

GEOG 3445G: Global Agriculture and Food Systems

Course Outline – Section 001 – Winter 2021



Although this academic year is different, Western University is committed to a thriving campus. We encourage you to check out the [Digital Student Experience](#) website to manage your academics and well-being. Additionally, the following link provides available resources to support students on and off campus: www.uwo.ca/health/.

1. Technical Requirements



Stable internet connection



Laptop or computer

If you wish to come to the optional office hours or arrange an appointment, you will also need:



Working microphone



Working webcam

zoom

Zoom application installed

Recommended technical specifications: <https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/timetables.html>

Western Zoom webpage, including privacy information: <https://wts.uwo.ca/zoom/index.html>

2. Course Information

Delivery Mode	Time
Online	Asynchronous – lecture material will be posted to OWL every Tues and Thurs

*Details about design and delivery of the course are listed below in Section 5

Classes Start	Reading Week	Classes End	Study Day	Exam Period
January 11	February 13-21	April 12	April 13	April 14 - 30

* March 15, 2021: Last day to drop a first-term half course or a first-term full course without penalty

Course Instructor	Contact Information	Optional Zoom Drop-in / Office hours
Dr. Tony Weis	tony.weis@uwo.ca	Fridays in the 2 nd and 3 rd week of each unit (time TBD) additional meetings available by appointment

Teaching Assistant	Contact Information	Office hours
Daniel Amoak	damoak@uwo.ca	By appointment

Dr. Weis will be available for an optional group session on Zoom during the second and third week of each unit, and is willing to schedule further meetings if requested.

Please feel encouraged to submit general queries about course content or logistics through the OWL Forums tab, which will get checked and answered regularly, and sorted into thematic folders as the term proceeds.

3. Calendar Description

Food is a basic human need and agriculture is one of the most fundamental ways that societies interact with their habitats. This course examines the diversity of world agriculture and the rise of a dominant industrial system, focusing on both the social and environmental dimensions of agrarian change and their interrelation.

3 lecture hours, 0.5 credit. No prerequisites.

Prerequisite(s): Third or fourth year status at the University

Senate Regulations state, “unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you will be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.”

4. Overview

Agriculture and food starkly reflect global inequalities: nearly 1 billion people are chronically hungry or food insecure, many of them small farmers, while roughly 2 billion people are obese or overweight. World markets in food products and agricultural inputs are increasingly dominated by a small number of very large transnational corporations, and world food security has become ever more tied to industrialized agriculture, much of which is heavily subsidized and entails large resource budgets and pollution loads. Meanwhile, the vast majority of the world’s farming population lives in the Global South, constrained by marginal land access, limited capital and technology, and virtually no state support. Almost everywhere, small farm livelihoods are becoming more and more precarious.

This course focuses on key dynamics shaping contemporary agriculture and food systems, which have increasingly global dimensions that play out in very uneven ways and pose momentous environmental questions. The first half of the course focuses on the increasing control of transnational corporations over food retailing, distribution, processing, and packaging, as well as agricultural inputs and other aspects of farm production. The second half of the course focuses centrally on the environmental impacts of agriculture and food systems and the precarious biophysical conditions of the current trajectory; in short, why the cheap food we take for granted is not so cheap. The ultimate aim is to provide a framework for understanding both contemporary problems and possibilities, and to contextualize struggles to build more socially just and sustainable agro-food systems.

5. Readings

There is no required textbook. Readings for each unit are available for free on OWL in the unit folders (in the Resources tab), along with details of how to access a few documentary films.

Along with the lecture segments (MP4 format), the accompanying PowerPoint slides will subsequently be posted as PDF files. The PDF files contain an abundance of additional links to short videos, valuable websites, reports, and news items. In including so many additional active links, I do not expect you to follow everything – my only hope is that they might provide a starting point that allow you to dig into subjects you are most interested in a bit further.

6. Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should:

- have advanced their critical reading, listening, and analytic skills;
- have advanced their writing skills, with a particular focus on synthesizing information and clear and concise articulation of ideas;
- be able to understand and explain major social and ecological dynamics of agrarian and dietary change;
- be able to critically engage with debates, conflicts, and policy issues surrounding agriculture and food systems;
- have a conceptual basis for further studies in subjects relating to agriculture and food;
- be challenged to think about food choices, agrarian change, and ‘food movements’ in an ongoing way.

7. Course Format

This course is based upon online lectures and readings. The content is organized into 4 units, as outlined in the following section. Lecture material is asynchronous, with online lectures uploaded twice-weekly in short segments in folders in the Resources tab in OWL. There will be between 2-3 lecture hours in total per week, and the readings for each of the 4 units should take about 5 hours in total. The key is to balance your time in a way that allows you to keep up with lecture material and readings on a unit-by-unit basis.

You are expected to complete 4 short unit-based written assignments over the course of the term, which are due on each Thursday at 11.55 pm EST after the completion of the unit (due dates in the schedule). You have the *option* to displace 1 of your assignment grades with a final exam. If you are satisfied with your grades on the Unit papers, you can skip writing the final.

Google Chrome or Mozilla Firefox are the preferred browsers to optimally use OWL; update your browsers frequently. Students interested in evaluating their internet speed, please click [here](#). Using the right browser is important, especially when using different features integrated with OWL. If you need technical assistance, support can be found on the OWL Help page or by contacting the Western Technology Services Helpdesk (which can also be reached by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800).

8. Course Objectives and Schedule

This course is focused around four 3-week units on major subjects.

Date	UNIT
Jan. 12	Introduction: the big picture of global agriculture and food
Jan 12 – 17	Agroecosystems and peasants in the longue durée some key subjects: domestication and dispersion; biophysical organizing imperatives; diversity of peasantries; divergent colonial transformations between temperate and tropical regions
Jan 18 – 24	
Jan 25 – 31	
Feb 1 – 7	Technological change, global market integration, and rising corporate power some key subjects: uneven industrialization; scale pressures and the polarization of farming; the Green Revolution; neoliberal prescriptions (SAPs and multilateral rules-making); the concentration power and value in agriculture ('upstream' and 'downstream' from farms)
Feb 8 – 14	
Feb 15 – 21	Reading Week
Feb 22 – 28	
Mar 1 – 7	Environmental dimensions of modern agro-food systems some key subjects: biophysical contradictions and overrides; resource budgets and pollution loads of industrial monocultures and livestock production; accelerating contradictions (i.e. intensifying challenges)
Mar 8 – 14	
Mar 15 – 21	
Mar 22 – 28	Contemporary agro-food movements: struggles to build more equitable and sustainable alternatives some key subjects: food sovereignty and Via Campesina; agroecology; 'locavores' and other food movements; nexus of environment and health concerns; the right to food
Mar 29 – Apr 4	
Apr 5 – 11	

9. Communication

- you are encouraged to check the OWL site every 24 – 48 hours
- a weekly update will be provided on OWL announcements, and there may be additional announcements from time to time
- you are encouraged to post general course-related queries about both logistics and content (giving them a clear heading) in the Forums tab on OWL
- questions posted on Forums and emails will be monitored daily, and you can expect to receive a response in 24 – 48 hours
- any communication will arrive through your university email account. It is your responsibility to ensure that email received from the University at your UWO address is attended to in a timely manner. You can read about the privacy and security of the UWO email accounts [here](#).

