

GEOG 3445F: Global Agriculture & Food Systems

Course Outline – Fall 2023



1. Course Information

Course Instructor	Contact Information	Office hours
Dr. Tony Weis	tony.weis@uwo.ca	Mondays 1-2 pm, SSC 1403
Teaching Assistant		
Martin Sinel	msinel@uwo.ca	

Classes Start	Reading Week	Classes End	Study day(s)	Exam Period
September 7	Oct. 30 – Nov. 5	December 8	December 9	December 10 – 22

September 15, 2023: Last day to add a first-term half course

October 9, 2023: Thanksgiving Holiday

November 13, 2023: Last day to drop a first term half course without penalty

- In addition to office hours on Mondays (1-2 pm), Dr. Weis will be available immediately after most classes
- Please use OWL Forums for questions about course content and logistics (see Communication below).

2. 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.”

3. Readings

There is no required textbook and all readings for each unit are available on OWL in the unit folders found in the Resources tab. Although there is no textbook, you are expected to read one book over the course of the term as a requirement for one of the two short papers, and you may need (or want) to order it online.

The PowerPoint slides will be posted as PDF files shortly after each lecture, organized by units rather than individual days. The PDF files contain an abundance of additional links to short videos, websites, reports, and news stories. In including so many additional active links, I do not expect you to follow everything – the hope is that they might provide a helpful starting point to dive further into the parts of the course that you are most interested in.

4. Format

The course content is organized into 6 units, as outlined below, which are based upon in-person lectures and readings. There are 3 lecture hours per week, although the 2-hour session will rarely run the full 2-hours. The readings for each of the 6 units should take about 3-4 hours in total. All PowerPoints will be posted to OWL at pdfs shortly after each lecture.

You are responsible for material covered in the lectures as well as the assigned readings, and it is important to keep up with lecture material and readings on a unit-by-unit basis. The evaluation is based on a midterm test, final exam, and 2 short written assignments (dates in the schedule).

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).

5. Overview

Agriculture and food starkly reflect global inequalities: roughly 1 billion people are chronically hungry or food insecure, many of them small farmers, while roughly 2 billion people are obese or overweight. Global markets in food products and agricultural inputs are increasingly dominated by a small number of very large transnational corporations, and food security on a world scale 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 agriculture and food systems over time, which have increasingly global dimensions that play out in very uneven ways and pose momentous questions. The first half of the course focuses on key historical, geographical, political economic, and technological transformations of agro-food systems, and the tremendous speed and scope of change associated with industrialization. The second half of the course focuses on the biophysical instabilities of industrial agriculture (in short, why the cheap food that underpins modern societies is not so cheap), the increasing control of transnational corporations over all aspects of modern agro-food systems (food retailing, distribution, and processing, and agricultural machinery, inputs, and information), and multidimensional struggles to build alternatives. The ultimate aim is to provide a framework for understanding contemporary problems and possibilities, and the urgent need to build more equitable, sustainable, and humane agro-food systems.

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. Units and Schedule

Unit	Dates	Subjects	
	Sept. 7	Course introduction: the big picture of agriculture and food	
1	Sept. 12	Agroecosystems & peasants in the longue durée	domestication, dispersion, and biophysical organizing imperatives
	Sept. 14		peasants in world history: innovation, diversity, and appropriation
	Sept. 19		
	Sept. 21		
2	Sept. 26	Divergent colonial transformations	tropical and semi-tropical regions (focus: sugar & slavery)
	Sept. 28		temperate regions (focus: North America)
	Oct. 3		
	Oct. 5		
3	Oct. 10	The rise of cheap food	the industrialization of grain and livestock production
	Oct. 12		dietary change and the deepening dependence on long-distance movements of inputs and outputs
	Oct. 17		
	Oct. 19		
	Oct. 24		
Oct. 26	MIDTERM TEST (20%), in class		
Oct. 30-Nov. 5		Fall Reading Week	
4	Nov. 7 – PAPER 1	Not-so-cheap food	the uncounted costs and increasing instability of industrial monocultures
	Nov. 9		the uncounted costs and increasing instability of industrial livestock production
	Nov. 14		
	Nov. 16		
5	Nov. 21	The concentration of power	who controls the value and trajectory of innovation in agriculture and food?
	Nov. 23		
6	Nov. 28 – PAPER 2	Alternatives	contemporary struggles to build more sustainable and equitable agro-food systems
	Nov. 30		
	Dec. 5		
	Dec. 7		
Dec. 10-22		FINAL EXAM (30%), date TBA in exam period	

October 9: Thanksgiving holiday (no classes)

November 13: Last day to drop a first term half course without penalty

December 9: Study day

8. Communication

- in addition to office hours, Dr. Weis will be available after most classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays
- if the office hours don't work, you can schedule an individual zoom meeting via email
- you are encouraged to check the OWL site every 24 – 48 hours
- you should post general course-related queries (whether content or logistics) to the Forums tab in OWL, so that the clarifications can be seen by everyone

- Forum posts will get monitored daily and you can expect to receive a response in 24 – 48 hours be organized (depending on volume, these will be organized into folders as the term unfolds)
- some communications about the course 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](#).

