

The Politics of Food in America

GOVERNMENT 370L, UNIQUE NO. 39100
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
FALL 2021
MW: 10:00a.m.-11:30a.m. UTC 4.112

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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, bought, served, and consumed is the result of a series of political decisions and governmental actions. These decisions are the outcomes of congressional legislation, regulatory politics, court decisions, trade policy, and administrative practices. In addition, the course exposes students to different theories to help explain food politics: prospect theory and aversion to loss; pluralist politics in the American political system; the tragedy of the commons and difficulty of collective action; the role of ethics and morality; “iron triangles” and policy subsystems; and choice architecture (or, how the organization and phrasing of choices may explain choice outcomes).

Because of the interdisciplinary and encompassing nature of the national and international food system, the course draws from a variety of disciplines and touches on multiple features of the food system. Throughout, we will be questioning “What is political?” about what we learn about the food system and experience personally with food.

Course readings—there are two textbooks and other readings available online in Canvas—will be supplemented by guest lectures, online sources, and student projects. Students also have extra credit options.

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

Lastly, getting vaccinated and being masked is **strongly recommended** for the 2021-2022 academic year. Many members of the UT community live with immunocompromised, elderly, and/or family members under the age of 12 who are particularly at risk and may not be able to be vaccinated. Getting vaccinated and wearing a mask are important not only for your own health, then, but also the health of many others.

II. MATERIALS

Required texts: Paul Roberts, *The End of Food*
 Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi, *Food Justice*.

Both are available at the UT Coop or through your own book order. You may read the other assigned texts either online or you may print them out (my preference).

III. GRADES:

Grades consist of the aggregate of the weighted grades of tests (quizzes and a take-home test), class exercises, 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 those ending in 0, 1, and 2 (e.g., 70, 71, or 72 is a C-). There are no A plusses.

A. Quizzes (3 of 4 total) 24%

Students are allowed to drop their lowest quiz grades (absences are counted as a failed quiz) or can miss a quiz. Quizzes consist of short answer questions, including multiple choice, that cover the course material that you have read and other important points I bring up in class. The quizzes test on content that we have learned since the beginning of the course or since the previous quiz.

B. Food Journal (8%) and Analysis Paper (8%) 16%

You must keep a food journal for a 48-hour period over two consecutive days between Sept. 19-24 (your choice of which consecutive 48 hours and which exact days), in which you keep an account of what you ate and when. You also need to trace down *all* the ingredients of *ten* items you eat (or drink), describing where the food (and/or its ingredients are from). The food journal is graded on its thoroughness and detail.

Students can organize their journal in whichever way they find most useful.

In the 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 well-written, well-composed papers that demonstrate your active engagement with understanding the food system in which you are a participant.

The food journal is private, between the student, faculty member, and teaching assistant. If you feel any discomfort with this assignment, please speak to the instructor.

C. Blog Posts 20%

The class features student blogs, under “Discussion” in Canvas, each blog with a new title, in which students synthesize, discuss, and analyze food politics. You are to write on what interests you, where the blogs offer you the opportunity to experiment by hyperlinking secondary content and sources, embedding images and video, and otherwise having a chance to move away from strictly linear composition. The blogs are to go beyond our readings or discussions; they are to be your “riffs” on questions and ideas that relate to what we have read and talked about.

Blog posts give you the chance to learn from each other, moreover. You may read your peers' writing and, hopefully, learn from it or be challenged by it. Should you have a particular reaction (pro, con, etc.), you are encouraged to write a "response blog."

You are to do two blogs (2) at minimum, worth up to 8 points each for thorough, informed, and thoughtful work. You are also to respond at least once (1) to a classmate's blog (4 points each). You may contribute additional "original" blogs or "response" blogs, depending on your inclination, to make up the 20 point total. Blogs are due on Mondays, posted before class; reaction blogs are due on Wednesdays, also posted before class.

Zero (0) credit will be given for disparaging or disrespectful blogs of either kind, for not blogging at all, and for cursory or perfunctory replies (e.g., "Good job!" "Agreed!" or "Nice!").

D. Solutions Project 20%

You are work independently *or* in groups to identify a problem and then propose how you would like to address it. Depending on the number of students interested in group projects, I may assign groups. Either individually or in teams, you are to propose community-level solutions or advocacy plans. If you work on a team, you and your teammates must come up with a group contract to ensure an equitable division of labor. Students start presenting their work beginning the last half of November (see the course schedule). Presentations may take the form of written work (delivered verbally), videos, Power Point slides, or other creative formats. The finished project is due the second-to-last day of class.

E. Class Participation, Attendance, and Extra Credit 20%

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 class 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 asking a question about it during that class (Pass, High Pass, Fail). Students will be assigned the date of their presentation (two students per class).

