Course objective

This semester, we will explore organic agriculture from multiple angles, starting with a historical exploration of organic and finishing with policy approaches to organic. Please come to each class prepared (ie having read assigned material or watched movies) and ready to discuss the topic of the day.

Required books and activities

See readings below; many of the articles are already posted (they are out of order on blackboard). The books can be easily found online, or you can buy them at the bookstore. The book Encyclopedia of Organic, Sustainable and Local Food (referred to as Encyclopedia in the syllabus) available in the bookstore; its purchase is optional, but it might be a good addition to your book collection.

We are extremely fortunate to have three on-farm classes this semester, which will be held from 9-1 at Snug Harbor farm on Staten Island. Gus Jones, experienced farmer and graduate of UC Santa Cruz’s Agroecology School, will teach us:

- February 25: Propagation, seeding, and planning the crops
- March 24: Soils
- April 21: Transplanting: The link between the greenhouse and the land

Course requirements

Active participation in the weekly discussions makes class more interesting and productive for all of us. Please come to class prepared, having finished the readings, and ready with 1 question to share with the class.

Attendance at the farm classes.

Two papers:

1. The first paper is an 8-10 page discussion of one of the three farming classes and how they relate to the readings in class.
2. The second paper is a 10-15 page research paper:
   - A one page proposal of your research paper is due February 6.
   - A draft of your paper is due the week after spring break, March 19, which I will read and comment on.
   - A final version of your paper (along with my comments on your draft) is due May 11.
Presentation of your research:

• A five minute presentation on the last day of class.

Course Policies

Attendance/lateness/participation policy – Please do your best to be on time. Attendance is not explicitly required (except for the farming classes), but since the class is a seminar/lecture, you will miss many subtleties if you don’t regularly attend class. Also note that participation makes up a large portion of your grade – it is impossible to participate if you are not present.

Academic Integrity

Please review NYU’s academic integrity policy. Steinhardt’s academic integrity website is available at: (http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity).

Statement on Disability Services

Any student attending NYU who needs an accommodation due to a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility and/or learning disability, or is deaf or hard of hearing should register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212 998-4980, 240 Greene Street, www.nyu.edu/csd.

Grading/Key dates

Spring break – no class 3/16

Farm participation 15%
Paper - farming 25%
One page draft of research paper 5%
Research paper draft 10%
Final paper 35%
Presentation 10%

Course schedule

1/25 Course overview


*What’s Organic about Organic?* Documentary shown in class
Topic 1: Philosophies underlying organic agriculture – where we have been matters

2/1  Rudolf Steiner. Lectures on Agriculture (1-8), available at: http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/Agri1958/Ag1958_index.html


2/8  Sir Albert Howard, An Agricultural Testament. (available at http://journeytoforever.org/farm_library/howardAT/ATtoc.html): read Preface, Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 3, Chapter 4, and Chapter 12


Heckman, J. “A history of organic farming: Transitions from Sir Albert Howard’s War in the Soil to USDA National Program.” Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems: 21(3); 143-150.

Topic 2: Environmental benefits of organic agriculture

The readings for the next two classes are from The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, http://www.maweb.org/en/index.aspx

Ecosystem Services and Biodiversity

2/15  Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. Ecosystem Services and Human Well-Being. Overall synthesis report


2/22 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. *Ecosystem Services and Human Well-Being. Biodiversity synthesis report*


2/29 Climate change and organic agriculture


Howitt, R.E., R. Catala-Luque, S. De Gryze, S. Wicks, and J, Six. “Realistic payments could encourage farmers to adopt practices that sequester carbon.” *California Agriculture.* April – June 2009 pp 91-95


3/7 Soil quality/water quality


3/14  Spring break

Topic 3: Markets and policy

3/21  *Organic certification and farming practices*

USDA, National Organic Program.  

