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STFS 330: Sustainability and Food Production in Italy
Course Syllabus
Spring Semester 2018

Instructor: Elisa Ascione, Ph.D.

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Prerequisites: none

Class Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 12-1.30pm

Office Hours: After class

Course Type: Course with Service Learning

Lab Fee: 150 €

Course Description

There are more than six billion humans on the planet, each of whom need to eat every day: ever-higher food production is contributing to faster use of non-renewable fossil fuels and environmental degradation. What modes of food production and consumption may be viable, sustainable responses to this problem? What are some alternative models of food production? How are people responding to increasing inequalities relating to food availability? What can we learn from Italian food cultures in terms of sustainability?

This course focuses on the radical increase in food production over the last 70 years and the ecological and social problems it has created, as well as on some possible solutions: the organic movement, Slow Food, and the shift towards local food. A critical eye on these movements and analysis of their ability to change the trajectory of the global food production system, which is rapidly heading for collapse, will be casted. In addition to classroom lectures and discussions, a field trip to the world-famous Tuscan butcher Dario Cecchini will be taken.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- consider the complex interplay of social and political factors in shaping food systems;
- analyze aspects of production, distribution, and consumption of food to determine their sustainability;
- compare the geneses of the alternative food movements in Italy;
- integrate theory and practice as it applies to modern-day Italian foodways

Course Materials

Readings

There is one required text, James McWilliams' *Just Food*. All other readings will be in the course reader.

Course reader available at local copy shop. See "Umbra Institute Course Materials - Textbooks and Readers" handout provided in the orientation folder for more information. Additional reading assignments, both optional and required, will be made available by the instructor.

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Assessment

15% Participation
20% Service Learning Project
25% Mid-Term Exam
15% Presentation
25% Final Exam

Grading

Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

Letter Grade Range	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A	93% - 100%	Exceptional
A-	90% - 92%	Excellent
B+	87% - 89%	Superior
B	83% - 86%	
B-	80% - 82%	
C+	77% - 79%	Satisfactory
C	73% - 76%	
C-	70% - 72%	
D+	67% - 69%	Low Pass
D	63% - 66%	
D-	60% - 62%	
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

Course Requirements

Grades are based on the mid-term and final exam, service learning project, presentations, and participation.

Participation (15%)

For a spirited discussion, students' active attention and participation are required. Class participation grades are based on four points:

1. Being on time in class and respectful behavior
2. Working in pairs/in groups, helpfulness towards classmates
3. Interest in the course and its topics
4. Required readings: readings should be done for the class the day they are assigned. Failure to do the readings will lower students' participation grade.

Service Learning Project (20%)

Students will work on the Umbra sustainable synergistic orto, a type of organic gardening, which uses plants that naturally protect and nourish each other. The Umbra orto is located at the Gruppo Famiglia Taralla Residency. Students will help with seasonal tasks, including tilling the soil; planting herbs, vegetables, and flowers; and harvesting.

Mid-Term Exam (25%)

An exam covering all topics presented in the first half of the course. It will consist of short answers. The exam will take approximately 90 minutes to complete and is closed book/closed notes. *No alternative exam dates will be offered.*

Presentation (15%)

A 10-15-minute presentation on one or two concrete case-studies on best practices in food and sustainability (e.g., the sustainable policies of a multinational company; a farm that applies an alternative form of agriculture; the achievements of a consumer movement; an educational program for food and health, etc.). I expect: a brief theoretical introduction, a description of your case-study, an evaluation of its achievements, counter arguments, a

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clear conclusion, slides with no more than five words. You should not read your presentation from written text, but rehearse it in advance. *Final Exam (25%)*

An exam covering all topics presented in the second half of the course. It will consist of short answers. The exam will take approximately 120 minutes to complete and is closed book/closed note. This is the only time the exam will be given. *No alternative exam dates will be offered.*

Additional Course Information

All the activities, topics, lectures, and readings may be subject to change, always with due warning.

Attendance Policy

Class attendance is **mandatory**. Students are allowed two “free” absences, which do not need to be justified. Each additional absence, unless for a very serious reason, will lower the students’ grade by one grade level (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B). If students miss class, they are responsible for obtaining class notes from other students and/or for meeting the professor during office hours. It is also the policy of the Institute that any student who has eight or more absences automatically fails the class. Furthermore, times and dates indicated for exams, quizzes, presentations, and any other graded assignments cannot be changed for any reason.

Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important for student performance in class. Missing a mandatory field trip, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to the professor and Umbra Academic Director in a timely manner, will lower students’ final grade by one grade level (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

Academic Integrity

All forms of **cheating** (i.e., copying during exam either from a fellow student or making unauthorized use of notes) and **plagiarism** (i.e., presenting the ideas or words of another person for academic evaluation without acknowledging the source) will be handled according to the Institute Academic Policy, which can be found in the Umbra Institute Academic Policies and Conduct Guidelines.

Classroom Policy

Students are expected to follow the policy of the Institute and demonstrate the appropriate **respect** for the historical premises that the school occupies. Please note that **cell phones** must be turned off before the beginning of each class. **Computers and other electronic devices** cannot be used during class lectures and discussions.

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Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

WEEK 1

Mon.,
Jan. 15 *Food and Sustainability.*
This lecture presents the study of food and the movement for greater sustainability in its production as an interdisciplinary exercise. In this first class, the instructor will explain the structure of the course, with special reference to food systems.

Wed.,
Jan. 17 *The “Green Revolution” and Conventional Agricultural Production.*
Between 1943 and the late 1970s, a combination of new plant varieties and the widespread use of fossil fuel-based fertilizers and pesticides dramatically raised world food production and changed the relationship between the industrialized world and the developing world. The class will talk about how the Green Revolution began, and its effects.

