Community Health 189  
Spring, 2013  
Politics of Food and Fat

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Course Description  
Currently, approximately 800 million people in the world do not have enough to eat, while nearly a billion are overweight or obese. As Raj Patel has written, the world’s population is “stuffed and starved.” In the seminar, we will study the causes of these simultaneous problems, focusing on some of their shared roots. Using the lens of the social-ecological model, we will explore the kinds of individual, environmental, and policy changes that will be required to mitigate these problems.

Required Books  

Other readings will be distributed in class or are at the Blackboard site.

Assignments  
1. Seminar Paper. Each student will select a food policy issue as his or her seminar paper subject. Your issue should be linked to the U.S. farm bill and include an analysis that can inform the next bill—it may be related to domestic or international affects of subsidies, SNAP and nutrition programs, food safety, organic agriculture, or any other food policy issue that should be considered during development of the next Farm Bill. You must get my approval for the topic. Your final paper for this class will be a critical assessment of the policy making process surrounding your issue and your thinking as to what should be done instead. In particular, consider current policy and the kinds of treatments/interventions that we might pursue to mitigate the problem as opposed to what is being done now. Include in your paper some assessment of what community health principles suggest we should do.

   A brief description of your topic is due by February 13. We will have a meeting after you submit this to think through your next steps and to fine tune your topic. Your detailed problem statement will be due on March 13 (10% of overall grade). We will spend the March 6 class period in the library doing research for the paper.

   Your first draft will be due on April 17 and must be at least 10 pages long. I will grade this draft. You can either keep the grade you receive on the draft or rewrite it. Drafts that are less than 10 pages (double-spaced, 12 pt type, 1 inch margins) will lose half a grade on the final paper. Final papers are due on May 5 at 5 p.m. and should be 12-15 pages long (40% of overall grade).

2. Presentation. During the last two class sessions (April 17 and 24), I will ask each of you to do a presentation based on your work. You should plan to present for about 15 minutes. Your presentation should introduce your topic, have a clear statement of your research question(s), provide background/data, and then end with your suggestions about what should be done. (10% of overall grade)

3. Weekly Questions. Each week, you need to send me by 3 p.m. on Monday, one question for discussion in the group. These should be anchored in the readings but may also have a current events focus if
something interesting has happened that week on the food or fat front. These will be graded on a “plus,
check, minus” scale. ” To earn a “plus,” your questions should refer to the week’s reading assignments and
bring original thought to the readings; they must also be submitted on time. To receive an A on questions
will require that at least half of those you write receive a plus. These questions will form some of the basis
for of our discussion for that week. (5% of overall grade)

in 1998 called, World Hunger: Twelve Myths. You will present a myth to the class. For your
presentation, you will summarize their argument and critique it. Is it really a myth? Has the world
changed in the last 15 years? You must present both sides of this argument. Oral presentations will
be given in February. You will have 20 minutes, so be organized. You will then write up your arguments, on
which you can take either side but you must choose one. All essays (4-5 pages), except the Green
Revolution, are due on February 20. (15% of your grade). Green Revolution essays are due on February
27.

5. Class Participation. A seminar is only interesting if everyone has done the reading and contributes to
the class discussion. For this reason, I take class participation seriously. It counts for 20% of your course
grade. I expect you to attend class and to be prepared to participate in class discussion. “Being prepared”
means that you have done the readings and can lead a discussion on the questions you have submitted.
Each class absence will result in a half-grade reduction in your overall course grade, unless you have a
medical or some other legitimate excuse that I receive in advance of the class meeting. If you have such an
excuse, you may miss once but you must hand in a written response to two of the “Questions for
Discussion” submitted that week. More than one absence will result in a half-grade reduction in your
overall course grade.

Grading Summary: Weekly questions will count for 5% of your grade. Your myth essay will count for
15%. Your presentation will count for 10%. Your problem statement will count for 10% of your course
grade. Your final paper will count for 40% of your grade (see “seminar paper” on how I will assign grades
on the paper). Class participation will count for 20% of your grade.