9. Evaluation

Below is the evaluation breakdown for the course. Any deviations will be communicated.

Evaluation Components	% of Course Grade	Assignment Schedule
Unit summary & reflection paper	20%	Paper #1: November 7 Paper #2: November 28
Book discussion paper	30%	
Mid-term test	20%	October. 26
Final exam	30%	TBA in exam period: Dec. 10-22

Midterm test (20%) and Final Exam (30%)

The midterm test is a combination of multiple choice and short answer questions, and the final exam combines multiple choice, short answers, and paragraph questions. Students are responsible for material covered in the lectures as well as the assigned readings. More detailed instructions will be given in advance of both mid-term and final.

If you fail to write the term tests or the final exam on the scheduled time you will be given zero, unless you communicate with Dr. Weis *prior to* the exam. Exam absences require a note from your physician (see note on special examination policy below).

Unit summary & reflection paper (20%)

Prepare a **1250-word** (~5 double-spaced pages) paper based on one unit you wish to discuss and reflect upon. This short paper has 2 parts:

PART 1: summarize and discuss the significance of 3 major subjects in the unit you've selected, drawing on both material from the lectures and the unit readings (~**750 words**)

PART 2: reflect 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, or an agricultural landscape that you are familiar with (~**500 words**)

There is no blueprint and 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 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 part 2.

For part 2, a good starting point is to ask yourself: how has the unit sparked attention to environmental, social, political economic, or inter-species issue (or issues) that you hadn't previously thought about and now recognize to be important?

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.

Format: use 12 pt. font, double space, and save and submit your work as a Word document in the Assignments tab in OWL. 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)

Book discussion paper (30%)

Prepare a **1500-word** (~6 double-spaced pages) paper based on the book that you've selected from the list provided on OWL.

This short paper has 2 parts:

PART 1: summarize the scope, core arguments, and overarching contribution of the book (~**750 words**)

PART 2: reflect on how the book enhanced your understanding of at least 1 major subject covered in the unit that it is associated with in the list, and how it challenged you to think more critically about an important problem (or problems) associated with how agro-food systems are organized (~**750 words**)

There is no blueprint for this assignment. The goal of the first part is to consider the book as a whole, and to distil its most important contours. This can include an assessment of what you see as its biggest strengths (and weaknesses), but the focus should primarily be on the evidence it marshals and the major arguments it contains.

For part 2, a good starting point is to ask yourself: how has the book augmented your understanding of an important subject (or subjects) covered in the unit.

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

Length: 1500 words max. (about 6 double-spaced pages), not including references.

Save as: LASTNAME-FIRSTNAME-UNIT#.doc

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

Grading on written assignments:

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 thoughtful reflections, and are very well-written and edited. 1500 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.

10. Use of Electronic Devices

No electronic devices will be allowed during tests and examinations.

11. 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

The University recognizes that a student's ability to meet their academic responsibilities may, on occasion, be impaired by medical illness. Illness may be acute (short term), or it may be chronic (long term), or chronic with acute episodes. The University further recognizes that medical situations are deeply personal and respects the need for privacy and confidentiality in these matters. However, in order to ensure fairness and consistency for all students, academic accommodation for work representing 10% or more of the student's overall grade in the course shall be granted only in those cases where there is documentation indicating that the student was seriously affected by illness and could not reasonably be expected to meet their academic responsibilities.

Policy on Academic Consideration for Medical Illness - Undergraduate Students

Student Medical Certificate (SMC)

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](#).

12. Make-up tests and final exam

Makeups will be granted with approved documentation only. All documentation for missed exams must be provided to the Academic Counselling Office within 48 hours of the scheduled exam, otherwise the instructor will assign a grade of zero.

The format and content of make-ups may differ substantially from the scheduled test or examination.

13. 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.

Written components of exams 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).

14. Continuity of Education Plan (in-person class pivoting to online learning)

In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence during the course that necessitates the university to direct courses move away from face-to-face interaction, all remaining course content will be delivered entirely online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will **not** change. Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

15. Western's Commitment to Accessibility

The Department of Geography and Environment 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.

16. 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.

17. Support Services

[Western's Support Services](#)
[Student Development Centre](#)

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at:

https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html.

To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

18. Important Dates

September 7: Classes resume

September 15: Last day to add a first term half course

October 9: Thanksgiving Holiday – Department Office Closed

October 30 to November 5: Fall Reading Week (No classes; Department Office open)

November 13: Last day to drop a first term half course without penalty

November 30: Last day to drop a full course without penalty

December 8: Classes end

December 9: Study day

December 10-22: Examination Period