Readings

Standage, pp. 199-220.

WEEK 2

Mon.,
Jan. 22 *Agro-Ecology, Permaculture, Synergistic Gardening.*
This course will be an inquiry into sustainable food production: What exactly does that mean? Today, the class will explore the idea that “mimicking nature” is a good principle in order to construct more sustainable modes of production. The class will also look at polyculture in Italian agriculture before modernization.

Readings

Jacke, pp. 11-15; 240-245; 250-254; Nowak, pp. 1-4.

Wed.,
Jan. 24 *Orto Sinergico Visit and Field Lecture.*

WEEK 3

Mon.,
Jan. 29 **“A Farm for the Future”**, BBC Documentary - Screening and Discussion.

Wed.,
Jan. 31 *Urban Agriculture.*
Can the countryside and the city grow to be closer? Today, we will rethink the relationship between urban dwellers and their source of food. Can cities become more sustainable by growing food?

Readings

Mougeot, pp. 1-11; 71-78; Incredible Edible case-study.

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WEEK 4

Mon.,
Feb. 5 *The Organic Movement (Part 1).*
What is the history of organic food production and labelling? The class will discuss the positive aspects of organic agriculture, but will also offer a critique of the “supermarket pastoral” around “natural” food.

Readings

USDA, pp. 3-20; Guthman, pp. 53-59; Pollan, pp. 134-140.

Wed.,
Feb. 7 *The Organic Movement (Part 2).*
We expect organic to use fewer fossil fuels and to be better for both humans and the environment - is it though? James McWilliams offers a critique of what we think as an alternative to industrial agriculture.

Readings

McWilliams, pp. 53-80.

WEEK 5

Mon.,
Feb. 12 *Food Justice and Fair Trade.*
“The dark side of chocolate” Movie Screening

Readings

Charter of Fair Trade Principles, pp. 1-12.

Wed.,
Feb. 14 *Sustainable Restaurant Visit: Fair Trade Products and Nadir Local Restaurant.*
The case-study of Nadir Restaurant and *Ponte Solidale* Fair Trade store. The class will meet and interview people involved in alternative choices for their food businesses.

WEEK 6

Mon.,
Feb. 19 *“Good, Clean and Fair”: The Case of Slow Food.*
From the beginning, Slow Food was a “political” food movement. Students will discuss Carlo Petrini’s turning away from the mainstream left and creating the group that would become Slow Food. In addition, we will look at Slow Food’s current stance and decide whether it is the blueprint for global sustainability.

Readings

Andrew, pp. vi-ix, 3-11; Laudan, pp. 133-144.

Wed.,
Feb 21 *Waste, Food, and the Environment*
During this lecture, the class will analyze the social and environmental costs of food waste at a global level.

Readings

Stuart, pp. xv-xxii, Segrè, pp. 212-247.

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WEEK 7

Mon., *Midterm Review.*
Feb. 26

Wed., **MIDTERM EXAM**
Feb. 28

SEMESTER BREAK (March 05-09)

WEEK 8

Mon., *A Critique of the “Locavore” Movement.*
Mar. 12 Is local more sustainable than organic? The concept of Life-Cycle Analysis (LCA) and the true food miles (and carbon footprint) of “local” foods will be introduced.

Readings

McWilliams, pp. 17-51.

Wed., *Local Food Systems: The Farmers’ Market.*
Mar. 14 Local foods have been the genesis of re-emerging local economies. The class will visit a market and ask questions to local producers.

WEEK 9

Mon., *The Food Industry and Public Health Problems.* “Fed Up”. Documentary screening.
Mar. 19

Wed., *Meat and Vegetarianism.*
Mar. 21 It takes at least seven pounds of grain to make a pound of meat. The class will look at the true costs of meat-eating as we investigate CAFO’s and explore the possibility of “sustainable meat.”

Readings

Pollan, pp. 65-84; Niman, pp. 140-144.

Fri., *Field Trip to Dario Cecchini.*
Mar. 23 Sustainable butcher in Chianti region, Tuscany (Be prepared to walk, wear tennis shoes, and bring water and an umbrella in case of rain.)

Readings

Cecchini, pp. 1-6.

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WEEK 10

Mon., *GMO (Part 1).*
Mar. 26 The lecture will explore what exactly is “genetic modification”. Is GMO the benevolent technology Monsanto would have us believe it is, or is there something wrong about genetic modification and patenting life?

Readings

Pollan (2001), pp. 186-238 (excerpts: 186 “The garden is...”-198 “...us in them.”, 206 “St Louis”-221 “...this very morning.”, 231 “In March 1998...”-end)

Wed., *GMO (Part 2).*
Mar. 28 Genetically modified foods make everyone think of fish with three heads and Monarch butterflies dying in cornfields, but is this a rational view? James McWilliams will make the argument that GMO is safe and can help reduce pesticide use and keep more forest unplowed.

Readings

McWilliams, pp. 80-116.

WEEK 11

Mon., *Easter Monday-* School closed
Apr. 2

Wed., Final Orto Party
Apr. 4

WEEK 12

Mon., *Students' Presentations.*
Apr. 9

Students' Presentations.
Wed.,
Apr. 11

WEEK 13

Mon., *Students' Presentations.*
Apr. 16

Final service learning project report due in print at the beginning of class. Come to class with the PowerPoint and all activities ready for presentation rehearsal.

Wed., **Final Exam Review.**
Apr. 18

WEEK OF FINAL EXAMS AND SPECIAL ACADEMIC EVENTS

Apr. The Final Exam and Special Academic Events Calendar will be provided later in the semester.
23-26

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