[http://www.mosesorganic.org/certificationguide.html](http://www.mosesorganic.org/certificationguide.html)


3/28  *Organic food supply chain and trends in the U.S.*


4/4  *Organic food consumers*


4/11  *Domestic and International Policy*


4/18  Big vs small organic: does it matter? What does it mean?


4/25 and 5/2 presentations
Food Systems Planning

FOOD-GE.2034-001  Spring 2012

Matthew Hoffman

(This course is officially listed as Food Systems II: Food Processing and Industrialization. It is not a course about food processing, however; it is simply listed under another course’s name. It is a course about food systems and city and regional planning.)

Course time and location: Wednesdays 4:55 – 6:35 at the Silver Center, room 508
Instructor email: matthew.hoffman@nyu.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays 12:30-2:30 411 Lafayette, 5th floor, Room 549, or by appointment

Course description:

This course is about the role of planners and planning in building sustainable food systems. The fact that more than 9 million people get fed every day in the city of New York without any apparent plan for how this happens is considered a miracle of free markets. We will be taking a closer look at this miracle and examining some of its shortcomings in an effort to understand what needs are not being addressed and what can be done to address them. Very recent case studies, primarily from urban areas, will be used to illustrate what non-profits and local governments can do to build sustainable food systems. The culture of this course is part graduate seminar and part planners’ workshop, a mix of the theoretical and the practical.

Course objectives:

- To understand the role of planners and planning in sustainable food systems.
- To understand specific food systems related issues that planners attempt to deal with.
- To understand what planners are doing in various locations to address these issues.

Key Theme:

Throughout this course I would like to maintain a special focus on the relationship between cities and rural areas as they are connected by food. Both urban and rural areas have been shaped by this connection, in some ways for the worse; and it may be that some improvements to both urban and rural areas can be made by, and perhaps only by, changes in the food systems that connect them. This is something that I would like to think about together throughout the semester.
What you must do:

This course requires you to do a lot of reading and to come to class prepared to discuss what you have read. The material is very interesting and if you are well-prepared you will have a good time discussing it in class.

Here are some tips about how to do the reading.

- First, set aside adequate time for the task. You can sit for a whole afternoon or you can divide your reading up during the week, but trying to do it all on the night before class won’t work.
- Second, read with brisk purposefulness. Academic literature is not meant to be read in a leisurely and aimless fashion like a story. You are looking for information and ideas. As soon as you pick the next article or book off your stack, you want to know immediately what it is about. Read the title and the abstract. Then skim through, reading all the section headings. Have a look at the conclusion. Then go back and begin reading the article. If you already have a clear idea what the author’s main points are when you begin reading, you can move through the article much faster and will be in a better position to understand and evaluate the arguments being made.
- Third, and most important, highlight and take notes. Some people keep all their notes in a notebook. Others prefer to highlight or underline sections of text and cram their notes in the margins. Some do both. Whatever your style, this is what you need to be doing while reading. The sections of text that you highlight or underline will generally be what you and/or the author think are important information or ideas. Your notes will generally be your own reflections on what you are reading; how it relates to other things that you are reading or thinking about; disagreements that you have with it; or questions that the piece raises for you. As you read more and more, the collection of highlights and notes that you build will become the raw material for your own work.
- Fourth, make it enjoyable. For scholars especially, reading should be a pleasure as well as work. Settle into a comfortable chair in a nice place with something nice to drink. Maybe food too. You’re going to be there for a while. Look forward to reading—it is what you like to do.

Books to Buy and other Required Reading:

The following two books are ones that you need to buy. They are not expensive books. I have ordered them both to the bookstore but neither has arrived yet. Both are available on Amazon.


Most of the readings for this course are articles or book chapters that I will provide for you in pdf format on the class website (blackboard). Under “Assignments” you will find a folder for each week. Inside this folder you will find both required and optional readings, sometimes along with a note to guide your reading. You are of course encouraged to seek out additional sources of information and alternative viewpoints on your own and to use these to enrich our class discussion.

