

The Political Economy of U.S. Food Policy

University of Rochester, PSCI 235

Fall 2024

Tue/Thurs, 11:05 am - 12:20 pm, Lattimore 210

Instructor: Dan Alexander (he/him/his)
Contact: dan.alexander@rochester.edu
Office hours: Mon: 11:00 am - 12:00 pm (instructor, rm 311)
Thurs: 12:30 pm-1:30 pm (TA, location TBD)

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 some prominent inequalities in the food system and study how reforms to food policy in the United States make their way through the democratic process. We will ask how these reforms constitute efforts to democratize our food system and foodways, and we will observe how these democratizing reforms confront the same normative challenges that democracy itself faces. Through a variety of readings, podcasts, films, 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 four-five structured write-ups (3 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 exams (each worth 15%)

Attendance and participation (each worth 5%)

Structured write-ups At five points throughout the semester, students may complete a short

class for several sessions, let me know. Participation does not necessarily entail speaking up in class. Participating in our small-group, in-class discussions also counts! Or...I may just do some pop quizzes. None of this is ideal, but based on trends over the past few years, this is where we find ourselves.

Materials One goal of the class is to develop “food-news literacy.” In order to do so and to stay up-to-date on news about food politics, please subscribe to the emails from [www. foodpol i ti cs. com](http://www.foodpolitics.com) and Politico’s Weekly Agriculture. We will discuss items that appear in these newsletters throughout the semester.

We will draw from two required 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). **THE REQUIRED BOOKS ARE:**

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; (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. Please utilize office hours, and let me know if you are encountering difficulties that are affecting your ability to do your best work.

Academic Honesty Information

Academic honesty means acting with truthfulness and sincerity in carrying out all aspects of our individual and collaborative work, maintaining ownership over our work and acknowledging our debt to the work of others.

Students can best meet their obligation to academic honesty by adhering to the Aca-

1 Inequalities in the Food System

Readings for August 29, 2024: "The Land of Our Fathers," parts 1 and 2 (episode 5 of *1619* podcast: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/23/podcasts/1619-podcast.html>); "Ethics over Exploitation" (chapter from *Feeding the World Well*)

Readings for September 3, 2024: "Normative Foundations" (chapter 1 from *Political Economy for Public Policy*); "Stark Disparities" (*Politico* article)

Readings for September 5, 2024: "One Meat Plant. One Thousand Infections." (podcast from *The New York Times's* The Daily: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/04/podcasts/the-daily/meat-processing-coronavirus.html>); "Food Studies" (*Gastronomica* article); "Culinary Modernism" (*Gastronomica* article); "Wasted Food" (chapter from *Feeding the World Well*)

Essay # 1 (on inequality) due on September 13, via Blackboard, by 5 p.m.

2 Legislating Food Policy

Readings for September 10, 2024: FFA Intro. & Chapter 1; "New Bill" (*Civil Eats* article)

Readings for September 12, 2024: FFA Chapter 2; "Intro. Remarks" (Congressional hearing)

Readings for September 17, 2024: FFA Chapter 3; "SNAP & CARES" (*NYT* article); "Food Banks" (NPR's *The Salt* article)

Readings for September 19, 2024: FFA Chapter 4; "M.O.'s Food Fight" (*Politico* article)

Readings for September 24, 2024: FFA Chapter 5; *The Poison Squad* (documentary, found here: <https://login.ezproxy.lib.rochester.edu/login?url=https%3a%2f%2ffod.infobase.com%2fPortalPlaylists.aspx%3fwlD%3d152714%26xtid%3d206157>)

Essay # 2 (legislative analysis) due on September 27, via Blackboard, by 5 p.m.

3 Executing Food Policy (Regulating the Food System)

Readings for September 26, 2024: FFA Chapter 6; "Regulatory Capture" (*Food Politics* blog post: <https://www.foodpolitics.com/2020/09/corporate-capture-in-action-emails-illustrate-the-meat-industrys-role-in-keeping-plants-open-despite-covid-19/>); "Labels for the Blind" (*Food Navigator* article)

No class October 1, 2024

Readings for October 3, 2024: FFA Chapter 7; "Won't Move" (NPR's *The Salt* article); "Brain Drain" (*Politico* article); "Agency Restoration" (*Politico* article)

Readings for October 8, 2023: FFA Chapter 8; "Cut to the Bone" (*The New Yorker* article)

Readings for October 10, 2024: FFA Conclusion; bring in questions to review!!!

Essay # 3 (regulatory analysis) due on October 11, via Blackboard, by 5 p.m.

4 Litigating Food Policy

No class October 15, 2024

MIDTERM EXAM on October 17, 2024

Readings for October 22, 2024: FP Introduction & Part One

Readings for October 24, 2024: "New Way of Regulating" (chapter 1 from *Up In Smoke*); "Suing USDA" (case filing <https://www.citizen.org/wp-content/uploads/Pork-Line-Speed-Complaint-10.07.19.pdf>); "Dairy Antitrust" (*WSJ* article)

5 Activism and the Food System

Readings for October 29, 2024: FP Part Two

Readings for October 31, 2024: *Huerta* (documentary, found here: https://ezp.lib.rochester.edu/lorion?url=https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cvideo_work%7C4744779?account_id=13567&usage_group_id=98342); "Penny/Pound" (*The New York Times* article)

Readings for November 5, 2024: FP Part Three

Readings for November 7, 2024: "Rochester Food Policy Council" (<https://www.healthkids.org/blog/food-for-thought-creating-rochesters-first-food-policy-council>); "Lucky Peach" (two short interviews); "OKC Dollar Stores" (*WSJ* article)

Essay # 4 (local food policy initiative) due on November 8, via Blackboard, by 5 p.m.

6 Interest Groups and Food Policy

Readings for November 12, 2024: FP Part Four

Readings for November 14, 2024: "Corporate Responsibility" (Milton Friedman essay); "Racist Imagery" (*Food Dive* article); "Should there be a tax" (*WSJ* article)

Readings for November 19, 2024: FP Part Five

Readings for November 21, 2024: "Anti-Intellectualism, Natural Food" (*Gastronomica* article); "Ugly Produce" (*The Atlantic* article); "Michael Dukakis" (*The Boston Globe* article); "Revolving Door" (*Food Politics*: <https://www.foodpolitics.com/2020/12/the-revolving-door-keeps-turning/>)