10. Evaluation

The evaluation breakdown for the course is as follows:

Assessment	Format	Weighting	Due Date
Unit summaries & reflections	Word document • submit as .doc through OWL Assignment tab in specified folder	25% each x 4	Thursdays at 11.55 pm EST following each unit (see pg. 6 for dates)

Unit summaries & reflections (4 x 25% = 100% of course grade)

For **each** unit, you are expected to prepare a short, **1250-word** (~5 double-spaced pages) paper that has 3 basic parts:

- 1) a summary and discussion of the significance of 3 major subjects covered in the unit, that draws on material from the lectures and readings (**~750 words**)
- 2) a reflection on how 1 or more of the subjects in the unit challenge you to think more critically about a food item (or items) that you consume regularly (**~250 words**)
- 3) a reflection on how 1 or more of the subjects covered in the unit challenge you to think more critically about an agricultural landscape you are familiar with (**~250 words**)

There is no blueprint for these papers. You do not need to worry about whether you have identified *the* 3 major subjects – in every unit, there are many more than 3 subjects you could conceivably choose to focus on.

Consider the unit as a whole, including the lectures and the readings, and then identify 3 subjects to discuss clearly and succinctly. These might be chosen based on: what you see as being most significant; what you find most interesting; what you feel most confident discussing; subjects you think can most easily be discussed together; and subject(s) you would most like to critically reflect on in the second part of the paper. In asking you to think about the course material in relation to both food and agriculture landscapes, a good starting point is to ask yourself: how has it sparked attention to social and/or environmental considerations you did not previously think about.

The total words should not exceed 1250 words, and part 1 should have the most substance, but there is some flexibility in how you allocate the words. For both cases, do not copy lines from PowerPoints. You can use direct quotations from the readings occasionally (when effectively used, this can help indicate your grasp of the readings) but keep them to a minimum and be sure to cite them. Most of the writing should be *in your own words*.

* You can choose to drop your lowest assignment mark by writing an optional take-home final exam *

Format: use 12 pt. font, double space, and save and submit your work as a Word document. You can follow whatever formatting convention you are comfortable with (just be sure to follow it correctly and consistently)

Length: 1250 words max. (about 5 double-spaced pages), not including references.

Save as: LASTNAME-FIRSTNAME-UNIT#.doc

Submit: on OWL via Turnitin (see statement in policies below)

Due: Thursdays at 11.55 pm EST, in the week following the conclusion of the unit.

UNIT 1: February 4

UNIT 2: March 4

UNIT 3: March 25

UNIT 4: April 15

TAKE-HOME FINAL (*optional*): in exam period TBD (when registrar determines exam date)

Grading:

A+	90-100	One could scarcely expect better from a student at this level
A	80-89	Superior work which is clearly above average
B	70-79	Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory
C	60-69	Competent work, meeting requirements
D	50-59	Fair work, minimally acceptable
F	below 50	Fail

In general, top grades (**A / A+**) will be given to papers that demonstrate a very strong grasp of the subjects, incorporate some material from the readings, contain a thoughtful reflection, and are very well-written and edited. 1250 words is not a lot of space, but writing with concision is an important skill to foster, and for top marks it is important to be specific and avoid ambiguities and grammatical problems.

Low grades (**C and below**) will be given to papers where major subjects are conveyed inaccurately, unclearly, or indicate serious confusion, fail to draw upon the readings at all, and have sloppy writing. It is usually quite apparent if something has been prepared in great haste and without seriously engaging with the material.

Notes:

- plagiarized or copied work will receive a grade of **zero** (see notes on academic offences below).
- after an assessment is returned, if you have concerns you should wait 24 hours to digest feedback before contacting your TA. To ensure a timely response, reach out within 7 days.
- click [here](#) for a detailed and comprehensive set of policies and regulations concerning grading.

Late policy

- late papers without illness self-reports subject to a penalty of 10%/day
- late papers with self-reported absence or other documented accommodation should be submitted

within 24 hours after the end of the period covered by either accommodation.

Grades will not be adjusted on the basis of need. It is important to monitor your performance in the course. Remember: You are responsible for your grades in this course.