Written and other assignments:

Participation in discussion is central to a graduate seminar. You must come to class prepared to talk about what you have read. You know of course that you should bring the readings with you, along with your notes and whatever talking points and questions you have jotted down. In addition to that, I’m asking you to email me a short reaction memo (less than one page please) no later than 24 hours before the class. This memo should NOT summarize what you have read, but rather be your reactions to what you have read: e.g., questions that the readings have raised for you; your critique of certain readings; observations about how certain readings may shed light on questions raised earlier or might challenge assumptions made by other readings; and most especially how these readings contribute to your thinking about the issues we are discussing in class. I will use these memos to facilitate class discussion and am likely to call on you to elaborate on the thoughts that you have noted but briefly in your memo, so be interesting, provocative and sincere. Put your name on the top of the memo document and write “Food Systems Planning reaction memo” in the subject line of your email.

Group presentation: Just within the past few years, at least four major municipalities and one state have embarked upon comprehensive food system planning initiatives. We are going to take a close look at what they are doing in order to understand what their goals are and how they are trying to achieve these goals. I am going to ask you to divide into groups of approximately five persons each. Each group is going to pick a different city, region, or state and study up on what is happening with food systems planning in that place, after which that group will make a presentation to the rest of the class about their case study’s approach to a variety of planning issues that we will have discussed earlier in the semester.

Model Food Systems Plan: This project may be done either individually or in groups and involves a mix of research and creativity. You will think about all of the elements that go into a food system and draw a simple local or regional model for either a real or imaginary place. You will not only map out the logistical arrangements for distributing a given quantity of food, but also speculate about the institutional arrangements necessary to animate your system.

There will also be a final paper (10-15 pages, space-and-a-half) on a topic of your choice, due electronically on the last day of class. I encourage you to start on this early and to discuss your ideas with me (as much for my pleasure and edification as for yours). Your grade for this assignment will be based on its quality as a paper. A fascinating topic pursued with great wit will not yield a high grade if it is difficult either to perceive exactly what your point is or to see how the bulk of the paper supports that point. Take this opportunity to either think through
some of the ideas that come up in this course or to learn more about something relevant to the course that you really want to know about but which we didn’t cover. You might also choose to follow up in greater detail on some aspect of your model food system plan.

If you have any questions about the course; if you would like to discuss the readings or to talk about food systems in general; or if you need a faculty member with whom to discuss any aspect of your experience at NYU, please either visit me in my office during my office hours or contact me to make an appointment. While this is by no means a requirement, I hope that I will have the opportunity to meet and speak with each of you outside of class at least once.

Grading:

- Weekly reaction memos, plus attendance and participation 25%
- Group presentation and assessment of case study 20%
- Model Food System Plan 25%
- Final paper 30%
**Course Outline and Schedule** *

**Week 1** (Jan. 25)  Introduction and Introductions

**Week 2** (Feb. 1)  Feeding the City

**Week 3** (Feb. 8)  The Role of Planning

**Week 4** (Feb. 15)  The People: Issues of Access and Economic Development

**Week 5** (Feb. 22)  The Land: Conserving Resources

**Week 6** (Feb. 29)  The Built Environment: Transportation, Waste, and other Infrastructure

**Week 7** (March 7)  Group presentations and discussion of city plans

**Week 8** (March 21)  Special Guest: Kubi Ackerman, Project Manager at Columbia’s Urban Design Lab

**Week 9** (March 28)  Group presentations and discussion of city plans

**Week 10** (April 4)  Special Guest: Alissa Weiss, Senior Policy Analyst, NYC Council

**Week 11** (April 11)  The Relationship between City and Country: Cities as Empire

**Week 12** (April 18)  The Relationship between City and Country: Garden Cities and Regions

**Week 13** (April 25)  Governance and Participation + Workshopping Model Food Systems

**Week 14** (May 2)  Model Food System Poster Presentation and Soiree

* This is a tentative outline and is subject to change. You will always have at least at week’s notice regarding reading assignments.