Late work: All work is expected to be on time. You will lose half a grade per day if it is late. If you have
a valid reason why you need more time, you must discuss this with me before the due date.
Computer/printer failures, in general, are not valid excuses. Remember to save your drafts often,
somewhere other than on your own computer.

Learning Objectives in This Course

Skills
1) Students can understand how multiple disciplines bring unique perspectives to cross-cutting questions
   of health and societies.
   a. Integration of learning disciplinary perspectives
   b. Critical thinking
   c. Research skills
   d. Oral and written communication skills
2) Students can explain and assess social and behavioral interventions to improve the health of
   populations.

Processes
1) Students can evaluate complex arguments related to public policy and/or law.
   a. Critical thinking

Fields
1) Students can identify the role that public health plays in improving global health
2) Students can evaluate public policy issues with respect to access, quality, and cost and demonstrate
   understanding of health disciplines within vulnerable populations.
January 16 (Week 1). Introduction: Thinking about Corn


Viewing: King Corn

January 30 (Week 2). The Science and Epidemiology of Obesity and Underweight (all readings on Blackboard)


February 6 (Week 3). Global Policies and Pressures


First Four Myths
Myth 1 (There’s Simply Not Enough Food)
Myth 2 (Nature's to Blame)
Myth 3 (Too Many Mouths to Feed)
Myth 4 (Food versus our Environment)

February 13 (Week 4). United States Policies and Pressures

http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/?q=node/view/497

Two reports from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (on Trunk)
Neuberger, Zoe. “WIC Food Packages Be Based on Science.” June 4, 2010
“Introduction to the Food Stamp Program,” July 30, 2010

Wise, Timothy (2011) “Still waiting for the farm boom” Global Development and Environment Institute, Tufts University


Three More Myths
   Myth 7 (The Free Market Can End Hunger)
   Myth 8 (Free Trade is the Answer)
   Myth 10 (More U.S. Aid Will Help the Hungry)

February 20 (Week 5).
   Due: One page (or paragraph) description of your semester problem and Myth essay
   Guest Speaker-Health inequities and food access

February 27 (Week 6). The Future: Land and Sea
   Myth 5 (The Green Revolution is the Answer)
   Case Study: Golden Rice
   [http://www.goldenrice.org/Content4-Info/info.html](http://www.goldenrice.org/Content4-Info/info.html)
   Presentation of selected chapters from Bottomfeeder (2008) by Taras Grescoe (distributed in class)
   Sponberg, Adrienne (2012) New farm bill could have devastating effects on water quality. American Institute of Biological Sciences (on Trunk)

March 6 (Week 7). Introduction to Library Research
   Introduction to Library Research and Time to Practice - Meet in the Instruction Room in the Library

March 13 (Week 8). What Can We Do?
   Problem statement due
   Spring Break-March 20

March 27 (Week 9). What Can We Do (cont.)?
   Case Study: School lunch and the Farm Bill
April 3 (Week 10).

Field Trip - Waltham Fields Community Farm

April 10 (Week 11). What Can We do (cont)/Class summary

Pollan, Section II. Pastoral. Grass, Chapters 8 through 14

Moshow, Angela (1999), "The Cuba Case: The Contribution of Urban Agriculture to Gardeners, their Households, and Surrounding Communities; The Case of Havana, Cuba," in Koc. (handed out in class)

Juhasz, Mark (2004), "Revitalizing the Ranch: A Mexican Farm Story" in Heintzman and Solomon. (handed out on class)


Imhoff, Daniel (2012) New Zealand: still subsidy-free after all these years, Food Fight (handed out in class)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009), “Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States,” MMWR, July 24. (skim key recommendations)


Viewing: Fresh

April 17 and 24. Presentation of student work - All drafts due at 1:30 pm on April 17.