

**The Politics of Food in America**  
GOVERNMENT 370L, UNIQUE NO. 39050  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN  
SPRING 2011

MWF 10:00-11:00 a.m., WAG 420

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**I. COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course examines the many aspects of food policy in the United States. It therefore considers the behavior and motivations of individual and corporate producers, lobbyists, and members of Congress. It investigates the role of the US president and executive branch, particularly the actions of, and regulation and implementation by the USDA, FDA, EPA, and other relevant government agencies. It considers the role of the federal courts and some of the case law on food and agricultural issues. It looks at the rules and customs of agricultural trade (including "fair trade"), and it inquires into the ethics and morality of how food is grown, processed, regulated, and consumed. The course further addresses several related issues, specifically the origins and history of food production and consumption in the United States, the influence of social movements, such as those for the prohibition of alcohol, for organic food, and against genetically modified crops and animals. It further considers the public health dimensions and the climactic implications of contemporary US food policy.

**II: MATERIALS**

Required texts ("T" in the course schedule below):

- Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.
- Marion Nestle, *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Peter Singer and Jim Mason, *The Ethics of What We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter*, Emmaus, Penn.: Rodale Press, 2006.

All other readings ("P" in the course schedule) are in the course packet required for this class available at IT Copy, 512 West MLK, Austin, 78701, ph. 476-6662; [itcopy@austin.rr.com](mailto:itcopy@austin.rr.com)

News stories, weblinks, comments, and questions are to be posted on the course's Blackboard (BB) site.

### **III: COURSE GOALS**

- A. By taking “The Politics of Food in America” the student will be able to:
- discuss the major steps in the development of the U.S. food industry
  - identify the legislative processes, lobbying, and litigation that have caused how food is produced, regulated, distributed, and consumed in the United States
  - explain the role of the federal government in the food sector
  - explain the effects of contemporary food policy on public problems such as obesity and climate change
  - describe the role of genetic modification (GMs) in food production
  - recognize the trade laws, global factors, and international organizations (such as the World Trade Organization, or WTO) that affect food in America
  - become familiar with the ethics and/or philosophies explicit—or implicit—in food production and consumption
- B. The student is expected to demonstrate the following values in the class:
- respect for her and his fellow students, guest lecturers, and teaching assistant, and the instructor
  - dedication to learning by undertaking an on-going assessment of her or his understanding and knowledge of American food policy
  - academic honesty, consistent with the University of Texas Honor Code
  - responsibility, self-motivation, hard work, and self-reflection
  - engagement in and concern about the policies, practices, and implications of national food policy in the United States
  - collaboration and cooperation with his and her fellow students during classroom exercises, in class discussion, and when otherwise appropriate
  - appreciation and enjoyment of learning
- C. Students are specifically responsible for:
- reading the day’s assigned text(s) *in advance* of that day’s discussion and lecture (and subject to quizzes)
  - participating in class discussion and course material (class participation)
  - tests on readings and lectures, including guest lectures (tests)
  - listing and then researching the content and source of two days’ food consumption (submitted food log)
  - writing a short analysis of the food log, per themes of the course (three pages, 1500 words maximum)
  - keeping up with the course’s BB site and your own email accounts

#### **IV. 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 you emails within 24 hours or, at the latest, during my next office hours, unless I am indisposed or unless the answer to a question is in the syllabus or was discussed in class. I may also answer on BB if the inquiry is of general concern, rather than writing you back personally. I am available before and after class, in office hours, or by appointment should you be unable to make office hours.

