Political Economy of Agriculture and Food

Dr. Jamey Essex / Winter 2018 / MW 2:30 - 3:50 pm / Toldo 200
Office: 1139 CHN / Office hours: Tues 11:00 am - 1:00 pm, or by appointment
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Course description
This course critically examines shifts in the political economy of agriculture and food, focusing on the political, economic, social, and geographic changes occurring in agro-food production and consumption systems. Analyzing agriculture and food through the examination of political and economic structures, institutions, and practices, this course focuses on the connections between people, places, and processes, and the ways in which one of the most basic of human needs is (and is not) met. We will approach these issues through readings drawn from fields such as geography, political science, political ecology, agro-food studies, rural sociology, and development studies.

Course learning outcomes
Below are detailed the expected learning outcomes for this course. Outcomes may extend beyond those listed here, but this describes the basic standard against which I measure student work and success in the course.

• Describe, explain, and critically analyze major issues and phenomena of political science as they relate to structures, institutions, patterns, and practices of agricultural production, trade, and consumption.
• Critically analyze the different explanations provided for underdevelopment and the proposals to facilitate economic development as these relate to agriculture.
• Research and investigate political issues related to agriculture and food, synthesize data and information from varying sources and present descriptive and empirical evidence to support a central thesis.
• Confidently assert political and economic ideas and arguments, and defend them with sound reason and logic.
• Critically analyze political and economic ideas and arguments espoused by politicians, promoted by interest groups and reported by the media.
• Effectively and confidently communicate ideas, arguments and evidence through clear, concise and coherent written work.
• Engage in self-guided research.
• Through critical analysis, demonstrate understanding of political and economic traditions and practices in other societies as these relate to agriculture and food.
• Recognize and assess the value of social, political, economic, and environmental connections within and between places.
Required readings
There are three required books for this course:


All three are available at the university bookstore and through online retailers, and (if possible) on hard copy reserve at Leddy Library. Other required readings include several articles and book chapters available via the course Blackboard site. Some of the readings are challenging, but they are the basis for all other materials in the course and it is essential you read them for a full understanding of the concepts, cases, and themes of the course.

Assignments and grades
Your grade in this course will be based on three exams, which will consist of a mix of question types (e.g., multiple choice, fill in the blank, definition, short answer, reading interpretation, and/or essay), but they will be primarily focused on written answers and not multiple choice. The final will be essay format only. It is possible that I will curve final course grades if necessary.

- **Midterm exam #1 (35%)** – in class on Monday, February 5
- **Midterm exam #2 (30%)** – in class on Monday, March 12
- **Final exam (35%)** – Saturday, April 14, 8:30 - 10:30 am

Course expectations
Below I outline what I expect of you as a student in this course, and what you should expect of me as the instructor. In this course and in this classroom, I expect that you will:

- Attend class regularly (i.e., every Monday and Wednesday), arrive on time, and do all required reading;
- Pay attention, turn off your phone, refrain from distracting yourself and your classmates, and use your laptop for class-related activities only;
- Approach the course materials with an open mind and a serious attitude;
- Strictly adhere to the student code of conduct and observe the University’s policies regarding academic honesty;
- Respect your fellow students’ right to learn in a safe and hospitable classroom;
- Respect and take advantage of office hours, particularly if you are falling behind or having difficulty with the material;
Understand that grades refer to the quality and precision of work being graded, not to your need for a particular grade or to an open-ended negotiation between you and me.

For my part, you can expect that I will:

- Arrive to class on time and well-prepared to lecture and facilitate discussion;
- Complete the grading of exams and assignments in a timely fashion;
- Reply to emails in a timely fashion, normally within two working days;
- Be available during my scheduled office hours, and will re-schedule them if necessary (i.e., I won’t cancel them without making them up at some other time);
- Take your questions and ideas seriously, so long as they are relevant to the material;
- Maintain a relaxed but professional classroom space for learning and discussion;
- Treat all students equitably with regard to grading and class discussion.

Course Schedule

Jan 8 and 10: The global food economy
- Clapp, J. (2016), Chapter 1, “Unpacking the World Food Economy”

Jan 15 and 17: Industrialization of agriculture

Jan 22 and 24: Colonialism, the Green Revolution, and Globalization

Jan 29 and 31: International trade and the neoliberal era
Feb 5: Midterm exam #1 (35%)

Feb 7: Food, money, and land
- Clapp, J. (2016), chapter 5 “Financialization of Food”

Feb 12 and 14: Peasant rights and the future of agriculture

Feb 19 and 21: No class – Reading week

Feb 26 and 28: Food security

Mar 5 and 7: Labor and consumer politics

Mar 12: Midterm exam #2 (30%)
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading and Chapters</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mar 14</td>
<td>Agriculture and the environment 1</td>
<td>Weis, T. (2013), The Ecological Hoofprint, Introduction and chapter 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar 19 and 21</td>
<td>Agriculture and the environment 2</td>
<td>Weis, T. (2013), The Ecological Hoofprint, chapters 2-4</td>
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<td>Mar 26</td>
<td>Guest lecture - Local foodways in Windsor</td>
<td>Dr. Rob Nelson, Department of History, University of Windsor</td>
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<td>No reading, but this guest lecture will be covered on the final exam</td>
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<td>Mar 28</td>
<td>Mexican small farmers and tequila 1</td>
<td>Bowen, S. (2015), Divided Spirits, chapters 1-3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 2 and 4</td>
<td>Mexican small farmers and tequila 2</td>
<td>Bowen, S. (2015), Divided Spirits, chapters 4-7</td>
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Saturday, April 14, 8:30 - 10:30 am: Final exam (35%)