

## **The Politics of Food in America**

GOVERNMENT 370I, UNIQUE NO. 38380  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN  
FALL 2023, PAR 1  
MW: 10:00a.m.-11:30a.m

Professor Bartholomew Sparrow

Office: Batts Hall 3.142, M: 3:00-4:30pm, TH: 1:30-3:30pm

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Teaching Assistant: Christine Guo

### **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—eating and drinking—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, whether these theories (or philosophies or ethics) are explicit or implicit in food production and consumption. The concepts 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 (WTO) and NAFTA.
- knowledgably 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.

#### A. Quizzes (6) 30%

Students are allowed to drop their lowest quiz grades (absences are counted as a failed quiz) or can miss a quiz. 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.

<u>B. Food Journal (10%) and Analysis Paper (10%)</u>	20%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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 and when. You also need to trace down <i>all</i> the ingredients of <i>ten</i> different items you eat (or drink), describing where the food is from (and/or its ingredients are from). The food journal is graded on its thoroughness and its detail. <i>You can organize your journal in whichever way you find best communicates your findings.</i></li> <li>• In the analysis paper, you are to <i>identify what patterns you found</i> and then write an <i>analysis of what your findings signify</i>. 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.</li> <li>• 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 the instructor.</li> </ul>	
<u>C. Blog Post</u>	15%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The class features a student blogs, under “Discussion” in Canvas in which students synthesize, discuss, and analyze the food politics you find in sources <i>outside</i> class (news articles, TV and movies, interpersonal conversations, YouTube clips, etc.). The blog offers you the opportunity to experiment 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 questions and ideas that relate to what we have read and talked about.</li> <li>• Blog posts give you the chance to learn from each other. Reading your peers’ writing may educate you, challenge you, or give you pause. Should you have a particular reaction (pro, con, whatever), you are encouraged to write a “response blog.”</li> <li>• You are to do one blog (10 points) and one response to a classmate’s blog (5 points). Your blog is due by October 25, and your blog reaction by November 15; both are to be posted on Canvas before the class begins.</li> <li>• No credit will be given for disparaging or disrespectful blogs or blog responses, for failing to upload a blog or blog response, and for cursory or perfunctory replies (e.g., “Good job!”).</li> </ul>	
<u>D. Solutions Project</u>	20%
<p>You are work independently <i>or</i> in a team 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 as an individual or as a team (one per team), you are to propose community-level, regional level, or largescale 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. <i>This contract must be part of your proposal.</i> Students start presenting their work beginning the last half of November (see the course schedule). The short presentations may take the form of written work (delivered</p>	

verbally), videos, Power Point slides, or other formats. The finished project is due the second-to-last class day.

E. 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 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 will be assigned the date of their Q&Q (quotation and question), with two students per class. 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.

**N.B.:** Students who do not speak in class, for whatever reason or who otherwise 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 write a short film review (up to 1000 words, up to 4% credit), that summarizes and then analyzes a documentary (produced in or after the year 2010).
- Or 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, evidence, organization, and polish of your paper.

**IV. POLICIES:**

**A. 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 missed assignments for any reason or cannot otherwise participate in the class as required.
2. **No telephones or other devices are allowed to be out in class.** Your phones must be put away. The use of a phone 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. You **may** use your computers, but only for notetaking and consulting course materials (readings, syllabus, etc.). Other computer use (unless with my expressed permission) will be treated as telephone usage.

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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 my 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 problems, family emergencies, etc.

- *Three or more 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.
- *Five or more absences* leads to a 2% drop in your total grade per additional absence.
- *Eight or more class absences*—i.e., a total of four weeks of the course—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. 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. Introduction and Background**

- Aug. 21, M: Food and the U.S. Political System: An Overview  
     • Introduction to the course: overview of syllabus, rules, and logistics
- Aug. 23, W: Food and the Body  
     • Bill Bryson, “Food, Glorious Food,” *The Body: A Guide for Occupants*, Ch. 14, pp. 226-47. **CR**
- Aug. 28, M: American Eating: Too Many Calories, Too Fast  
     • Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, Introduction, pp. 1-10. **CR**  
     • Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Ch. 6, 7, pp. 100-119. **CR**
- Aug. 30, W: The Kernel of Food  
     • Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Chs. 1, 2, pp. 15-56. **CR**  
     • **Food journal begins, 48 consecutive hours** (within next 1.5 weeks)
- Sept. 4, M: **No Class: Labor Day**
- Sept. 6, W: Unequal Food  
     • Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi, *Food Justice*, Intro., Ch.1, pp. 1-38.  
     Online e-book in PCL catalog: **e-PCL**  
     • Read: <http://nwedible.com/tragedy-healthy-eater/>
- Sept. 11, M: Plentiful Food  
     • Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, Chs. 2, 3, pp. 39-73. **e-PCL**  
     • **Quiz.1**
- Sept. 13, W: American Drinking  
     • William Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic*, Ch. 1, 3-21. **CR**  
     • Thomas Babor, et al., “Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity—a summary of the third edition,” *Addiction*, Vol. 117 (2022), pp. 3024-036. **CR**
- B. Processes, Structure, and Industry**
- Sept. 18, M: Food Mind-Sets  
     • Alia J. Crum and E. J. Langer, “Mind-Set Matters: Exercise and the Placebo Effect,” *Psychological Science*, Feb., Vol. 18, No. 2 (Feb., 2007), pp. 165-71. **CR**  
     • 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**
- Sept. 20, W: Obesity  
     • Deborah Cohen, *A Big Fat Crisis*, Ch. 1-4, pp. 13-66. **CR**

