Mission of the Course

The purpose of this interdisciplinary class is to expose students to the history, politics, and economics of food. The course has three goals. First, the course will provide foundational knowledge about food production, distribution, and consumption of food across time. Second, the course will introduce students to a wide variety of current public policy debates about food (e.g., production subsidies, genetically modified food, and obesity). Third, the course will aid students in the development of critical thinking skills by compelling them to take a position on the public policy debates and defend their position using strong written and oral arguments.

This course falls within the global politics concentration for political science majors. Although there are no prerequisites for the course, most students are expected to be advanced undergraduates with a junior or senior standing. If you have questions about the appropriateness of your background for succeeding in the course, please see the instructor during the first week of class.

Course Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, you should be able to accomplish the following activities:

1. Develop persuasive arguments that include claims, counter-claims, and evidence.
2. Assess the strengths and weakness of arguments.
3. Communicate arguments in both written and oral forms.
4. Understand the historical evolution of food production, distribution, and consumption.
5. Assess how your food choices impact your life and the lives of others around the globe.
6. Evaluate economic issues related to food such as poverty, development, trade, tariffs, subsidies, and trade treaties.
7. Evaluate public health issues associate with food such as obesity and food safety (e.g., allergies, hormones, antibiotics, and genetically modified food).
8. Evaluate the political issues associated with food such as local versus global, industrial versus organic, developed versus less developed, and capitalism versus planned.

Instructional Strategy
The course will be a team-based learning course in which the students will work in teams during class to answer questions on quizzes and produce arguments for policy debates. With an estimated enrollment of thirty students, the class will be divided into approximately five teams with six students on each team. The teams will be permanent (meaning your dinner table will be your team). The philosophy behind team-based learning is that students learn best from actively engaging in small groups and applying knowledge to real world problems. Team-based learning will reduce the amount of passive lecturing in the classroom by the instructor and increase the amount of student-to-student engagement. Team-based learning shifts significant responsibility for learning to the students and requires teams to arrive in class well prepared for applying knowledge from assigning readings and films.

If you are interested in learning more about team-based learning, you can visit Dr. Larry Michaelsen's web site devoted to the topic at www.teambasedlearning.apsc.ubc.ca.

Course Format

This course will have an unusual format. Given that the course is about food, it seemed natural that the course will include a meal in order to introduce students to foods from around the world, to create an environment conducive to team & community building, and to highlight particular foods in public policy discussions. Although the dinners will be fun, they will also be an important learning experience.

The course will be taught once a week in the evening during a three hour block (e.g., 5:45-8:35). In most weeks, the three hour block will be divided into three sequential parts. For example, during the weeks in which readiness assessment tests are utilized, the class will be divided as follows. Part I (the first hour of the class meeting) will focus on Individual and Team Readiness Assessment Tests. Part II (the second hour of the class) will involve dinner and a guest lecture about a food related topic. Finally, Part III (the third hour of class) will focus on a team-based activity about a food related policy issue (e.g., debating a public policy question, exploring a case study, or conducting a simulation).

Requirements of the Course

Students' final grades will be based on the following assignments:
1) Individual Readiness Assessment Tests (15%),
2) Team Readiness Assessment Tests (10%),
3) Team Debate and other team work (15%),
4) Three Written Assignments (30%), and
5) Final Exam (30%).

First, in five of our class meetings (see schedule) students will complete an "individual Readiness Assessment Test" (iRATS) during the first 20 minutes of class. These assessments will be multiple choice quizzes based on the week’s required readings and videos (or the relationship between the week’s readings and prior weeks activities). The objective of the iRAT is to ensure that students have mastered the required materials (i.e., capable of understanding, summarizing, critiquing, connecting, and applying the readings and videos). After half the class has turned in their assessment, the remaining students will be given 5 minutes to complete the quiz. The iRAT typically takes about 15 minutes to complete. There will be no makeup iRATs.

