

The Politics of Food in America
GOVERNMENT 370L, UNIQUE NO. 38835
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
SPRING 2012

TH 12:30-2:00 p.m., WAG 420

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I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the fundamentally political nature of food policy in the United States. It addresses the political economy of agricultural practices in the United States and of American food consumption (broadly interpreted to include food supplements and beverages). It considers the political history of the production and regulation of food, ranging from the colonial era up to the present. It looks at food policy as it impacts public health—e.g., obesity, schoolchild nutrition. It looks at the rules and customs of agricultural trade (including “fair trade”). And it inquires into the ethics and moral aspects of how food is grown, processed, regulated, and consumed in the United States.

Food policy encompasses the whole of the political system: from the individual behavior of farmers and ranchers, to the group actions of companies, trade associations, commercial scientists, and food industry lobbyists, to the three institutions of government—the US Congress, the executive branch (Presidential leadership as well as the USDA, FDA, FTC, etc.), and the courts—to the global system of trade, energy, pollution, and climate change, and to restaurants, cafeterias, institutional food services, and consumers in their kitchens.

Lectures, in-class discussions, and in-class exercises will be supplemented by guest lectures and films. News stories, relevant weblinks, and course-related comments will be posted on the course’s UT Blackboard website (BB).

II: MATERIALS

Required texts (“T” in the course schedule below):

- Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.
- Peter Singer and Jim Mason, *The Ethics of What We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter*, Emmaus, Penn.: Rodale Press, 2006.
- Other readings (“P” in the course schedule) are in the course packet required for this class available at IT Copy, 512 West MLK, Austin, 78701, ph. 476-6662; itcopy@austin.rr.com

III: COURSE GOALS

- A. By taking “The Politics of Food in America,” the student will be able to:
- discuss the major stages in the development of the US food industry
 - identify the lobbying, legislative, and legal processes that determined how food is produced, regulated, distributed, and consumed in the US
 - explain the various roles of the US government in the food system
 - explain the effects of contemporary food policies on public issues such as obesity, hunger, and energy use
 - describe the role of genetic modification (GMs) in food production
 - recognize the trade laws, global causes, and international organizations (e.g., the World Trade Organization) influencing American food supply
 - become familiar with the ethics and/or philosophies explicit—or implicit—in food production and consumption
- B. As a student in this class, you are expected to demonstrate the following values:
- respect for your fellow students, guest lecturers, teaching assistant, and instructor
 - dedication to learning, by doing an on-going assessment of your own understanding and knowledge of American food policy
 - honesty in your academic work, consistent with the UT Honor Code
 - responsibility, self-motivation, and hard work
 - engagement in and concern about the policies, practices, and implications of national food policy in the US
 - collaboration and cooperation with your fellow students in the in-class exercises and discussions, and when otherwise appropriate
 - appreciation and enjoyment of learning
- C. You are specifically responsible for:
- reading the assigned text(s) *in advance* of the date in the course schedule
 - participating in class discussion and course material
 - quizzes and tests on the readings and lectures, including guest lectures
 - researching and listing the content and source of two days’ food consumption
 - writing a short analysis of the food log, per the themes of the course (three pages, 1500 wds maximum, per the food log and analysis project)
 - keeping up with the course’s Blackboard site and your own email account
 - attending class, arriving punctually, and leaving class when dismissed

IV. GRADES:

Grades consist of the aggregate and weighted grades of tests (midterm, take-home final); quizzes; class exercises; class participation/attendance; and other assignments. The class uses pluses and minuses. For a B, for example, 80-82 is a B-, 83-86 is a B, and 87-89 is a B+. The same applies for all other grades except an A (there is no A+). The instructor may round up—and reserves the right not to.

A. Tests (midterm and final) 45%

The midterm test is worth 20 percent; the final take-home essay 25 percent of the course grade. *Tests must be taken and handed in when they are due; late tests will not be accepted. Only hard copies are accepted; emailed copies or disk copies are not accepted.*

B. Food Log and Analysis Paper 25%

You must keep a food log for a 48-hour period (beginning on March 22, give or take a day, your choice), in which you keep track of what you ate and when. You also need to trace down all the ingredients of what you eat for one of the days, describing where the food and its ingredients are from. You are to then write a brief analysis of your experience and what patterns you found from keeping the journal. The paper is to be no longer than 2500 words.

