NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service

PADM-GP 4420  Contemporary U.S. Food Policy

Instructor:  John Gershman  john.gershman@nyu.edu
Monday  4:55 – 6:35 PM  Waverly Building [Room 366]
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Office Hours:  Tuesdays 3:00-5:00 and by appointment

This course is an overview of contemporary issues in U.S. food policy. As a half-semester course, it
does not aim to develop the in-depth analysis and approach that you would get in the outstanding
semester-long courses in Food Policy and Food Systems taught, for example, by Marion Nestle and
Carolyn Dmitri in the Food Studies Program. Instead it aims at developing a basic fluency in the
current national policy issues, debates, and programs (with an occasional look at New York City).

The course aims to build on insights from core courses at Wagner including Introduction to Public
Policy and Microeconomics, and to focus on the politics of food policy in the United States.

Learning Objectives:
By the end of this course students should be able to:

1. Identify basic dimensions of the U.S. hunger and food security situation in the United States.
2. Have a basic understanding of the politics and policies associated with the farm bill.
3. Have an understanding of research on labeling, food choices, and obesity.
4. Have a basic understanding of the food system and it’s key actors and issues.
5. Be able to analyze key policy proposals addressing the hunger and food security.

Outline of Class: Classes will initially involve roughly 40 minutes of lecture, followed by 20-30
minutes of discussion. Finally, 10-15 minutes of concluding remarks will pull together some of the key
points, highlight ongoing areas of empirical and theoretical debate, and frame the readings for the
subsequent class. Lectures will NOT summarize what is in the readings. Class participation will
constitute a significant percentage of the final grade. Over the course of the semester we may alter the
proportion of lecture and discussion time. My lectures are typically interactive and I have the right to
call on anyone during class. If for some reason you have not been able to do the readings or do not feel
able to respond to being called on in a specific class, please let me know. It is understandable that on a
rare occasion this will be the case. If it becomes a regular event, it will severely affect your
participation grade.
GRADES

There is no curve in this course. Everyone may receive an A or everyone may receive an F. This course will abide by the Wagner School’s general policy guidelines on incomplete grades, academic honesty, and plagiarism. It is the student’s responsibility to become familiar with these policies. All students are expected to pursue and meet the highest standards of academic excellence and integrity.

Incomplete Grades: http://wagner.nyu.edu/students/policies/incompletes
Academic Honesty: http://wagner.nyu.edu/students/policies

Course Requirements:
1. **Class Participation** (20%) The course depends on active and ongoing participation by all class participants.

   Participation begins with effective reading and listening. Class participants are expected to read and discuss the readings on a weekly basis. That means coming prepared to engage the class, with questions and/or comments with respect to the reading. You will be expected to have completed all the required readings before class to the point where you can be called on to critique or discuss any reading.

   Before approaching each reading think about what the key questions are for the week and about how the questions from this week relate to what you know from previous weeks. Then skim over the reading to get a sense of the themes it covers, and, before reading further, jot down what questions you hope the reading will be able to answer for you. Next, read the introduction and conclusion. This (usually) gives you a sense of the big picture of the piece. Ask yourself: Are the claims in the text surprising? Do you believe them? Can you think of examples that do not seem consistent with the logic of the argument? Is the reading answering the questions you hoped it would answer? If not, is it answering more or less interesting questions than you had thought of? Next ask yourself: What types of evidence or arguments would you need to see in order to be convinced of the results? Now read through the whole text, checking as you go through how the arguments used support the claims of the author. It is rare to find a piece of writing that you agree with entirely. So, as you come across issues that you are not convinced by, write them down and bring them along to class for discussion. Also note when you are pleasantly (or unpleasantly) surprised or when the author produced a convincing argument that you had not thought of.

   In class itself, the key to quality participation is listening. Asking good questions is the second key element. What did you mean by that? How do you/we know? What’s the evidence for that claim? This is not a license for snarkiness, but for reflective, thoughtful, dialogic engagement with the ideas of others in the class. Don’t be shy. Share your thoughts and reactions in ways that promote critical engagement with them. Quality and quantity of participation can be, but are not necessarily, closely correlated.

2. **Op-Ed** (20%) One op-ed (700-750 words) on an important current issue relating to food policy in the U.S. (This can include local issues). [for guidance see the resource under the “Writing Materials” section of the NYU Classes site]. This is due by **February 17** via NYU Classes. It may be revised and resubmitted for a (potentially) higher grade of up to two-thirds of a grade by **March 24**. (For example,
if you received a B on the first pass, you can receive at most an A- on the resubmitted paper). 