Second, immediately after students complete the iRAT, they will complete a "team Individual Readiness Assessment Test" (tRAT) as a group during the remainder of the first hour of the class. The iRAT and tRAT will have identical questions. The purpose of the tRAT is to foster student discussion on the best answer for each question. Experience with the method has
shown that students learn by attempting to persuade others through argumentation. The tRAT will be graded immediately; student groups may create a written appeal for any question that they received an incorrect grade. All students on the team will receive the same grade for the team test. There will be no makeup tRATs.

Third, students will complete three written assignments. Each writing assignment will be in the form of a proposition (e.g., the United States should ban routine use of antibiotics in the production of meat and dairy products). Students will make a persuasive argument in support or opposition to the proposition. The essays, which should be about five pages in length, must be posted to Blackboard prior to the start of class on the due date. All assignments will be checked for plagiarism using Turnitin (or a similar antiplagiarism software). Late assignments will not be accepted and there will be no makeup assignments.

Fourth, student teams will participate in one policy debate. Developing the ability to express ideas and persuade others in an oral argument is essential to any career. In fact, whether you are an investment banker on Wall Street or a legislative aid on Capitol Hill, many if not most of your arguments will be oral rather than written. Given that there will be six teams in the class, there will be three policy debates (with two teams in each debate). The faculty will also engage in a demonstration debate early in the semester. The debate topics for the semester will be as follows.

**Faculty Demonstration Debate:** Proposition: The United States should eliminate all sugar tariffs. (22 February)

**Student Debate #1:** Proposition: Consumers should purchase only organic food. (15 March)

**Student Debate #2:** Proposition: The United States should ban genetically modified food. (12 April)

**Student Debate #3:** Proposition: All countries should suspend subsidies and incentives for bio-fuels. (3 May)

During the first week of class, teams will select a debate topic. Each team will prepare a 20-30 page briefing book that will include arguments in favor of the proposition, arguments against the proposition, refutations to these arguments, and counter-refutations to the refutations. On the day of the debate, a coin toss will determine which side of the proposition each team will defend. The debates will be video taped and placed on the class web page for viewing by students in the future.

The individual written assignments and team debate topics are linked. The first written paper assignment will be the proposition in the faculty demonstration debate. All students will write an essay supporting or opposing this proposition. The remaining written assignment topics will be the propositions in the student debates. Students participating in the debate will not turn in an individual written paper that week; they will be producing a team briefing book. Thus, by the end of the semester each student will produce three individual written papers and one team briefing book.

Finally, the final exam will be an in-class examination. The examination will consist of both essay and short answer questions. Make-up exams are only available to students providing documentation signed by a doctor of an emergency medical situation (i.e., common colds and dentist appointments do not count). Students that feel their exam or assignment has been graded incorrectly should follow a three-step procedure. First, the student should carefully read the exam or assignment and identify the precise problem with the grading. Second, the student must send a
written appeal explaining why their answer was appropriate to the instructor. Third, the instructor will meet with the student to discuss the appeal and resolve the conflict.

Twice during the semester students will rate the performance of their fellow teammates. Based on these evaluations, the team portion of the grade (i.e., tRATs and the Debate) will be adjusted to account for an overall assessment of superior and inferior teamwork.

*Attendance and Participation:* At the college level of education, the expectation is that students will attend **every** class session and **actively** participate in class every discussion each week. I expect students to have read and thought about the material assigned for that week. If language or some other barrier inhibits you from participating actively, you should meet with the instructor during the first two weeks of class to devise a solution. Attendance is not participation. Students missing more than one class session without prior approval of the instructor (or documentation of an emergency medical situation) will be penalized a third of a letter grade per missed class.

Students with learning disabilities must notify the instructor within the first two weeks of the course in order to make suitable arrangements.

**Course Websites**

This course will use a wiki page for posting materials and coordinating teams. The wiki is located at:

http://foodandpolitics.pbworks.com

In addition, the required readings will be posted on a Blackboard page which can be accessed at:

http://bls.its.albany.edu/webct/entryPageIns.dowebct

**E-mail Contact**

All students are **required** to update the Blackboard preferences with an email address that redirects all course email to their primary email account. This will ensure that they get all emails from the instructor and group members in a timely fashion. This must be done by the end of the first week of class.

