oct. 8 – Theoretical Utensils: Part One


Supplemental:


15. Tues., Oct. 15 – Strategies for Moving towards Ecological Agriculture


17. Tues., Oct. 22 – Coming into Our Foodshed
   To be announced.

18. Thurs., Oct. 24 – Guest lecture by Wenonah Hauter, Executive Director of Food and Water Watch and author of Foodopoly

Oct 25-27: AERO Annual Meeting in Hamilton. All of you are invited to attend. EVST will provide transportation and hopefully cover some or all of your costs. More information to come!

19. Tues., Oct. 29 – TBD

20. Thurs., Oct. 31 – The Politics of Food Safety


21. Tues., Nov. 5 – Challenging the “Local”


22. Thurs., Nov. 7 – TBD

23. Tues., Nov. 12 – Work session

25. Thurs., Nov. 14 – ESSAY #2 DUE

26. Tues., Nov. 19 – TBD

27. Thurs., Nov. 21 – PRESENTATIONS

28. Tues., Nov. 26 – PRESENTATIONS
   Nov. 27 – Dec. 1 Thanksgiving break

30. Tues. Dec. 3 – PRESENTATIONS

31. Thurs., Dec. 5 – PRESENTATIONS

Tues., Dec. 10 Final Exam Period at 3:20-5:20. FINAL TERM PAPERS DUE.
   Note: If it works for everyone, we will probably select another time to meet and have a final gathering/potluck and reflection on the course.