

The Politics of Food in America

GOVERNMENT 370I, UNIQUE NO. 38585

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

FALL 2022

MW: 10:00a.m.-11:30a.m. RLP 0.128

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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.

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. Who benefits and who suffers from the current food system (“food system” referring to the aggregate of many political decisions that give US agricultural and food politics their distinctive features compared to, say, French or Japanese)?

Course readings—there is one textbook 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

II. MATERIALS

Required texts: Paul Roberts, *The End of Food*

The book is available at the UT Coop or through your own book order. You may read the other assigned texts online or you may print them out (which I find more useful).

III. GRADES:

Grades consist of the aggregate of the weighted grades of tests (quizzes), dclass 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 (4 of 5 total) 32%

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 (10%) and Analysis Paper (10%) 20%

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 Post 13%

The class features a student blogs, under “Discussion” in Canvas in which students synthesize, discuss, and analyze food politics—really, whatever interests you. The blog offers you the opportunity to experiment by hyperlinking secondary content and outside sources, embedding images and video, and otherwise being able 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 one blog (9 points) and to respond at least once (4 points) to a classmate’s blog. Blogs are due on Wednesdays, posted before the class begins; reaction blogs are due on Mondays, also posted before class.

No credit will be given for disparaging or disrespectful blogs or blog responses, for not blogging, and for cursory or perfunctory replies (e.g., “Good job!” or only 2 or 3 sentences).

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 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 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 the asking a question about the passage they select (Pass, High Pass, Fail). Students will be assigned the date of their presentation (two students per class). The question should be *based on the author's argument or the theory in discussion*, and not merely be a question about what others think about the quotation or how the quotation matches the present-day reality.

N.B.: 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 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.

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) and 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 (1500 wds. maximum, per the food log and analysis project)
- 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.

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 computers, phones, or other devices are allowed to be on in class.** Your phones must be put away and your computers, iPads, etc. switched off. The use of a phones in class—and I may not say anything—counts as one of your allotted absences.

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 four “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, or consistently being late to class.
2. *Three or more early departures* from class counts as one absence.
3. *More than four* absences leads to a 2% drop in your total grade per each, extra 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.

6. If you *do* miss class, past lectures—also for quiz review—can be found at the Lectures Online site, on your Canvas page: <http://sites.la.utexas.edu/lecturesonline/students/how-to-access-recordings/>. For more information see <https://sites.la.utexas.edu/lecturesonline/>.

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

Course Schedule

A. Introduction and Background

Aug. 22, M: Food and the U.S. Political System: An Overview

- Introduction to the course: overview and logistics

Aug. 24, W: 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>

Aug. 29, M: The Kernel of Food

- Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Chs. 1, 2, pp. 15-56.
- Food journal begins, 48 consecutive hours.

Aug. 31, W: Unequal Food

- Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi, *Food Justice*, Intro., Ch. 1, pp. 1-38.
- Read: <http://nwedible.com/tragedy-healthy-eater/>

Sept. 5, M: **No Class: Labor Day**

Sept. 7, W: Plentiful Food

- Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi, *Food Justice*, Chs. 2, 3, pp. 39-73.
- **Food-journal analysis paper due.**

Sept. 12, M: Drinking Americans

- James McWilliams, “Intoxication,” *A Revolution in Eating*, pp. 241-78.
- William Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic*, Ch. 1, 3-21.
- **Quiz.1**

Sept. 14, W: Food Safety

- Roberts, *The End of Food*, Ch. 7, pp. 175-204.
- Robert Paarlberg, *Food Politics*, Ch. 13, pp. 155-73.

Sept. 19, M: Chicken Processing

- Steve Striffler, *Chicken: The Dangerous Transformation of America’s Favorite Food*, Ch. II, VI, pp. 32-52, 111-134.

- Sept. 21, W: [Meatpacking](#)
 • Tim Pachirat, *Every Twelve Seconds*, Ch. 5-6, pp. 108-61.
- Sept. 26, M: [Obesity](#)
 • Deborah Cohen, *A Big Fat Crisis*, Ch. 1-4, pp. 13-66.
- Sept. 28, W: [Food Mind-Sets](#)
 • Alia J. Crum and E. J. Langer, "Mind-Set Matters: Exercise and the Placebo Effect," *Psychological Science*, Feb., 2007, Vl. 18, No. 2 (Feb., 2007), pp. 165-71.
- Oct. 3, M: [The Organic Food Movement](#)
 • Pollan, "Big Organic," *Omnivore's Dilemma*, Ch. 9, pp. 134-84.
 • 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>
 • **Quiz.2**
- Oct. 5, 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. 10, 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.
- Oct. 12, W: [Raising Livestock: Guest Lecture, Doug Phelan \(local rancher\)](#)
 • James McWilliams, *Just Food*, Ch. 1, pp. 17-51
- Oct. 17, 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

B. The Global Food System

- Oct. 19, W: [Globalization of Food 1](#)
 • Kimberly Weir, *From Jicama to Jackfruit*, Ch. 2, 4, pp. 21-36, 59-84.
- Oct. 24, M: [Globalization of Food 2](#)
 Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, Chs. 4-5, pp. 75-119.
 • **Quiz.3**

- Oct. 26, W: [Globalization of Food 3](#)
 • Roberts, *The End of Food*, Ch. 5, pp. 113-143
- Oct. 31, 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, "The Lamb That Roared," in C. Hinrichs and T.E. Lyson, *Remaking the North American Food System*, pp. 277-97.
- Nov. 2: W: [Food Labels](#)
 • Roberts, *The End of Food*, Ch. 4, pp. 82-109.
 • 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.
- Nov. 7, M: [Food Sovereignty, Food Security](#)
 • <https://civileats.com/2013/05/29/from-food-security-to-food-sovereignty/>
 • <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/flint-water-crisis-everything-you-need-know>
- Nov. 9, W: [Race, Community, and Food Policy](#)
 • <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.4**
- Nov. 14, M: [The Environment and Climate Change](#)
 • <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/13/world/americas/coffee-climate-change-migration.html>
 • <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2019/11/05/773097167/climate-change-is-disrupting-centuries-old-methods-of-winemaking-in-france>
 • [Solutions Presentations](#)
- Nov. 16, W: • [Solutions Presentations](#)
- Nov. 21, 23: **Thanksgiving Holiday**
- Nov. 28, M: [Solutions Presentations](#)
- No. 30, W: [Solutions Presentations](#)
 Course Overview, Conclusion
[Solutions Projects Due](#)
- Dec. 5, M: **Quiz.5**