**Plagiarism and Cheating**

The emergence of the internet has changed our world forever. The amount of information at our fingertips has increased geometrically over the last decade. Library searches which took hours to complete in the past can be done in a matter of minutes today. Public and private documents that were difficult, if not impossible, to gain access to in the past are now a mouse click away. While this technological revolution has enhanced the learning process in many ways, it has also increased the amount of plagiarism. Plagiarism is the intentional or unintentional use of another’s words or ideas without giving credit to that person. While this includes copying text word for word without the use of quotation marks, it also includes paraphrasing another person’s work without proper citation. Intellectual honesty is a core value of university and the foundation of faculty and student development. Plagiarism, therefore, undermines the entire university community.

In the past couple of years, a number of students in political science courses have been caught plagiarizing from internet sources. The punishments have ranged from failing the assignment to failing the course to suspension from the university. This has been a painful and time consuming experience for everyone involved. In order to eliminate this problem, all students will be required to submit their written assignments electronically via the WebCT website **prior** to handing in hard copies at the start of class. If the hard copy and the electronic copy differ in any way, the student will automatically receive a failing grade for the assignment
whether or not plagiarism is found). All paper submissions will be checked for plagiarism using the Turnitin software program. Your written assignments will also be placed in a database with past submissions. This database will also be searched for plagiarized material. Students guilty of plagiarizing any material will receive a failing grade for the course and the evidence will be automatically turned over to the Office of Student Conduct.

All students must complete the UAlbany Library’s tutorial on plagiarism entitled "Plagiarism 101" (http://library.albany.edu/usered/ncplaga/index.html) by the due date of the first paper. A failing grade will be assigned to the first paper (and subsequent papers) unless completion of the tutorial is documented.

Required Readings and Videos

There is one required book and one required course pack for this class. The books are available from the University at Albany Book Store on the Uptown Campus. The course pack readings are available on-line via the Blackboard course page.


The required readings marked [R] can be found in the Pollan book; the required readings marked with an asterisk [R*] can be found on the Blackboard web page. The required videos marked [R^] are accessible via the Blackboard web page (for material with copyrights) or a web site (for publicly available material). Finally, the required audio podcast material marked [R^] is accessible via the web link. The videos and podcasts are streamed which means that you can view them but not save them. Immediately after the required readings, I have listed several suggested readings for each topic which are marked [S]. The suggested readings can be accessed via Minerva, databases, or e-journals.

The course workload is based on the assumption that you will devote at least seven hours per week engaging this class (with three hours of participation during class meetings and four hours of work outside of class). I assume that the average student can read 30 pages per hour and write original essays at a rate of approximately 300 words (or one single-spaced page) per hour (including draft, revision, and final proofreading). Thus, a combination of outside work in a week might involve one hour of streamed video, sixty pages of reading, and a one page reflective essay. Please budget your time accordingly.

Summary Course Schedule

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<th>Dinner</th>
<th>History Segment</th>
<th>Public Policy Issues</th>
<th>Student Assessment</th>
<th>Dinner Lecture</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>25-Jan</td>
<td>Global cheese</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>O'Connor</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>argumentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<td>rise of agriculture; commodity prices</td>
<td>RAT</td>
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<td>15-Feb vacation</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>22-Feb</td>
<td>Caribbean sugar</td>
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<td>Paper #1</td>
<td>Rousseau</td>
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<td>RAT</td>
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<td>8-Mar</td>
<td>German pigs</td>
<td>EU Common Agricultural Policy</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>15-Mar</td>
<td>Italian cows &amp; chickens</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>22-Mar vacation</td>
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<td>fair trade &amp; traceability</td>
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<td>Davison</td>
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<td>29-Mar</td>
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<td>5-Apr vacation</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>12-Apr</td>
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<td>Hessler</td>
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<td>RAT</td>
<td>Smith-Howard</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>26-Apr</td>
<td>Sub-Saharan salt</td>
<td>hunger at home and abroad</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>van der Veen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>3-May</td>
<td>Mexican chocolate</td>
<td>biofuels</td>
<td>Paper #4; Debate #3</td>
<td>Gonzales-Murphy</td>
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Outline of Classes and Required Readings

Week 1 (1/25): Introduction to Course
This class will be devoted to an overview of the class and course mechanics. By the end of this informational class, you should be able to determine if it suits your needs and interests.