**PLEASE PUT YOUR NAME AND WAGNER MAILBOX # (IF YOU HAVE ONE) ON THE OP-ED. PLEASE LABEL YOUR ATTACHED FILE: “Yournamefoodpolicyoped.”**

3. **Short Paper (25%)** (3-4 pages double-spaced (not including notes, appendices, or bibliography), one inch margins, 12 point Times New Roman font). **Due March 10.**

There are several options for a paper that asks you to explore the policy dimensions of these issues:

1. Take the Food Stamp Challenge (http://www.foodbanknyc.org/how-you-can-help/take-the-food-stamp-challenge) for two weeks and write about it (see also Parke Wilde’s discussion of it on p. 182 of the text), embedding your discussion within a broader conversation about the challenges facing SNAP recipients.
2. Explore the lobbying data on the Center for Responsive Politics Open Secrets Lobbying Database site and either look at a food, nutrition or hunger issue and explore which groups are active on it. Identify five groups working on this issue and make some hypotheses why they have lobbied on this issue and what impact(s) they might have had. What would you need to know to evaluate such hypotheses? **OR** Look at a food or agricultural company, advocacy organization, or trade association of your choice and look at the range of issues on which it lobbies over the last two years (2011-2013). Identify five issues on which they lobby explain why you think they have lobbied on these issues. Make some hypotheses about why these groups are active on this issue (in the first case), or why this group is involved in this set of issues (in the latter case). What would you need to know to evaluate those hypotheses? [If you want to do this project I will give you more detailed instructions on how to present the data]. You can also expand this initial research into the longer paper if you would like.
3. Take an item from one of your meals and chart its path from origin to your plate. (You may expand on this for the long paper if you choose by doing a meal).
4. Propose another idea.

4. **Long Paper (35%)** (8-10 pages, double-spaced, one inch margins, 12 point Times New Roman font.)

You have several options for writing the long paper.

1. Choose a policy, an initiative, a program or an organization that aims to address one or more aspects of hunger and food security in the United States (This can be at the local, state, or national scale). Summarize the history of the PIPO including main stakeholders, constituencies, and interests at stake (3-4 pages), the evidence base and theory of change on which it rests (2 pages), what we know about the PIPO’s effectiveness or impact (if it’s been implemented) or what we will need to know to evaluate it’s effectiveness or impact (if not) (2 pages), the challenges it faces and prospects for overcoming them (2 pages).
2. A policy memo aimed at an organization or policymaker that addresses one hunger and food security issue (again, at any scale) and provides a current situational analysis and either an options memo for addressing the situation, or a strategy memo for achieving a specific policy objective.
3. A white paper on a hunger/food security issue.
4. Or if you have another idea, pitch it to me.
I am happy for students to write papers that may be of direct use in your work or internships. All proposed paper topics should be submitted by **February 10.** [An Assignment tab on NYU Classes will be created for a one page outline of the project, including basic topic, initial list of resources, and the type of paper. Please feel free to speak with me about topics]. The final paper is due (tentatively) by 5:00 PM on Monday, March 24 through NYU Classes.

**Late Policy.** Extensions will be granted **only** in case of emergency. This is out of respect to those who have abided by deadlines, despite equally hectic schedules. Papers handed in late without extensions will be penalized one-third of a grade per day.

**Grading Breakdown:** Class participation (20%), Op-ed (20%), Small Paper (25%), Long Paper Memo (35%).

**Prerequisites:** “Introduction to Public Policy” (P11.1022) or “History and Theory of Urban Planning” (P11.2600) or equivalent, and Microeconomics. [Lacking these, permission of the Instructor is required].

**Required Books (available at the Professional Bookstore):**

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**Week 1: January 27**  U.S. Hunger and Food (In)Security and Course Overview

**Week 2: February 3**  The Farm Bill and Agriculture in the United States

**Week 3: February 10**  Guest Lecture: Brian Elbel, Labeling and Obesity

*February 17 – NO CLASS [President’s Day]*

**Week 4: February 24**  The Terrain of the Food System

**Week 5: March 3**  TBD by Class

**Week 6: March 10**  Ways Forward?
Week 1: Hunger and Food (In)security in the United States
Parke Wilde, *Food Policy in the United States: An Introduction*, Chapters 1, 10, 11
Film: A Place At the Table

Week 2: Agriculture and Farming in the U.S.
Parke Wilde, *Food Policy in the United States: An Introduction*, Chapters 2-4
Marion Nestle, “Utopian Dreams: A New Farm Bill” *Dissent*, (2012) [NYU Classes]
Dan Morgan, *The Farm Bill and Beyond* (2010)

Week 3: Labeling and Obesity
Parke Wilde, *Food Policy in the United States: An Introduction*, Chapters 8, 9
Other readings TBD

Week 4: The Terrain of the Food System
Parke Wilde, *Food Policy in the United States: An Introduction*, Chapters 5, 6
http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/24/magazine/the-extraordinary-science-of-junk-food.html?_r=0
Deborah A Cohen, *A Big Fat Crisis* Chapters 5-7 [NYU Classes]
Food Chain Workers Alliance, *The Hands That Feed Us* Chapters 1,2,4-6 [NYU Classes]

Week 5: TBD By the Class
*Possibilities: Food Safety, GMOs*

Week 6: Ways Forward? Panel
Joel Berg, *How President Obama Can Reverse America’s Worsening Hunger Metrics* (February 2013), Center for American Progress. [NYU Classes]

*Nourishing Change*, Parts III and IV (pp. 24-30) [NYU Classes]

Deborah Cohen, *A Big Fat Crisis*, Chapters 8-10 [NYU Classes]