C. Quizzes 15%

There are four quizzes given over the semester. Each quiz will review basic facts contained in the readings and lectures (including guest lectures and movie); each quiz (with the lowest score dropped) counts as 5% of your grade.

E. Class participation and attendance 10%

You are evaluated on your participation in the class. You will be assessed on your engagement in the lectures and guest lectures, and in the questions and comments you contribute on the class's BB discussion site. *You will receive a grade bonus if you miss on only two days or fewer* (2 points added to your overall grade). Failure to participate in class or to attend regularly, or misconduct (see under Rules below) will detract from your grade.

F. Film review 5%

You are to write a short summary of a film about the American food system or the global food system, and then analyze/interpret/criticize the documentary. You may choose the film, as long as you check with your instructor. The review should be no more than 1500 words in length.

G. Extra Credit up to 5%

You may take a field trip to a CSA, farmers' market, or other local site, and write a short description and analysis of the visit (no more than 1500 words)

V. POLICIES:

A. Communication:

Email correspondence is welcome. ***Please format your emails as business correspondence (with a title/greeting and signature), and please realize that I may not be able to get to them right away.*** I shall try to get to your emails within 24 hours or, at the latest, during my next scheduled office hours, unless the answer to a question is in the syllabus or was discussed in class (in which case you should consult a classmate). I may also answer through BB or a general email to the class, rather than writing you back personally, if your question reflects a general concern. I am also available before and after class, during office hours, or by appointment if you cannot make my office hours.

B. General Rules:

1. Let your instructor know in advance if you know you will be late for class or if you have to leave early for extraordinary reasons (e.g., job interview, court appearance). Also, let him know ahead of time if you have miss assignments for particular reasons or cannot otherwise participate in the class as expected.
2. Misconduct in class will detract from your participation grade. ***Misconduct is any behavior disruptive to learning and includes the following:*** activated cell phones, texting, and the use of iPods in class; exiting and reentering the classroom (use the restroom before class or afterwards!); personal conversations; reading newspapers/magazines; studying for another course; using laptops for reasons not related to this class; and other behavior as interpreted by your instructor. Inappropriate classroom behavior may result in your dismissal from the classroom, and will count as an unexcused absence.
3. Special arrangements for the tests and other assignments may be considered on an individual basis *in exceptional circumstances only*. Even then, you need to discuss this with your instructor in advance.
4. Students with disabilities: Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/> Please inform the instructor of your condition by the 2nd week of classes.
5. By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

C. Attendance Policy

You are expected to attend class regularly and arrive on time—and your instructor will likewise do what he can to begin and end class on time. There will be a sign-in sheet passed around in class.

1. More than *three* tardies (5 minutes or more late) counts as *one* absence
2. More than *three* early departures from class counts as one absence
3. More than *six* absences total (*excused or unexcused does not matter*) results in a 3 percent reduction in your overall grade; *each additional* absence results in another single percentage-point drop
4. *Ten* or more class absences may result in automatic class failure
5. Let the instructor know as soon as possible (before the class, quiz, test, etc.) if you have an emergency or other extraordinary circumstances

D. Emergency Evacuation Policy

In the event of a fire or other emergency, it may be necessary to evacuate a building rapidly. Upon the activation of a fire alarm or the announcement of an emergency in a university building, all occupants of the building are required to evacuate and assemble outside. Once evacuated, no one may re-enter the building without instruction to do so from the Austin Fire Department, University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.

Students should familiarize themselves with all the exit doors of each room and building they occupy at the university, and should remember that the nearest exit routes may not be the same as the way they enter buildings.

Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructors in writing during the first week of class. Faculty members must then provide this information to the Fire Prevention Services office by fax (512-232-2759), with "Attn. Mr. Roosevelt Easley" written in the subject line.

