

N327 - Food Systems and Sustainable Diets - Fall 2018

Time: Thursdays from 1:30 PM – 4:30 PM.

Instructor: Hugh Joseph - hjoseph@tufts.edu

Course summary:

[Note: The fall 2018 course is substantially modified from 2017 to cover more topics of current importance across food systems and sustainability research and practice landscapes].

Perspectives on food systems and diets will cover of social, economic, governance, health, culture, and environmental dimensions. Systems-based, multi-disciplinary approaches explain key issues from holistic perspectives. Topics include biodiversity, climate change, local food systems, food waste, livestock/meat; literacy; oceans & seafood; water and beverages; sustainable dietary guidelines. A particular emphasis are sustainable diets and dietary guidance. How can food consumption serve as a critical change model for producing a more sustainable food system?

The course emphasizes active class participation, including student-led presentations and group activities designed to build skills in applying sustainability and food system concepts to real-world situations. Assignments will focus on understanding the interplay of multiple facets of sustainable food systems, and how to navigate their complexities to produce practical outcomes in domains such as public policy, agricultural and food industry practices, public health nutrition, NGO advocacy, and communications.

There are no course prerequisites, but as an advanced course, first year students should have reasonable background in food systems education and/or experience. If unsure, please contact the instructor or enroll and come to the first class to evaluate your readiness for it.

Course Learning Objectives:

- Analyze food systems in terms of their interlinked components - including agriculture, processing, distribution and consumption – with broader socio-economic, environmental and cultural aspects of human diets.
- Apply systems-based and multi-disciplinary approaches to assess contemporary sustainability-related policies and practice.
- Using these approaches, address specific aspects of food systems sustainability, such as waste, climate change, biodiversity, food security, resource use, and global pollution.
- Connect diets / food consumption to overall food systems sustainability, including economic, ecology, food justice, and animal welfare concerns.
- Explain key concepts related food system terminologies, including ‘sustainable’, ‘food miles’, ‘footprints’, ‘local’, ‘green’, ‘organic’, and more effectively use of language and framing in food systems discourse.
- Formulate approaches to developing practical guidance for sustainable diets in varied settings and contexts – institutions, food service, education, government, and NGOs.

Weekly overview: Classes are 3 hours (Thursdays, 1:30 PM - 4:30 PM) and will generally include the following:

- (a) Interactive lectures on specific food system topics (see weekly summaries).
- (b) Overviews of systems, systems thinking, sustainability, food systems, sustainable diets, ethics, framing, etc.
- (c) Group exercises where students apply these themes to food supply chains and sustainable diets in terms of assessments, policies, and/or practices.
- (d) In-class discussions on students' selected topics (see list below).
- (e)

Readings: Weekly readings will incorporate the following:

- Assigned articles or book chapters - typically two or three each week.
- Additional student selected reading for class discussion.
- Students may also review additional literature for their weekly assignments and major papers.

Assignments:

A. Weekly mini-assignments: On many weeks, there will be short written assignments covering the major themes, and/or exercises to be used as part of class instruction.

B. Major paper: Papers will comprise a sustainable systems-based assessment, incorporating tools, techniques, and insights covered throughout the course, resulting in an applied example of food systems / diets interactions, to synthesize some of the complexities of food systems and sustainability, and to apply this to potential policy, education, or practice settings.

Topics for student-led class discussions: Many applied aspects sustainable food systems – supply chains and diets - will be addressed via weekly readings and paper topics, based on student selections. These can include:

Agroecology	Food rights
Climate change	Food security / food access
Community / regional food systems	Labor and food justice
Fair trade	Nutrition and personal health
Food industry / food processing	Obesity and health
Food marketing	Organic production
Food quality / taste	Oceans and waterways
Food rights	True cost of food

Grades are based on three categories:

- A. Weekly assignments and exercises: 40%
- B. Major paper: 50%
- C. Class participation - includes consistent and timely class attendance, completing required readings on time, preparation for class discussions, and active in-class involvement: 10%

Grading of assignments will typically incorporate a rubric and comments.

Weekly Syllabus Summary

Weekly class content is divided into three categories. We will cover:

9-6: Week 1

Presentation topics:

Major: Food systems – concepts / history / terminologies

Minor: Systems and systems thinking – 1

Course overview

9-13: Week 2

Presentation topics:

Major: Sustainability and food systems

Minor: Systems and systems thinking - 2

Students' topic: TBA

9-20: Week 3

Presentation topics:

Major: Sustainable diets

Minor: Food systems thinking

Students' topic: TBA

9-27: Week 4

Presentation topics:

Major: Foodprints / Lifecycle analysis (LCA)

Minor: Meta-systems ecologies

Students' topic: TBA

10-4: Week 5

Presentation topics:

Major: Sustainable food production / agriculture

Minor: Scale across food systems

Students' topic: TBA

10-11: Week 6

Presentation topics:

Major: Biodiversity

Minor: Food systems literacy

Student topic: TBA

10-18: Week 7

Presentation topics:

Major: Local food systems

Minor: Worldviews and sustainability

Students' topic: TBA

10-25: Week 8

Presentation topics:

Major: Values / ethics for sustainable food systems

Minor: Food systems – multi-criteria analysis (MCA)

Students' topic: TBA

11-1: Week 9

Presentation topics:

Major: Waste across the food systems

Minor: Right to food

Students' topic: TBA

11-8: Week 10

Presentation topic(s):

Major: Sustainable Dietary guidance and guidelines

Minor: Nutritionism

Students' topic: TBA

11-15: Week 11

Presentation topic(s):

Major: Beverages and sustainability

Minor: Framing food systems and sustainability concepts

Students' topic: TBA

11-29: Week 12

Presentation topic(s):

Major: Livestock / meat consumption

Minor: Sustainability indicators – tracking change

Students' topic: TBA

12-6: Week 13

Presentation topic(s):

Students' major paper presentations