GEO 4354: GEOGRAPHY OF THE GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEM

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About the Course

Food is the universal commodity and our most direct link to the natural environment. Today this link is increasingly mediated by transnational corporations, which control much of the production process from the patenting of seeds to the transcontinental shipment of agricultural commodities to the delivery of ready-to-eat products to our tables. This course explores how the spatial organization of the global food system is critical to our understanding of the development of the world economy, from the first New World sugar plantations to NAFTA and the WTO. Ranging in scale from the level of the individual to national and global levels, the course will examine issues of food security, food sovereignty, trade, and environmental sustainability. We will trace the historical development of food production and distribution on a global scale, marking important developments such as the petrochemical revolution, the Green Revolution, genetic modification, and fast food marketing. We will consider how, at the global level, hunger is now increasing while climate change, oil prices and the diversion of food crops to fuel production point toward worsening crisis. Finally, we will look at proposals and initiatives to improve the food system in terms of sustainability, nutrition and affordability, from the local scale to the international system.

Learning Goals:

Students will learn about the central importance of food and agriculture in structuring human relationships to one another, to other species, and to the natural environment at multiple geographic scales, from the individual to the global level. By looking at the food system in terms of its historical development, its political economic structure, its environmental impacts, and the social and geographic differences that characterize it, students’ ability to analyze the food system, including their own participation in it, will be enhanced. We will also examine alternatives to globalizing trends so that students, as informed citizens, will become aware of choices and options and possibilities for change.

Learning Outcomes:

Students will develop awareness of the significance of food and agriculture to processes of globalization and the impacts of globalization in transforming agrarian relations and food systems.

Students will acquire global perspective in analyzing their place in the global food system, in historical and geographical context.

Students will demonstrate global engagement by analyzing the relationship between national and global agendas in potentially competing visions for food security and food sovereignty.
Course Grading and Requirements

1) Participation & Assignments  40%
2) Exam 1             25%
3) Final Exam       35%
                    100%

Required Texts


We will make extensive use of readings posted on Blackboard, articles accessed via the FIU library and newspapers available on-line. Therefore, make sure that your FIU library card is activated!!

Important Dates

Due: Personal Food Essay        January 23
First Exam              February 6
Due: Food Security Brief       March 4
Due: Topical Research Paper       April 15
Final Exam              April 24

Weekly Schedule of Topics & Readings

Part I: The modern food system: how did we get here?

WEEK 1: JANUARY 7/9 THE WORLD FOOD SYSTEM: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW


WEEK 2: JANUARY 14/16: DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORLD FOOD SYSTEM: THE CASE OF SUGAR


WEEK 3: JANUARY 21/23: THE RISE OF THE INDUSTRIAL MEAT SYSTEM


The Penguin Atlas of Food (Topics 25 & 32)

WEEK 4: JANUARY 28/30: GLOBALIZATION & THE GEOPOLITICS OF FOOD


The Penguin Atlas of Food (Foreword, Introduction & topics 24, 26, 27, 28, & 33)

WEEK 5: FEBRUARY 4/6: REVIEW/EXAM 1

Part II: Whose food system is it? Who wins, who loses? How do we change it?

WEEK 6: FEBRUARY 11/13: HUNGER & MALNUTRITION/FAMINE & OBESITY


The Penguin Atlas of Food (topics 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 30 & 31)

WEEK 7: FEBRUARY 18/20: FOOD & POWER AT MULTIPLE SCALES OF ANALYSIS


WEEK 8: FEB. 25/27: GENDER/CONFLICT/ALTERNATIVES


WEEK 9: MARCH 4/6: WHAT WOULD A SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM LOOK LIKE?


The Penguin Atlas of Food (Topic 4 & Part 2, all (topics 9-23)) & selected news articles TBA.
WEEK 10: SPRING BREAK! MARCH 10-15


WEEK 11: MARCH 18/20: WE ARE WHAT WE EAT?!


*The Penguin Atlas of Food* (topics 36 through 40)

WEEK 12: MARCH 26/27: SUPERSIZE PROFITS!


WEEK 13: APRIL 1/3: SAFE FOOD?

Continue selected chapters from Marion Nestle, (2003) *Safe Food: Bacteria, Biotechnology, and Bioterrorism*.

*The Penguin Atlas of Food* (topics 8, 14, 34, 35, & 40) & selected news articles TBA.

WEEK 14: APRIL 8/10: GM FOOD: WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHY?

