

# The Political Economy of U.S. Food Policy

University of Rochester, PSC 235

Spring 2020

Mon/Wed, 10:25 am - 11:40 am, Hylan 305

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## Course Information

**Description** This course seeks to answer a variety of questions about U.S. food policy and how it gets made. Who are the actors who push for change in food policy, in which institutions do they operate, and with what sorts of political pressures must they contend? What is the economic rationale underlying food policies, and what are the economic implications? Who do food policies serve? We will examine how reforms to food policy in the United States make their way through the democratic process and how these reforms, which often constitute efforts to democratize our food system and foodways, confront the same normative challenges that democracy itself faces. Though a variety of readings as well as visits from guest speakers, students will learn about the role that activists, civil servants, lawmakers, corporations, and local organizations interact with legislative and regulatory processes, shape the preferences of citizens and lawmakers, and implement food policy on the ground in ways that seek to reform our foodways. Throughout, we will engage with the concepts of access, centralization, externalities, information, and representativeness.

**Assignments and Expectations** All students are expected to come to class having read the assigned material and should be prepared to ask questions and engage in discussions that draw upon the readings. Content presented in class will not directly mirror any of the assigned readings, striving instead to offer complementary background and concepts from social science, so attendance will be crucial for students' success in the course. Participation and attendance will not be graded, but I reserve the right to revise this policy if it becomes necessary. Students will produce three structured

write-ups (3-4 pages in length) and two shorter responses to visits from speakers (1 page in length) as well as complete a mid-term and final exam. The weighting given to the assignments in calculating grades is provided below, followed by descriptions of those assignments and additional information for those students taking the course for writing-intensive credit.

- 4 structured write-ups (each worth 15%)
- 2 one-page speaker responses (each worth 5%)
- 2 exams (each worth 15%)

**Structured write-ups** At four points throughout the semester, students will complete a short paper. The topics will be, in order: 1) a piece of legislation relevant to food policy with a focus on an amendment or exemption that seems driven by a particular interest, 2) a regulation/rule pertaining to some aspect of the food system, 3) a local (not necessarily Rochester-based, rather at the local level somewhere) initiative aimed at reducing food waste, and 4) the perspective of a relevant interest group on current labeling debates. All of the papers will be heavily structured, in the sense that students will write a paragraph or two in response to several questions that I supply to help guide the analysis. I will post the questions for each assignment at least two weeks in advance of the due date.

**Speaker responses** After two of the three in-class speakers, students will write a one-page response (reflection) that highlights the ways in which each speaker hit upon themes of the class. What challenges and opportunities does food policy create for them? Do they work to change food policy in any ways? Which political considerations did they mention? These should not be summaries of the conversations, but rather short, incisive analyses in light of the concepts covered in our course.

**Exams and Terms to Takeaway (TTT)** The exams will be mostly short-answer, with one or two short essay (i.e., a few paragraphs) questions. They will cover the readings as well as the key concepts covered in class, often asking students to synthesize the two. To make the important ideas from the course more salient, I will highlight them as “terms to takeaway” (TTTs). I recommend reviewing the TTTs in advance of exams as well as keeping up with the reading. The mid-term is scheduled for Wednesday, March 4, 2020 – the last class period before Spring Break. The final is scheduled for Wednesday, April 29, 2020, the last class meeting of the semester. Please let me know as soon as possible if you are unable to be in attendance either of those days.

**Writing intensive** If you are taking the course as writing intensive, you will be expected to produce a paper of about 10-15 pages in length in addition to the other course requirements. This paper could take a number of forms, but you will be required to submit at least one draft mid-way through the semester and subsequently incorporate comments in a thorough revision for your final submission. In order to ensure that this project is maximally useful to you, I ask you to meet with me early in the semester (during office hours or by appointment) to discuss the particular kind of paper and topic you will pursue.

**Materials** We will draw from three books – listed below, preceded by the abbreviation with which they are referred to throughout the rest of syllabus – as well as from a number of articles in academic journals and the popular press. The articles will be posted on blackboard. The books are available for purchase from the bookstore (or from other book sellers), and a copy of each is on reserve at the library (though this is a scarce resource).

TPS: Blum, Deborah. 2018. *The Poison Squad: One Chemist's Single-Minded Crusade for Food Safety at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Penguin Press.

FFA: Poppendieck, Janet. 2010. *Free for All: Fixing School Food in America*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

FP: Nestle, Marion. 2013. *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 10th anniv edition.

**Assistance and Resources to Promote Student Success** Please feel free to reach out to me at any point during the course with any concerns or information that you would like me to know to support your success this semester.

The University of Rochester respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities. In the event you encounter any barrier(s) to full participation in this course due to the impact of a disability please contact the Office of Disability Resources. The access coordinators in the Office of Disability Resources can meet with you to discuss the barriers you are experiencing and explain the eligibility process for establishing academic accommodations. You can reach the Office of Disability Resources at: [disability@rochester.edu](mailto:disability@rochester.edu); (585) 276-5075; Taylor Hall.

The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has a number of resources to improve study habits, including one-on-one study skills consultations, study skills course (CAS 142), quiet study

space with peer support (Study Zone), and, for specific courses, one-on-one tutoring, drop-in group tutoring, and weekly study groups.

Student success at the University of Rochester includes more than just academic performance. Please feel comfortable speaking with me about challenges you are experiencing within and outside of the classroom so that I may submit a CARE Referral on your behalf. A CARE Referral is submitted when the level of concern for a student necessitates inclusive, multi-layered support from the campus community. The CARE network administrator shares information only with staff who need to know it in order to help you. I *care* about your success and am committed to my role in helping you get connected to appropriate campus resources.