Information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at <http://www.utexas.edu/emergency>

VI: Course Schedule:

A. Introduction

- January 17: Course Overview: Food and Political Science
- See posted news articles on the class BB site
- January 19: Americans as Consumers
- ERIC SCHLOSSER (T), *FAST FOOD NATION*, pp. 1-10, Chs. 1-2, pp. 13-59
 - PAUL ROBERTS (P), "Prologue," *THE END OF FOOD*, pp. ix-xxvi
- January 24: Convenient Food
- PAUL ROBERTS (P), CH. 2, *THE END OF FOOD* (2008), pp. 29-56
 - PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), CH.5, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, pp. 69-80
- January 26: What's at Stake? The Commerce and Ethics of Eating
- MARION NESTLE (T), "Introduction," *FOOD POLITICS*, pp. 1-28
 - PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), Ch. 1, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, Introduction and Ch. 1, pp. 3-20
- January 31: Food Politics in Comparative Perspective
- Guest Lecture:** Prof. Patricia Maclachlan, "Food Politics in Japan"
- ERIC SCHLOSSER (T), *Fast Food Nation*, Ch. 10, pp. 225-254
 - PAUL ROBERTS (P), *THE END OF FOOD*, Ch. 5, pp. 113-143
- February 2: King Corn and his Domain
- MICHAEL POLLAN (P), *Omnivore's Dilemma*, Ch. 1, pp. 16-31; Ch. 5-7, pp. 85-119
- Quiz.1**
- February 7: Creating Popular Culture
- *Movie: *Food, Inc.* Dir. Robert Kenner, 2009 (in class), 1st half
- MARION NESTLE (T), Chs. 8, 9, *FOOD POLITICS*, pp. 173-218
- February 9: Food Safety
- *Movie: *Food, Inc.* (in class), 2nd half
- ERIC SCHLOSSER (T), *Fast Food Nation*, Ch. 9, pp. 193-222; "Afterword," 271-288
 - PAUL ROBERTS (P), *THE END OF FOOD*, Ch. 7, pp. 175-204

B. How We Got Here

February 14: Colonial America: Before the Tea Party

- JAMES MCWILLIAMS (P), "TRADITIONALISM," *A REVOLUTION IN EATING* (2005), pp. 55-88

February 16: Alcohol and Prohibition

- JAMES MCWILLIAMS (P), "INTOXICATION," *A REVOLUTION IN EATING* (2005), pp. 241-278

February 21: The Ranching Industry

Guest Lecture: Mr. Doug Phelan, Austin, TX, "The Cattle Business in Texas: Observations by a Part-time Rancher,"

- ERIC SCHLOSSER (T), *Fast Food Nation*, Chs. 5-6, pp. 91-131

February 23: The Fast Food Industry's Business Model

- ERIC SCHLOSSER (T), *Fast Food Nation*, Chs. 3-4, 7, pp. 59-107, 152-66

Quiz.2

February 28: Reaction I: Farming and the Environment

- RACHEL CARSON (P), Chs. 1-3, 5-6, *SILENT SPRING*, pp. 21-49, 61-86

Film Review due (max 1,500 words)

March 1: The Evolution of Domesticated Animals

Guest Lecture: Prof. Robyn Metcalfe, Department of History, UT Austin, "Rare Breeds: Conservation or Extinction?"

Readings to be assigned

March 6: Reaction II: The Organic Food Movement

- PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), CH. 14, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, pp. 197-222
- MICHAEL POLLAN (P), "Big Organic," *Omnivore's Dilemma*, Ch. 9, pp. 134-84