Students who do not prefer to speak in class or who otherwise wish to improve their participation grade may choose an extra-credit assignment. You may take a field trip to a CSA, farmers' market, or other local site, and write a summary and your organized, informed response to your visit (no more than 1000 words, up to 5%) to supplement your class participation and attendance record. You may also (or, in addition) write a short film review (up to 1000 wds., up to 5%), that summarizes and then analyzes a documentary or other film (produced in or after the year 2000). You may also attend a relevant talk 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, factual basis, organization, and polish of your paper.

Lastly, towards the end of class you may re-write your food-journal paper in light of what you have learned over the course of the semester. You may choose to apply this credit to the class participation component or to replace your initial grade for your food-journal paper.

IV. 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, iron triangles, and the tragedy of the commons to food production and consumption, whether these theories (or philosophies or ethics) are explicit or implicit in food production and consumption. These will be explained in class.
- 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 and NAFTA
- knowledgably explain the effects of contemporary public policies as they affect obesity, hunger, energy use, genetic modification, etc.

B. Educational Values

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

- respect for fellow students, 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 specifically 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
- 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 (2000 wds. maximum, per the food log and analysis project)
- writing blogs and reactions to blogs
- 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.

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 office hours. I am also available before and after class, during office hours, or by online Zoom appointment.

B. General Rules:

1. **Let your instructor know in advance** if you know you will be late for class or if you need 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 any reason or cannot otherwise participate in the class as expected.
2. **No phones, computers, or other devices are allowed to be on in class.** Your phones must be put away, and your computers, iPads, etc. must be switched off.
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.

C. Attendance Policy

You are expected to attend class regularly and arrive on time. There will be a sign-in sheet passed around during class. You have three “free” absences, for which you need no notes, reasons, or excuses.

1. *Three or more tardies* counts as *one* absence. (Tardies are more than 5 minutes late.)
2. *Three or more early departures* from class counts as one absence.
3. *Four or more absences total (excused or unexcused does not matter)* results in a 1% reduction in your overall grade per each additional absence.
4. *Eight or more class absences*—i.e., a total of four weeks of the course—may result in automatic class failure.
5. Let the instructor know as soon as possible—*before* the class, quiz, presentation, etc.—if you have extraordinary circumstances meriting special consideration.

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>

E. Because of the impact of Covid-19 and subsequent variants and because of possibly unforeseen other circumstances, I reserve the right to change the syllabus schedule and assignments as need be.

Course Schedule

A. Introduction and Background

- Aug. 25, W: Food and the U.S. Political System: An Overview
• Introduction to the course content and logistics
- Aug. 30, M: Where We Are Today, and Course Details
• Paul Roberts, *The End of Food*, “Prologue,” Ch. 1, pp. ix – 28.
Read: 40 Maps that Explain Food in America
<https://www.vox.com/a/explain-food-america>
- Sept. 1, W: The Kernel of Food
• Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Chs. 1, 2, pp. 15-56.***
• Food journal begins, 48 consecutive hours.
- Sept. 6, M: **No Class: Labor Day**
- Sept. 8, W: Unequal Food
• Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi, *Food Justice*, Intro., Ch. 1, pp. 1-38.
• Read: <http://nwedible.com/tragedy-healthy-eater/>
- Sept. 13, M: Plentiful Food
• Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi, *Food Justice*, Chs. 2, 3, pp. 39-73.
• Food-journal analysis paper due.
• Blog: use readings from linked articles, Pollan chapters on corn, or the readings on food justice or the American food system to blog.
- Sept. 15, W: A Nation of Drunkards?
• James McWilliams, “Intoxication,” *A Revolution in Eating*, pp. 241-278.***
• William Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic*, Ch. 1, 3-21.
• **Food Analysis paper due**
- Sept. 20, M: Food Safety
• Roberts, *The End of Food*, Ch. 7, pp. 175-204.
• Robert Paarlberg, *Food Politics*, Ch. 13, pp. 155-173.***
• Blog: follow up on the use of alcohol, food safety, or a recent news topic.
- Sept. 22, W: Chicken Processing
• Steve Striffler, *Chicken: The Dangerous Transformation of America’s Favorite Food*, Ch. II, VI, pp. 32-52, 111-134.
• **Quiz 1: no reaction blog**
- Sept. 27, M: Meatpacking
• Tim Pachirat, *Every Twelve Seconds*, Ch. 5-6, pp. 108-161.
• Blog on an aspect of poultry, livestock, or other meat, whether of the processing itself, the workforce, or immigration.