##### **B. General Rules:**

1. Let your instructor know in advance if you know you will be late for class or if you have to leave early (e.g., job interview, court appearance). Also let him know ahead of time if you have miss assignments for particular reasons or cannot otherwise participate in the class as expected in the syllabus.
2. Misconduct in class will detract from your participation grade. *Misconduct is any behavior disruptive to learning and includes the following:* activated cell phones, texting, and iPods; exiting and reentering the classroom (use the restroom before class or afterwards!); personal conversations; reading newspapers/magazines; studying for another course; using laptops for reasons not related to this class; and other behavior as interpreted by your instructor. Inappropriate classroom behavior may result in your dismissal from the classroom, and will count as an unexcused absence.
3. Special arrangements for the tests and other assignments may be considered on an individual basis *in exceptional circumstances only*. Even then, you need to discuss matters with your instructor in advance.
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 observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe 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—and your instructor will likewise do what he can to begin and end on time. There will be a sign-up sheet passed around in class.

1. More than *three* tardies (5 minutes or more late) counts as *one* absence.
2. More than *three* early departures from class counts as one absence.

3. More than six absences total (*excused or unexcused does not matter*) results in a 3 percent reduction in your overall grade; *each additional* absence results in another single percentage-point drop.

4. Ten or more class absences may result in automatic class failure.

5. Let the instructor know as soon as possible (before the class, quiz, test, etc.) if you have an emergency or other extraordinary circumstances.

#### 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>

#### V. GRADES:

Grades consist of the aggregate average grade of tests (midterm, take-home final); quizzes; class exercises; class participation/attendance; and any other assignments.

The class uses pluses and minuses. For a B, for example, 80-82 is a B-, 83-86 is a B, and 87-89 is a B+. The same applies for all other grades except an A, which has no plus grade. The instructor may round up, but also reserves the right not to.

##### A. Tests (midterm, final) 45%

Midterm is 20 percent; final take-home essay is 25 percent. *Tests must be taken and handed in when they are due; late tests will not be accepted. Only hard copies are accepted; emailed copies or disk copies are not accepted.*

##### B. Food Log and Analysis Paper 20%

You must keep a food log for a 48-hour period (beginning around March 30, your choice), keeping track of what you ate and when. You also need to trace down all the ingredients of what you eat, for one of the days, and describe where the food and its ingredients are from. You are to then write a brief analysis of your experience and what patterns you found from keeping the journal. The paper is to be no longer than 2000 words.

C. Quizzes 12%

There will be three quizzes held over the course of the semester. Each quiz, reviewing the basic facts contained in the readings and lectures (including guest lectures and movie), counts as 4 percent of your grade.

E. Group Legislation Project 10%

You and four classmates are to come up with a three-page summary of a new US farm bill.

E. Class participation 8%

You are evaluated on your participation in the class. You will be assessed on your engagement shown in class during lectures, guest lectures, and questions and comments posed by your fellow students, on your contributions to a Blackboard discussion site (to be set up for this class), and on other indicators of your interest and engagement in the course topic. You will receive a grade bonus if you miss on only two days or fewer (2 points added to your overall grade). Failure to participate in class or attend regularly (see above), or misconduct in class (see "General Rules," above) will detract from your grade.

F. Film review 5%

You are to right a short summary and then analysis/interpretation of a film about the American food system or about the global food system in relation to the United States. You may choose the film, as long as you clear it with your instructor. The review should be no more than 1500 words in length.

## **VI: Course Schedule:**

### ***A. Introduction***

January 19: Course Overview

- See posted news articles on the class BB site

January 21: Americans as Food Consumers—as Eaters

- ERIC SCHLOSSER (T), *FAST FOOD NATION*, pp. 1-10
- PAUL ROBERTS (P), "Prologue," *THE END OF FOOD*, pp. ix-xxvi

January 24: Faster Food

- ERIC SCHLOSSER (T), *FAST FOOD NATION*, Ch. 1-2, pp. 13-59

January 26: Convenient Food

- PAUL ROBERTS (P), CH. 2, *THE END OF FOOD* (2008), pp. 29-56

- January 28 The Business of Food: What's at Stake
- MARION NESTLE (T), CH. 1, *FOOD POLITICS*, pp. 1-28
- January 31 The Ethics of Eating
- PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), CH. 1, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, Introduction, Ch. 1, pp. 3-20
- February 2: Food and International Development
- PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), CH. 1, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, Ch. 11, pp. 151-69
- Quiz.1**

