

The Politics of Food in America

GOVERNMENT 370I, UNIQUE NO. 37400

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

FALL 2024, UTC 1.116

MW 4-5:30 p.m.

Professor Bartholomew Sparrow

Office: Batts Hall 3.142, M: 1:30-2:30pm, TH: 1:30-3:30pm

Telephone: 512.232.7207; bhs@austin.utexas.edu

Teaching Assistant: Letzter Zhang: letzterzhang@gmail.com, zx3555@my.utexas.edu

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

“The Politics of Food in America” examines the fundamentally political nature of food. What is (and is not) grown, harvested, produced, distributed, traded, bought, served, and consumed is the result of political decisions and governmental actions. These decisions are the outcomes of congressional legislation, regulatory politics, court decisions, trade policy, administrative practices, and other political outcomes.

Because of the interdisciplinary and encompassing nature of the American food system—where “food system” refers to the aggregate of the many political decisions that give US agricultural policy, food production, and consumer behavior their distinctive features—the course draws from interdisciplinary research and other sources and it touches on multiple features of the food system. In particular, “What is political about the food system and individuals’ own experience with food?” and “Who benefits and who suffers from the current food system?”

Course readings are available online in Canvas. Readings will be supplemented by lectures, in-class and Canvas discussion, guest lectures, and student presentations. Students also have a choice of several extra credit options.

Students are responsible for quizzes, a food journal, short papers, class presentations, participation in Canvas discussions, and an individual or group project.

II. COURSE GOALS

A. Student Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- successfully identify the political processes and government policies that determine how food is produced, regulated, distributed, and consumed in the United States.
- effectively apply political theories, including collective action problems and the tragedy of the commons to food production and consumption.
- be cognizant of the ethical issues implicit in food production, farm labor, .
- critically analyze how globalization interacts with and disrupts local diets and economies worldwide, e.g., with trade laws, global causes, and international

institutions that influence food production and supply, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and NAFTA.

- knowledgeably explain the effects of contemporary public policies as they affect hunger, energy use, obesity, genetic modification, etc.

B. Educational Values

Students are to demonstrate civility, integrity, and self-improvement. Specifically:

- respect for fellow students, the teaching assistant, and instructor
- honesty in 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 U.S. national food policy
- collaboration and cooperation with your fellow students when appropriate
- dedication to learning, by doing an on-going assessment of your own understanding and knowledge of American food policy

C. You are responsible for:

- reading the assigned text(s) *in advance* of the date in the course schedule
- attending class, arriving punctually, and leaving class when dismissed (the classroom configuration makes this particularly important)
- participating in class discussion and course material
- choosing a passage from the text, reading it out loud, and posing to the class a question derived from that quotation.
- taking quizzes on the readings, lectures, discussions, and guest lectures.
- researching and listing the content and source of two days' food consumption
- writing a short analysis of the food log (1500 wds. maximum)
- writing a blog and blog reaction
- keeping up with the course's Canvas site and your own email
- researching and writing up or otherwise creating a solution to a food-centered problem you identify. You may do this individually or in a team.

III. GRADES:

Grades consist of the aggregate of the weighted grades of quizzes, class participation/attendance, and other assignments. Grades will have plusses and minuses. Plusses are two-digit grades ending in 7, 8, and 9 (e.g., 87, 88, or 89 is a B+); minuses are those ending in 0, 1, and 2 (e.g., 70, 71, or 72 is a C-). There are no A plusses. The professor may or may not round up at his discretion.

A. Quizzes (4)

20%

Quizzes consist of multiple choice questions and may also have short answer questions that cover the course material that you have read and other important points brought up in class. The quizzes test on content since the previous quiz OR, for the last quiz, that we have learned since the beginning of the course.

B. Food Journal (10%) and Analysis Paper (10%) 20%

- You must keep a food journal for a 48-hour period over two consecutive days between Aug. 30 and Sept. 12 (your choice of which consecutive 48 hours and which exact days), in which to keep an account of what you ate, how much, and when. You also need to trace down where exactly *ten* food items you consume are from (location of source as well as, if relevant, processor and distributor). The food journal is graded on its thoroughness and its detail. *You can organize your journal in whichever way you find best communicates your findings.*
- In the analysis paper, you are to *identify what patterns you found* and then write an *analysis of what your findings signify*. The paper is to be no longer than 1,500 words in length. The analysis is graded on your ability to organize your observations and reach one or more conclusions that relate to the subject of this course. These should be tightly written, well-organized, and polished papers that demonstrate your understanding of how your own life intersects with the U.S. food system.
- The food journal is private, between the student and the faculty member (and the teaching assistant). If you feel any discomfort with this assignment, please speak to your instructor

