CSUS 855, Section 001  
Political Ecology of Food  

Fall 2018  
Mondays, 12:40-2:30 p.m.  
19 Natural Resources Building  

Date of Final Exam – Tuesday December 11, 3 to 5pm in 19 Natural Resources  

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Brief Description  
Interactions between food, society and the environment. Ecological impacts and sociopolitical power in international and domestic contexts.  

Course Description  
This interdisciplinary course will apply political ecology (critical political economy, with attention to environmental changes) to specific foods and food systems. We will explore food production, consumption, and the links in between in the United States, as well as in global/international contexts. We will also apply theories and methods from political ecology to our own specific research interests. Doing so will require understanding the diversity of approaches encompassed by the broad field of political ecology, as well as directly engaging in the difficult task of bridging the social and natural sciences. Issues that will receive particular attention include technologies, scale, development strategies, risk, knowledge, food sovereignty and crisis tendencies.  

Learning Objectives  
- Develop a scholarly capacity for analyzing the interactions between food, society and the environment, drawing on disciplines including anthropology, biology, development studies, ecology, economics, geography, history, political science and sociology.  
- Develop a better understanding of how to synthesize political economic and ecological frameworks through case studies of food systems.  
- Critically examine key themes in food research, with a focus on ecological sustainability, political participation and social inequalities.  

Course Approach  
This course is organized as a small seminar with a commitment to developing collaborative learning among all who participate.  

Course Prerequisites  
Graduate standing or permission from instructor. CSUS 811 (Community, Food and Agriculture: A Survey) is recommended, but not required.  

Course Assignments and Evaluation  
Assignments (100 points each) include:  
- required readings and participation in class discussions  
- weekly online reflections following up on the readings and class discussion from the previous week, and final self-evaluation
• critical review of a scholarly book related to the political ecology of food (Oct. 22)
• group project that critically applies political ecology to a food issue in Michigan (Dec. 11)

Weekly readings
You are expected to come to class prepared to answer the following questions about the weekly readings:
1. what did you agree/disagree with the most? OR what did you find most useful
2. what did the readings potentially leave out?

Online Component
Each week (beginning in week 2) you will write an essay of approximately 500 words to follow up on the readings and class discussion (please wait until after class discussion to begin the assignment):
1. what question(s) did the readings and discussion raise?
2. what were you able to uncover about this question?
Answering question 2 will require that you seek out and read at least one additional article or chapter in an effort to answer question 1. It's OK if you're not able to answer the question, just share what you learned in the process. Please cite the outside article/chapter that you read.

You will also be asked to read the reflections of other students, and brief responses are welcome (but not required).

Critical Review
800 to 1,000 word review of scholarly book, formatted for submission to an academic journal.

Group Project
Peer groups will also engage in research in Michigan communities to apply concepts of political ecology. Each group will investigate a specific food or food system, the results of which will be made publicly available as a multimedia presentation (e.g. powerpoint, keynote, PDF). There are a number of possibilities, but one example from a previous class involved comparing three different animal welfare standards, with a focus on ecological impacts, scale and political power (see https://prezi.com/req8x_tpzmpg/animal-welfare-standards/, but note that I am not a fan of Prezi and its excessive motion).

Topics might include food trucks, community supported agriculture farms, cottage food laws, heritage pork producers, seed libraries, retail cooperatives, Naturally Grown certification, etc..

Grading scale for the course (by percentage of the 400 points obtained):
94 to 100% - 4.0
87 to 93% - 3.5
80 to 86% - 3.0
75 to 79% - 2.5
70 to 74% - 2.0

Required Texts

Recommended Text (recommended to read before first class)

Additional readings as assigned (see below).

Schedule
PART 1: INTRODUCTION

Week 1 (8/29) – Class introductions, formation of peer groups

Week 2 (9/10) – The Political Ecology of Food


Week 3 (9/17) – Agroecology Part 1

- Vandermeer, The Ecology of Agroecosystems, Chapters 1-4

Week 4 (9/24) – Agroecology Part 2

- Vandermeer, The Ecology of Agroecosystems, Chapters 5-8

Part 2: US/EU CASE STUDIES

Week 5 (10/1) - Scale


Week 6 (10/8) – Technologies


Week 7 (10/15) – Knowledge

Week 8 (10/22) – Critical Book Reviews due

In-class presentations

Part 3 INTERNATIONAL/GLOBAL CASE STUDIES

Week 9 (10/29) - Food Sovereignty

- Chappell, Beginning to End Hunger

Week 10 (11/5) – Development


Week 11 (11/12) – Risk

- Galt, Food Systems in an Unequal World

Week 12 (11/26) – Crisis Tendencies?


Week 13 (12/3) - group project oral presentations, draft PDF due

FINAL EXAM WEEK (12/10)

Final group project (PDF) and final self-evaluation due Tuesday, Dec. 11 by 5pm.
Article 2.III.B.2 of the Academic Freedom Report states: “The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards.” In addition, the Department of Sustainability adheres to the policies on academic honesty specified in General Student Regulation 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades; the all-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades; and Ordinance 17.00, Examinations.

Therefore, unless authorized by your instructor, you are expected to complete all course assignments, including homework, lab work, quizzes, tests and exams, without assistance from any source. You are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, you may not submit course work you completed for another course to satisfy the requirements for this course. Also, you are not authorized to use the www.allmsu.com Web site to complete any course work in this course. Students who violate MSU regulations on Protection of Scholarship and Grades will receive a failing grade in the course or on the assignment.

Faculty are required to report all instances in which a penalty grade is given for academic dishonesty. Students reported for academic dishonesty are required to take an online course about the integrity of scholarship and grades. A hold will be placed on the student's account until such time as the student completes the course. This course is overseen by the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education.

Michigan State University is committed to ensuring that the bereavement process of a student who loses a family member during a semester does not put the student at an academic disadvantage in their classes. If you require a grief absence, you should complete the “Grief Absence Request” web form (found at https://www.reg.msu.edu/sitemap.aspx?Group=7) no later than one week after knowledge of the circumstance. I will work with you to make appropriate accommodations so that you are not penalized due to a verified grief absence.

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