**B. How We Got Here**

- February 4: Colonial America: Before the Tea Party
- JAMES MCWILLIAMS (P), "TRADITIONALISM," *A REVOLUTION IN EATING* (2005), pp. 55-88
- February 7: Alcohol and Prohibition
- JAMES MCWILLIAMS (P), "INTOXICATION," *A REVOLUTION IN EATING* (2005), pp. 241-278
- February 9: Pesticides
- RACHEL CARSON (P), CHS. 1- 3, 5-6, *SILENT SPRING*, pp. 21-49, 61-86
- February 11: The Fast Food Industry: the Business Model
- ERIC SCHLOSSER (T), *Fast Food Nation*, Chs. 3-4, 7, pp. 59-107, 152-66
- February 14: The Fast Food Industry: the Products
- ERIC SCHLOSSER (T), *Fast Food Nation*, Chs. 5-6, pp. 91-131
- February 16: King Corn and his Dominion
- MICHAEL POLLAN (P), *Omnivore's Dilemma*, Ch. 1, pp. 16-31; Ch. 5-7, pp. 85-119
- \*Movie: *Food, Inc.* Dir. Robert Kenner, 2009: Part I (in class)
- February 18: The Rise of Agricultural Politics
- MARION NESTLE (T), CH. 4, *FOOD POLITICS*, pp. 95-110
- \*Movie: *Food, Inc.*, Part II (in class)

February 21: The Organic Food Movement

- PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), CH. 14, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, pp. 197-222

**Quiz.2**

February 23 **Guest Lecture:** “The Evolution of the School Lunch Program”

Clare Brock, PhD Student in Government, Department of Government, The University of Texas at Austin

- JANET POPPENDIECK (P), CH.2, 6, *FREE FOR ALL: FIXING SCHOOL FOOD IN AMERICA*, pp. 46-64; 161-189

February 25 Big Organic

- JULIE GUTHMAN (P), CH. 6, *AGRARIAN DREAMS*, pp. 110-40
- MICHAEL POLLAN (P), “Big Organic,” *Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Ch. 9, pp. 134-84

February 28: Deregulating Food

- MARION NESTLE (T), CH. 10, 12, *FOOD POLITICS*, pp. 219-46; 272-97

March 2: Genetically Modified (GM) Crops

- JAMES MCWILLIAMS (P), CH. 3, *JUST FOOD* (2009), pp. 81-116
- Three-page (max 1,500 words) film review due

March 4: Creating Popular Culture

- MARION NESTLE (T), CH. 8, 9, *FOOD POLITICS*, pp. 173-218

March 7: A Global System

- PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), CH.5, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, pp. 69-80
- PAUL ROBERTS (P), *THE END OF FOOD*, Ch. 5, pp. 113-143

March 9: Test.1: short answers and essay question (choice 1 of 2 questions)

March 11 **Food Log:** Out of Class Assignment, 48-hr. journal  
(48-hr. journal and project, description to be distributed)