- 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**

Sept. 25, M: Food Safety

- Paul Roberts, “We Are What We Eat,” *The End of Food*, Ch.7, pp. 175-205 **CR**
- **Food Log and Food Analysis Paper Due**

Sept. 27, W: : Chicken Processing

- 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, 111-134. **CR**
- **Quiz.2**

Oct. 2, M: Eating Meat: Guest Lecture, Doug Phelan (local rancher)

- James E. McWilliams, “Meat: The New Caviar,” *Just Food*, Ch. 4, pp.117-54. **CR**

Oct. 4, W: The Meat Industry:

- Sarah Gibbons, “Eating Meat Has Dire Consequences for the Planet,” *National Geographic*, pp. 1-4. **CR**
- Tim Pachirat, “Killing at Close Range,” *Every Twelve Seconds: Industrialized Slaughter and the Politics of Sight*, Ch. 6, pp. 140-161. **CR**

Oct. 9, M: Meatpacking

- Pachirat, “Control of Quality,” *Every Twelve Seconds*, Ch. 7, pp. 162-207. **CR**

Oct. 11, W: Covid and Color

- 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**
- **Quiz.3**

Oct. 16, W: Seafood

- Singer and Mason, *The Way We Eat*, Ch. 9, 111-135. **CR**
- Read:  
[https://e360.yale.edu/features/in\\_novel\\_approach\\_to\\_fisheries\\_fishermen\\_manage\\_the\\_catch](https://e360.yale.edu/features/in_novel_approach_to_fisheries_fishermen_manage_the_catch)

Oct. 18, M: Food Labels

- Patrick Meyer, “The Crazy Maze of Food Labelling,” *St. John Law Review*, Vol. 92 (2018), pp. 233-282. **CR**

- 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**

- Oct. 23, 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>
- Oct. 25, M: 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. 114-33. **CR**
  - Read/listen:  
<https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2016/08/03/487905333/organic-foodfights-back-against-non-gmo-rival>
- Quiz.4**
- Oct. 30, W: Food Assistance: WIC, School Lunches, and SNAP/Food Stamps:
- 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), 1-18. **CR**
  - Lynn Gatto “‘Lunch Is Gross’: Gaining Access to Powerful Literacies,” *Language Arts*, Vol. 90, No. 4 (March 2013), pp. 241-52. **CR**

### C. The Global Food System

- Nov. 1: W: : Globalization of Food
- Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, Chs. 4-5, pp. 75-119. **e-PCL**
- Nov. 6, M: Terroir
- Amy Singer, “Rescaling terroir through virtual identity work and impression management,” *Food, Culture, and Society*, 2018, Vol. 21 No. 5, pp. 698-715. **CR**
  - Heather Paxton, “Locating Value in Artisan Cheeses: Reverse Engineering Terroir for New-World Landscapes,” *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 112 No (2010), pp. 444-57. **CR**
- Nov. 8, W: Food Sovereignty, Food Security, Race, and Community
- <https://civileats.com/2013/05/29/from-food-security-to-food-sovereignty/>
  - <https://civileats.com/2022/08/11/op-ed-the-loss-of-my-familys-farm-is-a-loss-for-californias-japanese-agricultural-legacy/>
  - <https://civileats.com/2022/07/27/black-farmers-arkansas-seek-justice-elaine-massacre-systemic-racism-heirs-property/>
  - <https://civileats.com/2022/07/26/meet-the-group-thats-been-bringing-bison-back-to-tribal-lands-for-30-years/>
- Quiz.5**

Nov. 13, M: The Environment and Climate Change 1  
• SRCCL, Ch. 5, pp. 439-466. **CR**

Nov. 15, W: The Environment and Climate Change 2  
• SRCCL, Ch. 5, pp. 475-513. **CR**  
• Solutions Presentations

Nov. 20, 22: **Thanksgiving Holiday**  
• **Optional Extra Credit** assignment due by the 21<sup>st</sup> at 5pm.

Nov. 27, M: Solutions Presentations

No. 29, W: Solutions Presentations  
**Solutions Projects Due** before class

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