- Sept. 29, W: [Obesity](#)
 • Deborah Cohen, *A Big Fat Crisis*, Ch. 1-4, pp. 13-66.
- Oct. 4, M: [The Organic Food Movement](#)
 • Pollan, “Big Organic,” *Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Ch. 9, pp. 134-184.***
 • Peter Singer and J. Mason, *Ethics of What We Eat*, Ch. 14, pp. 197-222.
 Read: <https://theconversation.com/organic-food-has-become-mainstream-but-still-has-room-to-grow-164220>
 • Blog about obesity, organic food, or related topics.
- Oct. 6, W: [Genetically Modified \(GM\) Crops](#)
 • Jeff Gillman and Eric Heberlig, “Genetic Engineering: A Time Bomb Waiting to Explode?,” *How the Government Got in your Backyard*, pp. 114-133.
 • Roberts, *The End of Food*, Ch. 9, pp. 239-268.
 • Read/listen:
<https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2016/08/03/487905333/organic-foodfights-back-against-non-gmo-rival>
- Oct. 11, M: [Food Assistance: WIC, School Lunches, and SNAP \(i.e., “food stamps”\)/](#)
 • Janet Poppendieck (e-book), “The ABCs of School Lunch,” in *A Place at the Table* (PCL online), Ch. 9, pp. 123-33.
 • Bob Wilson and Leslie Nichols (E-book), “Local Leaders,” and “Another Take,” in *A Place at the Table* (PCL online), Ch. 2, pp. 38-43.
 • Blog: compare differences between organic to non-organic food with a chart or data visualization. See <http://learndataviz.web.unc.edu/>
- Oct. 13, W: [Raising Livestock: Guest Lecture, Doug Phelan \(local rancher\)](#)
 • James McWilliams, *Just Food*, Ch. 1, pp. 17-51***
Quiz 2: no reaction blog
- Oct. 18, M: [Seafood](#)
 • Singer and Mason, *The Way We Eat*, Ch. 9, 111-135.
 • Read:
https://e360.yale.edu/features/in_novel_approach_to_fisheries_fishermen_manage_the_catch
 • Blog: What are the pros or cons of being a “locavore”? Is aquaculture the answer to rising demand for seafood?

B. The Global Food System

- Oct. 20, W. [Globalization of Food 1](#)
 • National Security Study Memorandum 200 (P), April 24, 1974
 Henry Kissinger, National Security Advisor, pp. 1-10, 16-21, 38-45
 Available at: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PCAAB500.pdf
 • Kimberly Weir, *From Jicama to Jackfruit*, Ch. 2, 4, pp. 21-36, 59-84.***

- Oct. 25, M: Globalization of Food 2
 Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, Chs. 4-5, pp. 75-119.
 • Blog: reflect on globalized food consumption
- Oct. 27, W: Globalization of Food 3
 • Roberts, *The End of Food*, Ch. 5, pp. 113-143.
- Nov. 1, M: Terroir
 • G. W. Stevenson and Holly Born, “The ‘Red Label’ Poultry System in France,” in C. Hinrichs and T. E. Lyson, eds. *Remaking the North American Food System*, pp. 144-62***
 • Elizabeth Barnham (P), “The Lamb That Roared,” in C. Hinrichs and T.E. Lyson, *Remaking the North American Food System*, pp. 277-97.***
 • Blog: how would you advise a client to establish “terroir”?
- Nov. 3, W: Food Labels
 • Roberts, *The End of Food*, Ch. 4, pp. 82-109.
 • Margaret Sova McCabe, “Loco Labels and Marketing Madness,” *Journal of Law and Policy* 17 (2009), pp. 493-528.
Quiz 3; no reaction blog
- Nov. 8, M: Food Sovereignty, Food Security
 • Read: <https://civileats.com/2013/05/29/from-food-security-to-food-sovereignty/>
 • Read: <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/flint-water-crisis-everything-you-need-know>
 • Blog about food security or a related topic.
- Nov. 10, W: Race, Community, and Food Policy
 • Clare Brock and Bartholomew Sparrow “Race, Ethnicity, and the Politics of Food” *The Oxford Handbook of Racial and Ethnic Politics in the United States****
 • <https://civileats.com/2019/07/24/indigenous-food-security-is-dependent-on-foodsovereignty/>
 • <https://www.eater.com/2018/10/17/17990098/navajo-nation-food-sovereignty-nativeamerican-cuisine-arizona>
- Nov. 15, M: The Environment and Climate Change
 • Read: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/13/world/americas/coffee-climate-changemigration.html>
 • Read:
<https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2019/11/05/773097167/climate-change-is-disrupting-centuries-old-methods-of-winemaking-in-france>
 • Solutions Presentations
- Nov. 17, W: Conservation and the Farm Bill

- Listen, Meat Eater Podcast
<https://www.themeateater.com/listen/meateater/ep-116-senator-heinrich>
- Explore: <https://sunlightfoundation.com/2014/06/16/five-charts-on-agribusinessinfluence/>
- Solutions Presentations

Nov. 22, M: Solutions Presentations
Last day to turn in extra credit assignments

Nov. 25, W: **Thanksgiving Holiday**

Nov. 30, M: Solutions Presentations

Dec. 1, W: Solutions Presentations
Solutions Projects Due

Dec. 6: M: Course Overview, Conclusion
Quiz.4