March 14-18

SPRING BREAK

### C. Contemporary Issues

- March 21 Labor and Worker Safety
- ERIC SCHLOSSER (T), *Fast Food Nation*, Ch. 8, pp. 169-190
  - STEVE STRIFFER (P), CH. IV, V, VI, *CHICKEN: THE DANGEROUS TRANSFORMATION OF AMERICA'S FAVORITE FOOD*, pp. 72-134
- March 23 Food Safety
- ERIC SCHLOSSER (T), *Fast Food Nation*, Ch. 9, pp. 193-222; "Afterword," 271-288
  - PAUL ROBERTS (P), *THE END OF FOOD*, Ch. 7, pp. 175-204
- March 25 **Guest Lecture: "Beyond Local: Rethinking Sustainable Agriculture"**  
James McWilliams, Associate Professor of History, Texas State University—San Marcos
- No assigned readings
- Food Log and Analysis Paper Due
- March 28 Where's the Government?
- PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), CH.2, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, pp. 21-36
  - FRAN HAWTHORNE (P), *Inside the FDA*, "How Powerful Is Industry?" pp. 166-77, "When Consumers Get Angry," pp. 191-207
- March 30 Labelling
- PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), CH.3, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, pp. 37-41
  - MARGARET SOVA MCCABE, "LOCO LABELS AND MARKETING MADNESS," *JOURNAL OF LAW AND POLICY* 17 (2009), pp. 493-528
- April 1 Obesity and Public Health
- PAUL ROBERTS (P), *The End of Food*, Ch. 4, pp. 82-109
- April 4 Hunger
- Fred Powledge (P), "Food, Hunger, and Insecurity," *BioScience* 60 No. 4 (April 2010): 260-65
  - Paul Collier (P), "The Politics of Hunger," *Foreign Affairs* 86 No. 6 (December 2008): 67-80
  - Maureen Berner, Trina Ozer, and Sharon Paynter, "A Portrait of Hunger, the Social Safety Net, and the Working Poor," *The Policy Studies Journal* 36 No. 3 (2008): 403-420

- April 6 Alternatives to Agribusiness?
- G. W. STEVENSON AND HOLLY BORN (P), "THE 'RED LABEL' POULTRY SYSTEM IN FRANCE," IN C. HINRICHS AND T. E. LYSON, EDS. *REMAKING THE NORTH AMERICAN FOOD SYSTEM*, pp. 144-62
  - LAURA B. DELIND AND JIM BINGEN (P), "THE LAMB THAT ROARED," IN C. HINRICHS AND T.E. LYSON, EDS. *REMAKING THE NORTH AMERICAN FOOD SYSTEM*, pp. 277-97
- April 8 Local or International?
- PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), CH.10-11, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, pp. 135-169
- April 11 What About "Fair Trade"?
- MICHAEL E. CONROY (P), *Branded: How the 'Certification Revolution' Is Transforming Global Corporations*, Ch. 5, pp. 97-120
- April 13 **Guest Lecture:** "The Co-op Model"
- Dan Gillotte, General Manager, Wheatsville Coop, Austin
- No assigned readings
- April 15 Eating Meat
- PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), CH.4, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, pp. 42-68
  - JAMES MCWILLIAMS (P), CH. 4, *JUST FOOD*, pp. 117-54
- April 18 Go Fish
- PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), CH.9, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, pp. 111-134
  - MICHAEL SKLADANY, "Social Life and Transformation in Salmon Fisheries and Aquaculture," Ch. 7, in W. Wright and G. Middendorf, eds, *The Fight over Food: Producers, Consumers, and Activists Challenge the Global Food System*, 177-200
- April 20 Organic Food and other Options
- PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), CH.8, CH. 14, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, pp. 101-111, 197-222.
  - PAUL ROBERTS (P), CH. 9, *THE END OF FOOD*, pp. 239-268
- Quiz.3**
- April 22 Going Vegan
- PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), CH.12, 15-17, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, pp. 170-83, 223-269

- April 25      2011 Food Safety Bill and the 2010 Farm Bill  
                   • readings to be posted on Blackboard
- April 27      **Group Project:** Convene in class for group deliberations
- April 29      **Group Project:** Convene in class for group deliberations
- May 2         What Kind of Food Future?  
                   • PAUL ROBERTS (P), CH. 10, "EPILOGUE," *THE END OF FOOD*, pp. 269-322  
                   Group Papers Due
- May 4         Policy Conclusions  
                   • Marion Nestle (T), *Food Politics*, "Conclusion," pp. 358-74  
                   • PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON (T), CH.18, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT*, pp. 270-84
- May 6         Course Review  
                   **Take-home final distributed**
- May 12        Take-home final due TH at 10:00am