March 8: **Test 1:** multiple choice, short answer, and essay question

March 13, 17: *****SPRING BREAK*****

C. Contemporary Policy Issues

- March 20: What Role For the Government?
- PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), CH.2, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, pp. 21-36
 - FRAN HAWTHORNE (P), *Inside the FDA*, "How Powerful Is Industry?" pp. 166-77; "When Consumers Get Angry," pp. 191-207
 - Marion Nestle (P), *Food Politics*, Ch. 12, pp. 272-293
- March 22: **Food Log:** Out of Class Assignment, 48-hr. journal (48-hr. journal and project, description to be distributed)
- March 27: Labor and Worker Safety
- ERIC SCHLOSSER (T), *Fast Food Nation*, Ch. 8, pp. 169-190
 - STEVE STRIFFER (P), CH. IV, V, VI, *CHICKEN: THE DANGEROUS TRANSFORMATION OF AMERICA'S FAVORITE FOOD*, pp. 72-134
- March 29: Nutrition, Child Education, and Obesity
- Guest Lecture:** Clare Brock, Department of Government, UT Austin, "The Evolution of the School Lunch Program"
- JANET POPPENDIECK (P), Chs. 2, 6, *FREE FOR ALL: FIXING SCHOOL FOOD IN AMERICA*, pp. 46-64; 161-189
 - PAUL ROBERTS (P), *The End of Food*, Ch. 4, pp. 82-109
- Food log and Analysis Paper Due** (at the start of class)
- April 3: Genetically Modified (GM) Crops
- JAMES MCWILLIAMS (P), CH. 3, *JUST FOOD* (2009), pp. 81-116
 - PAUL ROBERTS (P), CH. 9, *THE END OF FOOD*, pp. 239-268
- April 5: Labeling
- PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), CH. 3, 8; *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, pp. 37-41, pp. 101-111
 - MARGARET SOVA MCCABE, "LOCO LABELS AND MARKETING MADNESS," *JOURNAL OF LAW AND POLICY* 17 (2009), pp. 493-528

D. How Do We Proceed from Here?

- April 10: The Future of Food
Guest Lecture: James McWilliams, Professor of History, Texas State University at San Marcos, "Beyond Local: Rethinking Sustainable Agriculture"
• ORAN HESTERMAN (P), *FAIR FOOD: GROWING A SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM FOR ALL* (2011), Chs. 4,5,6, pp. 77-128
- April 12: Whither Organic?
• JULIE GUTHMAN (P), Chs. 7-8, *AGRARIAN DREAMS*, pp. 141-185
Quiz.3
- April 17: What about Meat?
• PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), CH.4, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, pp. 42-68
• JAMES MCWILLIAMS (P), Ch. 4, *JUST FOOD*, pp. 117-54
- April 19: And Fish?
• PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), Ch. 9, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, pp. 111-134
• MICHAEL SKLADANY, "Social Life and Transformation in Salmon Fisheries and Aquaculture," Ch. 7, in W. Wright and G. Middendorf, eds, *THE FIGHT OVER FOOD*, pp. 177-200
- April 24: The Politics of Your Shopping Cart
Guest Lecture: "The Co-op Model," Dan Gillotte
General Manager, Wheatsville Cooperative, Austin
Alternatives to Agribusiness?
• G. W. STEVENSON AND HOLLY BORN (P), "The 'Red Label' Poultry System in France," IN C. Hinrichs and T. E. Lyson, eds. *REMAKING THE NORTH AMERICAN FOOD SYSTEM*, pp. 144-62
• LAURA B. DELIND AND JIM BINGEN (P), "The Lamb That Roared," in C. Hinrichs and T.E. Lyson, eds. *REMAKING THE NORTH AMERICAN FOOD SYSTEM*, pp. 277-97
- April 26: Local, Imported, and "Fair Trade"
• PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), Chs.10, 11, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, pp. 135-169
• MICHAEL E. CONROY (P), *Branded: How the 'Certification Revolution' Is Transforming Global Corporations*, Ch. 5, pp. 97-120

- May 1: Eating Ethically
- PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), Chs.12, 15-17, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, pp. 170-83, 223-269
- Quiz.4**
- May 3: What Kind of Food Future?
- PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), Ch.18, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, pp. 270-84
 - PAUL ROBERTS (P), Ch. 10 and "EPILOGUE," *THE END OF FOOD*, pp. 269-322
- Take-home final distributed**
- May 9: Take-home final due Thursday May 9 at 12:00 noon