Finish selected chapters from Marion Nestle, *Safe Food: Bacteria, Biotechnology, and Bioterrorism*.


Atkins and Bowler, “From the Green Revolution to the Gene Revolution” in *Food in Society*.

WEEK 15: APRIL 15/17: DISCUSSION & FINAL EXAM REVIEW

FINALS WEEK: APRIL 24 @ NOON!!! FINAL EXAM FROM 12:00 TO 2 P.M.

Assignments

1) Personal Food Essay: Placing Yourself in the Global Food System.

Three pages typed, double-spaced. This is not a food diary but rather an essay reflecting on your relationship to the global food system. **First:** Refer to key concepts from readings, lecture and class discussion that shed light on your food habits, such as, for example, Sidney Mintz’s ideas regarding the relationship between the historical rise of the modern food system and changes in food culture and consumption. **Possible themes:** You might discuss how your culinary habits are shaped by
family structure, culture, geography, and/or lifestyle. How do you get your food? What do you know about it? Who prepares it? What are your concerns or fears with regard to food? How have your food habits changed over time? How does your diet reflect the globalization of the food system? Where do you get information regarding food issues and how does this affect your choices?

2) Food Security/Food Sovereignty Brief: Prepare a five page (double-spaced) brief on the critical food security/sovereignty issues facing a single country of your choice. First: provide a definition of each term (“food security” and “food sovereignty”), identifying your sources, and explain the difference between them. Second: use ideas from lectures and class readings to outline the critical food security and food sovereignty issues facing the country you have chosen. Use international agency websites, government documents, academic texts, and journalistic reports as data sources. You need to include in-text citations and a bibliography to document your sources. Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

http://www.fao.org/spfs/faq_en.stm
http://www.foodsecurity.net/gateway.html
http://www.developmentgateway.org/node/130622/
http://www.eldis.org/food/
http://www.worldhungeryear.org
http://www.foodfirst.org/
http://www.foodsovereignty.org/new/
http://viacampesina.org/en/
http://www.grain.org/

As you write your brief, think of it as a concise report that you might be preparing for a nongovernmental organization, a policymaker or an activist who is interested in the food problems of a particular country. Therefore you need to outline the scope of the problem. For example, who in the country is suffering from food insecurity? Is there a geographic dimension, a particular region or a distinct rural/urban pattern? You also need to discuss the proximate and structural causes of food shortages. How does access to food reflect and intensify patterns of inequality? How does food sovereignty enter into the power relations within the country and also between it and the international system? In your brief, you may address issues relating to food production, distribution, exports and imports. You might discuss previous attempts at solving the problem and potential remedies. In the case of a country that is making progress on alleviating hunger, you can document their successes.

3) Topical Research Paper on the Global/Local Food System: 5 to 7 pages (double-spaced) plus bibliography. This paper begins with a question that you pose. The final paper gives you a chance to explore further an issue raised in class or address an aspect of the food system that we did not cover. One strategy is to look at an aspect of the local food system. If you choose to do this you can use primary material such as an interview or site visits as a significant component of your research. The main requirement is that you choose a topic that you find compelling and that the paper you produce is scholarly and original. This means that you can use popular sources but you also MUST refer to some scholarly sources. We can discuss potential topics in class.

Here are a few of the many interesting and useful food-related websites:

http://www.foodtank.org/
http://www.foodroutes.org/
http://www.growingpower.org/blog/
http://foodshed.greatereverglades.org/
http://www.urbanoasisproject.org/
A Note on Requirements
All of the assigned readings are mandatory. You are responsible for all information, materials, and instructions disseminated during the class period. Lectures, films and readings are complementary but not identical, and the exams will be based on all sources. Therefore, attendance is essential to doing well in this class. At various times throughout the semester I will take attendance at the beginning of class.

Electronic Devices
Cell phones must be off for the duration of the class. Laptop use is permitted ONLY for the purpose of taking notes.

Make-Up Policy
No make up exams without either 1) a note from a doctor that a student was incapable of attending for medical reasons or 2) documentation of a death in the immediate family.

Policy on Plagiarism
Plagiarism is cheating. Don’t do it. The disciplinary action that will be taken in the case of plagiarism is explained in the section on “Academic Misconduct” in the Student Handbook.

If you are uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism, check out the FIU library website: http://library.fiu.edu/assistance/plagiarism. In addition, we will spend time in class demonstrating and discussing proper use and citation of sources.