11. Online Participation and Engagement

- students can attend synchronous live sessions at the end of each unit
- students can post questions and thoughts in the Forums tab in OWL, and the instructor will try to respond within 24 – 48 hours

12. Professionalism, Privacy, and Online Etiquette

Western students are expected to follow the Student Code of Conduct. Additionally, the following expectations and professional conduct apply to this course:

- students are expected to follow online etiquette expectations provided on OWL
- all course materials created by the instructor(s) are copyrighted and cannot be sold/shared
- recordings are not permitted (audio or video) without explicit permission
- be courteous toward the instructor and your peers in optional synchronous sessions
- be professional and scholarly in all online postings in Forums: the exchange of diverse ideas and opinions is part of the scholarly environment. “Flaming” is never appropriate.

13. Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

Academic Consideration for Student Absence

Students will have up to two (2) opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the term, provided the following conditions are met: the absence is no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student’s final grade. Students are expected to contact their instructors within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence, unless noted on the syllabus. Students are not able to use the self-reporting option in the following circumstances:

- for exams scheduled by the Office of the Registrar (e.g., December and April exams)
- absence of a duration greater than 48 hours,
- assessments worth more than 30% of the student’s final grade,
- if a student has already used the self-reporting portal twice during the academic year

If the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence are *not* met, students will need to provide a Student Medical Certificate if the absence is medical, or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate

grounds for the absence in question. Students are encouraged to contact their Faculty academic counselling office to obtain more information about the relevant documentation.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds, or for other reasons. **All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty.**

For Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see:

[Policy on Academic Consideration for Student Absences - Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#)

For the Student Medical Certificate (SMC), see:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

14. How to be successful in this class

Students enrolled in this class should understand the level of autonomy and self-discipline required to be successful.

- 1) Invest in a planner or application to keep track of your courses. Populate all your deadlines at the start of the term and schedule time at the start of each week to get organized and manage your time.
- 2) Make it a daily habit to log onto OWL to ensure you have seen everything posted to help you succeed in this class.
- 3) Take notes as you go through the lesson material. Treat this course as you would a face-to-face course. Keeping handwritten notes or even notes on a regular Word document will help you learn more effectively than just reading or watching the videos.
- 4) Connect with others. Try forming an online study group and try meeting on a weekly basis for study and peer support.
- 5) Do not be afraid to ask questions. If you are struggling with a topic, check the online discussion boards or contact your instructor and/or teaching assistant.
- 6) Reward yourself for successes. It seems easier to motivate ourselves knowing that there is something waiting for us at the end of the task.

15. Statements Concerning Online Etiquette

While much of this course is conducted asynchronously, there are some components that involve online interactions, namely optional synchronous meetings at the conclusion of each unit, and posts to Forums.

To ensure the best experience for both you and your classmates, please honour the following 'netiquette' considerations:

- keep in mind the different cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students in the course.
- be courteous toward the instructor, your colleagues, and authors whose work you are discussing.
- be respectful of the diversity of viewpoints that you will encounter in the class and in your readings. The exchange of diverse ideas and opinions is part of the scholarly environment. "Flaming" is never appropriate.
- be professional and scholarly in all online postings.

Note that disruptive behaviour of any type during online element of classes is unacceptable. Students found guilty of Zoom-bombing a class or of other serious online offenses may be subject to disciplinary measures under the Code of Student Conduct.

16. Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (www.turnitin.com).

17. Western's Commitment to Accessibility

The Department of Geography strives at all times to provide accessibility to all faculty, staff, students and visitors in a way that respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities.

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 519-661-2147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation. Information regarding accommodation of exams is available on the Registrar's website.

More information about "Accessibility at Western" is available.

18. Mental Health

If you or someone you know is experiencing distress, there are several resources here at Western to assist you. Please visit Western's Health and Wellness website for more information on mental health resources.

19. Support Services

Western's Support Services
Student Development Centre

20. Important Dates

January 11: Classes resume

January 19: Last day to add a second term half course

February 15: Family Day – Department Office Closed

February 13 to February 21: Spring Reading Week (No classes; Department Office open)

March 15: Last day to drop a first term half course without penalty

April 2: Good Friday

April 12: Classes end

April 13: Study day

April 14 to April 30: Examination Period