C. Midterm: multiple choice, short answer, and essay question (choice, 1 of 2). 20%

D. Research or Solutions Project 20%

- You are to identify an area or issue where public policy, public law, or government regulation intersects and interacts with food in some way (farm production, public health, trade, food safety, etc.). If you wish to focus on a problem, identify the issue and why it matters, and then propose a community-level, regional level, or largescale solution or advocacy plan. You will present your findings to the class, beginning the last half of November (see the course schedule). The short presentations may take the form of written work (delivered verbally), videos, Power Point slides, or other formats. The finished project is due the second-to-last class day.

E. Blog and possible response(s) 5%

- You are to write blog (500-800 wds.) and post it under “Discussion” in Canvas. In the blog you are to synthesize, discuss, and analyze the food politics you find in sources and experiences *outside* class (news articles, TV and movies, interpersonal conversations, YouTube clips, etc.). The blog also gives you the opportunity to address an issue that is not or that is only partially covered in the course materials. You may also experiment in the blog by hyperlinking secondary content and outside sources, by embedding images and video, and by otherwise being able to move away from strictly linear composition. The blogs are to be your “riffs” on issues and ideas that relate to what we have read and talked about.
- The blog due dates are to be the same as your Q&Q date of presentation. You may also post your blog before the (randomly assigned) Q&Q date, **but not afterwards.**
- Blog posts give you the chance to learn from each other. Should you have a particular reaction (pro, con, whatever) to your classmate’s blog, you are encouraged to post a response, also in “Discussion,” in the thread of the original blog, within two weeks of the original blog. Your response will count to your participation grade.

F. Class Participation, Attendance, and Extra Credit 15%

- You are expected to attend class regularly (see below for attendance policy). Those who demonstrate active learning by asking questions or making observations (as well as attending regularly) will receive full points. The quality of questions and commentary is valued more than quantity.
- Each student is responsible for selecting a passage from that day's assigned text, reading it in class, and then asking a question about the passage they select (High Pass, Pass, Fail). Students who miss the day of their assignment will earn no points unless they notify their instructor more than 48 hours in advance or have an unavoidable emergency.
- Students will be assigned the date of their Q&Q (quotation and question). The question should be *based on the author's argument, the theory in discussion, or how the quotation fits in with other things we have learned or that you know*) and not be a question simply about what others think of the quotation or about how the quotation matches the present-day reality of the American food system.
- You are responsible for one (a 300-wd. "response blog"); extra responses can count up to three points (3 pts.) in extra credit.
- Students who wish to improve their participation grade may choose to submit *one* extra-credit assignment.
- You may take a field trip to a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) site, a farmers' market, an unfamiliar supermarket, or another local site, and then write a summary of that experience. Your informed, well-organized, and tightly written summary of your visit (no more than 1000 words, up to 4% in credit) can be used to supplement your class participation, attendance, and quiz grades.
- Alternatively, you may attend a class-related lecture on campus and write 1000 words summarizing and addressing the lecture. may be other opportunities that we can discuss. The extra credit assignments will be graded on the accuracy, evidence, organization, and polish of your paper.

IV. POLICIES:

A. General Rules:

1. **Let your instructor know in advance** if you know you will disrupt the class by arriving late for class or leaving early for extraordinary reasons (e.g., job interview, court appearance). Also let him know ahead of time if you have miss assignments for any reason or cannot otherwise participate in the class as required.
2. **No telephones or computers are allowed to be out in class.** Your phones must be put away once class begins. The use of a phones in class counts as one of your (few) allotted absences. Note that I may not say anything if I see you using a phone in order not to disrupt the class, or may only say something later, to you alone.
3. **Quizzes may not be made up.** Special arrangements for changing the date when an assignment is due may be considered on an individual basis only *in exceptional circumstances* and only *in advance of the due date*.

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 an **observance of a religious holy day**. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project because you are observing a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

B. 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 office hours. I am also available before and after class, during office hours, or by online Zoom appointment. If your question is of general interest, I may write to the class rather than to you personally.
- Part of professional communication is the **acknowledgment of receipt**. If you write me, I shall reply; and if I write you, you need to acknowledge the receipt of the email.