Assessments and Assignments Due:
none

Dinner Menu (light fare for first class):
Geographic focus: Global
Key food: Cheese
Guest lecture: Mr. Sean O'Connor, R&G Cheese Makers. Local Handcrafted Cheese.

Discussion Topics:
• What is political about food?
• How might the economics of food impact the domestic political process?
• Why is food an international issue?
• Is the globalization of food a new phenomenon?
• Why do we need to know the history of food?

Readings:
There are no assigned readings for the first meeting of the course.

Week 2 (2/1): Argumentation
In this class, we will discuss the subject of argumentation. In the social sciences and much of the humanities, scholars make arguments about causal claims, beliefs, values, etc. We will discuss the history of argumentation and the components of an argument.

Assessments and Assignments Due:
a) in class RAT

Dinner Menu:
Geographic focus: Chinese
Key food: Rice
Guest lecture: none

Discussion Topics:
• What is an argument?
• Can a definition be political?
• How do you diagram an argument?
• Can you teach argumentation?
• Are some arguments better than others?

Readings:
[R³] Food Inc. 2008. This ninety-one minute film provides an overview of many of the topics that we will be discussing in the course.

[R*] Debate and Paper Instructions on Blackboard


**Week 3 (2/8): The Rise of Agriculture and States**

This class will explore the emergence of agricultural production and its impact on the distribution of power and food across. In many food related debates, the focus of discussion is almost exclusively on conflict in the present moment. However, the structure of this conflict is often influenced by historical roots tracing back hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Although history does not determine outcomes in the present, it is important to recognize the role of historical trends play in current debates.

**Assessments and Assignments Due:**

**a) in class RAT**

**Dinner Menu:**
- Geographic focus: India
- Key food: Potato
- Guest lecture: none

**Discussion Topics:**
- Where agriculture first emerge and why?
- How did this first emergence influence state building and power distribution?
- How did colonialism impact food production, consumption, and distribution?
- What caused the Great Irish Potato Famine?
- Why do food famines persist?
- Why food prices vary so much?

**Readings:**


**UAlbany Vacation: no meeting on Week 4 (2/15)**

**Week 5 (2/22): Tariffs, Trade, and the World Trade Organization (WTO)**

This class will examine the logic behind free trade, the impact of protectionism, and the history of trade during the last century. Proponents of free trade argue that it is the key for developing countries to lift themselves out of poverty; anti-globalization opponents of free trade argue that it systematically impoverishes the poor and the vulnerable.

Assessments and Assignments Due:

a) First Written Assignment Due

b) Plagiarism Tutorial Must Be Completed (or No Credit For Paper)

**Dinner Menu:**

- Geographic focus: Caribbean
- Key food: Sugar
- Guest lecture: none

**Discussion Topics:**

- Why do people and states trade?
- Who are the winners and losers in a free trade?
- Does protectionism make states richer?
- What are tariffs, quotas, VERs, OMAs and subsidies?
- What are the impacts of trade organizations like GATT and the WTO?
- Should the US eliminate all food related trade barriers?
- How is the stalemate in the Doha Round of the WTO related to food and agriculture?

**Readings:**


[S] [www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org). Pages outline history and dispute resolution mechanisms.


**Week 6 (3/1): The Industrialization of Food**

This class will discuss the industrialization of food production. Why does the modern farm in Iowa, with row after row of corn attended by big machines and few farmers, look the way it does? Why has corn come to dominate the dinner plate? The emergence of industrial food production is closely related to the obesity crisis in the United States and the spread of this crisis throughout the world.