## Course Schedule

### The scientific study of (food) politics and policymaking

**1/15/2020** Discuss course structure, content, and expectations; answer “Why food?”; address any issues with registration. Define food systems, food ways, normative vs positive analysis, democracy, and democratization

*Readings for next class session:* *Political Economy for Public Policy* (chapter 1) on normative frameworks, “Notes to a food studies scholar” from *Gastronomica*, “Anti-Intellectualism and Natural Food” article from *Gastronomica*, article about “ugly produce” from *The Atlantic*

**1/22/2020** Discuss readings and their application to our approach in class, esp. the problems with relying solely on markets; conduct in-class exercise regarding “ugly produce”; begin overview of U.S. legislative process.

*Readings for next class session:* TPS, Introduction and chapters 1 - 2, “Michelle Obama’s Food Fight” from *Politico*

### Legislating food

**1/27/2020** The “Farm Bill,” the Agriculture Committee, current Ag Labor legislation

*Readings for next class session:* TPS chapters 3 - 5

**1/29/2020** Subsidies, tariffs, and taxes; National School Lunch Program

*Readings for next class session:* TPS chapters 6 - 8, Hearing on Food Waste in the U.S. House of Representatives

**2/3/2020** SNAP

Readings for next class session: TPS chapters 9 - 11

**2/5/2020** Food Safety Act and Food Safety Modernization Act

*Readings for next class session:* TPS chapters 12 - 14

**Due next class:** Structured write-up #1

## **Regulating food**

**2/10/2020** Agencies: USDA, FDA, and EPA; executive influence (e.g., moving NIFA and ERS to Kansas City)

*Readings for next class session:* TPS chapter 15 and epilogue, visit [www.headwaterfoodhub.com](http://www.headwaterfoodhub.com) to learn about the organization in advance of a visit from its founder/CEO.

**2/12/2020** Guest Speaker: Chris Hartman, Headwater Foodhub

**Due next class:** One-page speaker reflection #1

*Readings for next class session:* FFA Introduction and chapters 1, 2

**2/17/2020** Regulation, rulemaking, comments; externalities

*Readings for next class session:* FFA chapters 3, 4

**2/19/2020** Labeling rules, organic certification, incentives vs. disincentives

*Readings for next class session:* FFA chapters 5, 6

**Due next class:** Structured write-up #2

**3/2/2020** Present regulation findings from write-ups, review for exam 1

*No readings*

**Prepare for exam 1 next class**

**3/4/2020** Exam 1

**Spring break** PLEASE BE SAFE!

*Readings for next class session:* FFA chapters 7, 8 and conclusion, “From Oldie to Goldie” article on food waste interventions

### **Implementing food policy on the ground and food activism**

**3/16/2020** Referenda (e.g.s: Sugary Drink Taxes, CA Animal Confinement Law), shaping consumer preferences

*Readings for next class session:* FP Introduction and chapter 1, and poke around the campus dining websites in advance of next session’s guest speaker

**3/18/2020** Guest speaker Cam Schauf, head of campus dining

*Readings for next class session:* FP chapters 2-3, “Michael Dukakis would very much like your turkey carcass” from *The Boston Globe*

**Due next class:** One-page speaker reflection #2

**3/23/2020** Rochester 2050 and composting, food policy councils, the tragedy of the commons

*Readings for next class session:* FP chapters 4-5, article on restaurants incentivizing no-waste customers

**3/25/2020** Local food movement, CSAs, the challenge of collective action

*Readings for next class session:* FP chapters 6-7, writing by Elizabeth Henderson on farm labor

### **Influencing food policy from the outside: interest group influence on consumer beliefs, legislative behavior, the rulemaking process, and more**

**3/30/2020** Regulatory capture and public interest theories

*Readings for next class session:* FP chapters 8-9

**4/1/2020** Private politics and the informational theory of interest group influence, Lowi’s matrix of political action

*Readings for next class session:* FP chapters 10-11, Milton Friedman on “Corporate Social Responsibility”

4/6/2020 Self-regulation, “greenwashing;” tomato farmers per-pound increase

*Readings for next class session:* FP chapters 12-13, explore NOFA and SARE

4/8/2020 Guest speaker Elizabeth Henderson – farmer, activist, writer, and founder of Northeast Organic Farming Association

*Readings for next class session:* FP chapters 14-15, TBA reading on interest group influence on scientific studies

**Due next class:** One-page speaker reflection #3

4/13/2020 Funding of scientific studies, advertising

*Readings for next class session:* FP Conclusion and afterword

**Due next class:** Labeling write-up and preparation for active debate participation

4/15/2020 In-class debate over labeling of alternative milks and meats

*Readings for next class session:* Excerpt from Derthick on Tobacco

### **Unexpected avenues for making food policy**

4/20/2020 Federalism and the (growing) role of the judiciary in crafting food policy, e.g., states suing over labels

*Readings for next class session:* Piece by Prof. Kroeger

4/22/2020 Bureaucratic and interest group influence in the writing of bills

*Readings for next class session:* Prologue to *Founding Gardeners*, “A plea for culinary modernism” from *Gastronomica*, Park Slope food co-op from the New Yorker

4/27/2020 Review and concluding discussion on food and democracy in America

*No readings*

**Prepare for exam 2 next class**

4/29/2020 Exam 2