C. Attendance:

- You are expected to *attend class regularly and to arrive on time*. There will be a sign-in sheet passed around during class. You have four “free” absences, for which you need no notes, reasons, or excuses. This allows for doctors’ appointments, commuting issues, personal or family emergencies, etc.
- *Three tardies* counts as *one* absence; tardies are more than 5 minutes late, or consistently being a few minutes late to class.
- *Three or more early departures* from class counts as one absence.
- *With the fifth absence* you will be subject to a 3% drop in your total grade, and 3% for each additional absence after the fifth.
- *Eight or more class absences*—i.e., a total of four weeks of the semester—may result in automatic class failure.
- Let the instructor know as soon as possible—*before* the class, quiz, presentation, etc.—if you have extraordinary circumstances that merit special consideration.
- I shall post the PowerPoint slides for each class in Canvas before or soon after class. If you miss class, consult the PP slides and get the class notes from one or more of your classmates.

D. Emergency Evacuation:

- 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. For more information see <http://www.utexas.edu/emergency>

Course Schedule

A. Background: Your Body, Our Food

- Aug. 26, M: Food and the US Political System: An Overview
 • Introduction to the course: overview of syllabus, rules, and logistics
- Aug. 28, W: Humans and Food
 • Bill Bryson, "Food, Glorious Food," *The Body: A Guide for Occupants*, Ch. 14, pp. 226-47. **CR**
- Sept. 2, M: **No Class: Labor Day**

B. Processes, Industry

- Sept. 4, W: American Eating: Convenient and usually Safe
 • Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, "Introduction," pp. 1-10. **CR**
 • Paul Roberts, "We Are What We Eat," *The End of Food*, Ch.7, pp. 175-205 **CR**
- Sept. 9, M: The Kernel of American Food
 • Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Chs. 1, 2, pp. 15-56. **CR**
 • **Food journal begins, 48 consecutive hours** (due Sept. 13, 5p.m.)
- Sept. 11, W: Chicken
 • Steve Striffler, "An American Industry," and "Inside a Poultry Plant," *Chicken: The Dangerous Transformation of America's Favorite Food*, Chs. II, VI, pp. 32-52, pp. 111-134. **CR**
 • **Quiz.1**
- Sept. 13, F: **Not a Class Day**
 • **Food journal due at 5 pm**
- Sept. 16, M: Beef
 • Tim Pachirat, *Every Twelve Seconds: Industrialized Slaughter and the Politics of Sight*, Ch. 1, 3, pp. 1-19, 39-53. **CR**
 • **Food Analysis Paper Due** (before class, by 4pm)
- Sept. 18, W: Beef II
 • Pachirat, *Every Twelve Seconds*, Ch. 3, cont'd., pp. 54-94. **CR**
- Sept. 23, M: Seafood
 • Singer and Mason, *The Way We Eat*, Ch. 9, pp. 111-135. **CR**
 • Bruce Barcott, "In Novel Approach to Fisheries, Fishermen Manage the Catch," *Yale Environment 360*, Jan. 31, 2011.
https://e360.yale.edu/features/in_novel_approach_to_fisheries_fishermen_manage_the_catch

- Sept. 25, W: Obesity
 • Deborah Cohen, *A Big Fat Crisis*, Ch. 1-3, pp. 13-43. **CR**
- Sept. 30, M: Genetic Modification
 • Jeff Gillman and Eric Heberlig, “Genetic Engineering: A Time Bomb Waiting to Explode?” *How the Government Got in your Backyard*, pp. 114-33. **CR**
- Oct. 2, W: The Organic Food Movement
 • Pollan, “Big Organic,” *Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Ch. 9, pp. 134-84. **CR**
 Read: <https://theconversation.com/organic-food-has-become-mainstream-but-still-has-room-to-grow-164220>
 • **Quiz.2**
- Oct. 7, M: Guest Lecture
Prof. Patricia Maclachlan: Japan in Comparison
 • Reading tba
- C. Laws and Government**
- Oct. 9, W: Agriculture as Political
 • Clare Brock, *Farmed Out: Agricultural Lobbying in a Polarized Congress* (New York: Oxford U.P., 2024), Chs. 1-2, pp. 1-30.
 PCL online: <https://academic.oup.com/book/55139?login=true>
- Oct. 14, M: How to Reach Policymakers
 • Brock, *Farmed Out*, Ch. 3-4, pp. 31-75
 PCL online: <https://academic.oup.com/book/55139?login=true>
- Oct. 16, W: What We Call Food
 • Patrick Meyer, “The Crazy Maze of Food Labelling,” *St. John Law Review*, Vol. 92 (2018), pp. 233-82. **CR**
- Oct. 21, M: Interests’ Actions
 • Brock, *Farmed Out*, Ch. 5-6, pp. 76-108.
 PCL online: <https://academic.oup.com/book/55139?login=true>
- Oct. 23, W: **Midterm: Multiple-choice, short answer, and one of two essay questions (four possible essay questions circulated in advance)**
 Bring bluebook to class.
- Oct. 28, M: Money in Food Politics
 • Brock, *Farmed Out*, Ch. 7-8, pp. 109-41.
 PCL online: <https://academic.oup.com/book/55139?login=true>