**Assessments and Assignments Due:**

a) **in class RAT**

**Dinner Menu:**

- Geographic focus: Native American
- Key food: Corn
- Guest lecture: to be determined

**Discussion Topics:**

- What is the industrialization of food? Why has this occurred?
- How should we measure agricultural efficiency?
- What are positive and negative externalities?
- How is corn related to obesity?
- Why is obesity on the rise among children?
- Should the federal government tell you what to eat?
- Do cities have the right to ban trans fats?
- Should UAlbany limit access to sugary drinks?

**Readings:**


**Week 7 (3/8): The EU and Food**
This class will discuss the impact of food policy within the European Union. The discussion will begin with an examination of the standardization of food related regulations during the integration process. Then we will discuss the rationale and impact of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Assessments and Assignments Due:

a) none

Dinner Menu:
- Geographic focus: German
- Key food: Pigs
- Guest lecture: Dr. Holly Jarman, University at Albany, Political Science

Discussion Topics:
- How do German beer and Italian macaroni relate to regional economic integration?
- How does the EU make decisions?
- What is the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and how does it work?
- Who benefits from the CAP and who is hurt?
- Should the CAP be abandoned?
- Why are some foods taboo?

Readings:


[S] National Geographic. Taboo: Delicacies (i.e., Food). (DVD, Season I of Taboo).

[S] Modern Marvels: The Pig. A history of pigs. 50 minutes.

**Week 8 (3/15): Organic, Local and Sustainable Food**

The class will discuss the definition of organic food, the implications of buying local versus non-local food products, and the feasibility of sustainable agriculture. Organic food is one of the fastest growing segments of the food industry and large multinational corporations are increasing becoming involved in organic agriculture. During this week we will discuss the possible tension between choosing organic, local, and environmentally sustainable products.

Assignments Due:

a) Second Written Assignment Due
b) Student Debate #1

Dinner Menu:
- Geographic focus: Italian
- Key food: Cows and Chickens
- Guest lecture: Bob Comis, Schoharie County Farmer

Discussion Topics:
• How is organic defined? Should this definition be changed?
• Are definitions such as "organic" political?
• Does organic imply sustainable?
• Can a lower middle class family or lower income family eat organically? 
• Can processed food be organic?

Readings:

[S] Wal-Mart's Global Sustainability Report, 2009. (Although the document is 111 pages long, it should only take an hour or so to read carefully due to the large number of images and tables.) Available at walmartstores.com/Sustainability/7951.aspx. 

Week 9 (3/22): Coffee and the Fair Trade Debate
This week we will discuss how "information" can allow consumers to shape production decisions by voting with their cash and credit cards. We begin with the topic of fair trade and focus on the area of coffee. Then we expand the discussion to explore how information about the environmental stability, labor practices, gender equality, etc. can be transmitted via labels and bar codes. The entire discussion centers on the best means for achieving the desired end: government regulation or market action.

For the dinner lecture, we will return to the issue of obesity at home and around the world with a guest lecture by Dr. Davison.

Assignments and Assignments Due:
a) in class RAT

Dinner Menu:
Geographic focus: Middle Eastern
Key food: Coffee
Guest lecture: Dr. Kirsten Davison, University at Albany, Public Health

Discussion Topics:
• What is fair trade?
• How does fair trade differ from free trade?
• Who benefits and who loses from fair trade?
• Can free trade be fair trade?
• How can consumers influence the production process?
• Would giving consumers more information
Readings:


*UAlbany Vacation: no meeting on Week 10 (3/29)*

*UAlbany Vacation: no meeting on Week 11 (4/5)*

**Week 12 (4/12): Genetically Modified (GM) Food and Organisms**

Technology change has driven the rise in productivity of agriculture since the dawn of agriculture. The mouldboard plow in the middle ages and the tractor in the 1930's are just two of many examples. More recently, the ability to modify genes holds the promise to radically alter the production and distribution of food. However, critics of the new technology argue that its many dangers far outweigh any promised increases in productivity, safety, or sustainability.