- Oct. 30, W: Example: Meatpacking in Crisis
 • Sarah E. Dempsey, Heather M. Zoller, and Kathleen Hunt, “The meatpacking industry's corporate exceptionalism: racialized logics of food chain worker disposability during the COVID-19 crisis,” *Food, Culture & Society*. June 2023, Vol. 26, No. 3, pp. 571-90. **CR**

D. Alternative Paths

- Nov. 4, M: Branding of Place
 • Elizabeth Barnham, “The Lamb That Roared: Origin-Label Products as Place-Making Strategy in Charlevoix, Quebec,” in Clare Hinrichs and Thomas E. Lyson, *Remaking the North American Food System* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), pp. 277-97.
 • Amy Singer, “Rescaling terroir through virtual identity work and impression management,” *Food, Culture, and Society*, 2018, Vol. 21, No. 5, pp. 698-715. **CR**
- Nov. 6: W: Excise Taxes and Food Labels
 • Bret N. Bogenschneider, “‘Sin Tax’ as Signpost in Food Labelling,” *European Food and Feed Law Review*, 2017, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2017), pp. 14-21. **CR**
 • **Progress Report on Research Papers or Solutions Projects: one-page summary to TA of the content and reason of the topic, the research strategy, and a list of five sources (scholarly and/or experiential).**
- Nov. 11, M: School Lunches
 • Lindsey Haynes-Maslow and Jeffrey K. O’Hara, “Lessons from the Lunchroom: Childhood Obesity, School Lunch, and the Way to a Healthier Future,” *Union of Concerned Scientists* (2015), pp. 1-18. **CR**
 • **Quiz.3**
- Nov. 13, W: Reining in Externalities, Limiting Addictions
 • Braulio Torres and Elena Rose Atkinson, “Dear Medicine: Diabetes Prevention Is Not Your Battle to Fight,” *Harvard Public Health Review*, Vol. 15, NCDS (Fall 2018), pp. 1-6. **CR**
 • Thomas Babor, *et al.*, “Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity—a summary of the third edition,” *Addiction*, Vol. 117 (2022), pp. 3024-36. **CR**

- Nov. 18, M: Food Sovereignty
- Antonio Roman-Alcalá, “From Food Security to Food Sovereignty,” *Civil Eats*, May 29, 2013. **CR**
 - Gabriel Pietrorazio, “Meet the Group That’s Been Bringing Bison Back to Tribal Lands for 30 Years,” *Civil Eats*, July 26, 2022.
<https://civileats.com/2022/07/26/meet-the-group-thats-been-bringing-bison-back-to-tribal-lands-for-30-years/#:~:text=Years%20%7C%20Civil%20Eats-,Meet%20the%20Group%20That's%20Been%20Bringing%20Bison%20Back%20to%20Tribal,reviving%20traditions%20and%20healing%20communities>
 - Caroline Hatano, “The Loss of My Family’s Farm Is a Loss for California’s Japanese Agricultural Legacy,” August 11, 2022. **CR**
 - Black Farm Ownership: “Revolution is Based on Land” **CR**
- Nov. 20, W: Smaller Portions: Yes—but how?
- Yann Cornil, P. Chandon, “Pleasure as a Substitute for Size: How Multi-sensory Imagery Can Make People Happier with Smaller Food Portions,” *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 53, No.5 (Oct. 2016), pp.847-64. **CR**
 - **Research/Solutions Presentations**
- Nov. 23, F: **Not a Class Day**
- **Optional Extra Credit** assignment due online by Nov. 23rd at 5pm
- Nov. 25, 27: **Thanksgiving Holiday**
- Dec. 2, M: • **Research/Solutions Presentations**
- Dec. 4, W: • **Research/Solutions Presentations**
 • **Projects due online** before 4pm
- Dec. 9, M: Course Overview, Conclusion
Quiz.4