*Assignments Due:*

a) Third Written Assignment Due

b) Student Debate #2

*Dinner Menu:*

Geographic focus: Basque

Key food: Cod

Guest lecture: Dr. Kristen Hessler, University at Albany, Philosophy

*Discussion Topics:*

- What is the lesson of the cod?
- Why is it hard to save the cod?
- Is fishing sustainable?
- What is genetically modified food?
- How safe are genetically modified fish and corn?
- Who wins and who loses from the spread of genetically modified food?
- Does GM food raise or lower the cost of food on a families table?
• What are the environmental implications of GM food?
• What are the health implications of GM productions?

Readings:


[R*] Tiberghien, Yves. 2009. "Competitive Governance and the Quest for Legitimacy in the EU: the Battle over the Regulation of GMOs since the mid-1990s." Journal of European Integration 31/3 (May), 389-407.


Week 13 (4/19): Food Safety: Hormones, Antibiotics, and Allergies

How safe is your food? This week we look at the issue of food safety. Although safety has always been an issue, the industrialization of the food supply chain has brought a host of issue to the forefront. Are hormones in our meat and dairy harmful to humans? Are there problems associated with the mass distribution of antibiotics on a regular basis? Has there been a rise in food allergies and what might account for this change?

Assessments and Assignments Due:

a) in class RAT

Dinner Menu:
Geographic focus: East Africa
Key food: Milk
Guest lecture: Kendra Smith-Howard, University at Albany, History

Discussion Topics:
• Should dairy cows be given hormones and antibiotics?
• Does the regular use of antibiotics in animal feed stocks pose a threat to humans?
• Is food safety a national security issue?
• Has food safety declined recently? Why?
• What would it cost to make American food safe?
• Have food allergies been on the rise? Why?
• Should schools be "nut free" environments?

Readings:


**Week 14 (4/26): Hunger at Home and Abroad**

A course on food and politics must inevitably confront the issues of undernourishment, malnutrition, and poverty. This week we will discuss poverty in the United States and around the globe. We will also examine the effectiveness of public policies designed to confront this poverty (e.g., food stamps in the United States and food aid in the developing world). Finally, we will examine how food and agricultural policies at home impact the poor around the globe.

Assessments and Assignments Due:

a) none

**Dinner Menu:**

Geographic focus: Sub-Saharan Africa

Key food: Salt

Guest lectures: Dr. Maurits van der Veen, University of Georgia
Dr. Lynn Warner, University at Albany, Social Welfare

**Discussion Topics:**

- Do people have to go hungry? At home? Around the globe?
- Can free markets fix the poverty problem?
- What is the difference between mal-nourishment and undernourishment?
- Does foreign aid undermine or help development?
- Can we eliminate poverty at home and abroad?
- How does the American food stamp program work?
- Will demand for biofuels increase food prices and poverty?

**Readings:**


[R*] additional readings to be determine.


In this final class, we will begin with a discussion of biofuels and their impact on food policy. We will then turn to the impact of the regional trade group NAFTA on workers and farmers in Mexico. We will use the final hour for general questions about food and politics.

Assignments Due:
- a) Fourth Written Assignment Due
- b) Student Debate #3

Dinner Menu:
- Geographic focus: Mexico
- Key food: Chocolate
- Guest lecture: Laura Gonzalez-Murphy, University at Albany, Political Science

Discussion Topics:
- How has NAFTA impacted Mexican farmers?
- Do Mexican farmers have homogeneous or heterogeneous preferences? How does this relate to the impact of NAFTA?
- How as NAFTA impacted food production, distribution, and consumption in the United States?
- How does the geographic distribution of agricultural production in Mexico impact the political process in the federal government?
- Would Mexico be better off with a return to more protectionist policies?
- Should governments promote biofuels?
- Who is helped and who is injured by the drive for more biofuels?

Readings:

FINAL EXAM (Scheduled for Monday, May 10th from 5:45 to 7:45)