Department of Geography & Planning
University of Toronto

GRADUATE COURSE SYLLABUS (DRAFT)

Course: JPG1429 The Political Ecology of Food and Agriculture

Term: Winter 2020

Course Director: Dr. Michael Ekers
Email: mekers@utsc.utoronto.ca
Office: Sidney Smith 5027D
Office Hours: Tuesdays 12:00-2:00

Time: Tuesdays 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Location: Sidney Smith Hall SS5017A

Objectives:

1. Develop a broad understanding of historical, geographical and theoretical understandings of the political ecology of food, agriculture and the agrarian question.

2. Examine how the roots of many debates in political ecology have been informed by studies of food and agriculture.

3. Investigate historicist methods, with a focus on how texts, concepts and research travel and change historically and geographically.

4. Develop students’ presentation and research skills through applying course themes and readings to an agrarian/food issue of their choice.

Course Description:

Agrifood systems, connecting production and consumption, markets and various types of agrarian labour, are undergoing profound social and ecological change. Among these developments are large-scale land grabs, the financialization of food and farming, challenges to settler agriculture and the resurgence of Indigenous food systems, and the emergence of robust ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ alternatives to industrial and colonial agriculture. In trying to make sense of these changes, and the various social movements that have emerged in their wake, this course deploys and interrogates insights from agrarian political economy, political ecology and anti-colonial traditions to analyze the forces and social relations that define land-based and food-focused transformations, both historically and in the contemporary moment.

This course examines the often forgotten roots of contemporary debates in political ecology and food studies, that is, the enduring agrarian question. The agrarian question examines the extent to
which capital has transformed agricultural production and the degrees to which producers have been able to resist dispossession and the industrialization and capitalization of agriculture. Arguably, access to food and the viability of alternative and conventional agriculture is shaped by the particular, and at times limited, ways that capital takes hold of agrarian production processes and transforms Indigenous nations and small-scale and peasant farmers. This course examines these questions through a series of historical and geographical accounts of the agrarian question and discusses how they might inform or limit understandings of the political ecology of food. We start with competing historical accounts of agrarian production in the works of Lenin, Kautsky and Chayanov and debates regarding peasant politics and uprisings. Next, we explore the influences of these historical debates in accounts of peasant studies, agrarian political economy and political ecology in the 1970s and 1980s and the chasm existing between Marxist and populist accounts of the peasantry and agrarian change. Finally, we trace the endurance and relevance of political ecology approaches and the agrarian question in contemporary readings of alternative agriculture, urban agriculture, land-based social movements, anti-colonial struggles over, and understandings of, food and land and renewed forms of enclosure and the financialization of land.

Debates on food, social movements, alternative and urban agriculture and settler-colonialism, much of it channeled through the lens of political ecology, have exploded over the past 10 years. However, frequently much of the literature has overlooked the extended historical debates on agrarian change and the politics associated with different forms of production (peasant, petty-commodity production, and capitalist). Through this course we explore to what degree more recent studies of political ecology and food might be reinvigorated through a historically and geographically expansive reading of the agrarian question and also how contemporary debates ask us to rethink ‘classic’ texts. In doing so, the course seeks to provide a theoretical and empirical foundation for students interested in food and agriculture, political ecology, land-based social movements and critical perspectives on development.

As detailed below, these themes are examined through four blocks that structure the course:

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<th>I: Starting Points – Political Ecology and Agrarian Questions</th>
<th>II: Food Rights and Politics in Peasant Economies</th>
<th>III: Beyond the Classical Agrarian Question: Social Difference, Commodities and Ontology</th>
<th>IV: Contemporary Transformations in the Political Ecology of Food, Agriculture and Land</th>
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<td>Orientation and Course Organization</td>
<td>Peasant Politics</td>
<td>Commodity Trails</td>
<td>Financializing Food and Land</td>
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<td>Political Ecology</td>
<td>City and Country</td>
<td>Commodified and Non-Commodified Labour</td>
<td>Agrarianism, Alternatives and their Limits</td>
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<td>Surveying the Agrarian Question</td>
<td>The Moral Economy</td>
<td>Broadening Agrarian Transformations</td>
<td>Urban Political Ecology and Agriculture</td>
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<td>Non-Capitalist Economies</td>
<td>Agrarian Social Movements</td>
<td>Indigenous Politics, Land and Decolonizing Food</td>
<td>Agrarian Social Movements</td>
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Evaluations

1. Weekly Reading Reflections (20%) Weekly
2. Mid-Course ‘Check-In’ (5%) February 11th
3. Participation (20%) Weekly
4. Major Paper Proposal (15%) February 25th
5. Major Paper (40%) April 24th

Weekly Reading Reflections

Weekly reading reflections play an important role in ensuring that everyone (including your instructor!) is carefully engaging with the required readings. Moreover, the readings represent a common reference point and anchor class discussions, as I will draw on your various contributions and comments. You are required to write a 1-2 page double-spaced reflection on the required readings for 10 weeks of the term. No reflection is required for Class 1 and you can skip one further week during the term.

Your reading reflections should represent a thoughtful engagement with the required readings for the given week. These reflections should be more than a simple summary of the readings and should discuss some of the following questions: What key questions and/or issues do the readings provoke you to consider? Why do these readings matter, or not? What is the relevance of the readings to debates on the agrarian question, the political ecology of food or for your own research? What is of value in the readings, what critiques might be offered and what are the limits of the work? While criticism is important, sometimes there is a temptation to engage in critique for the sake of critique so be sure to identify the strengths and value of the various pieces of writing. When writing your reflections remember that particular, focused engagements are always better than overly general comments.

Your Reading Reflections must be submitted to your instructor an email attachment no later than 12:00 PM on the Monday preceding our scheduled class. With your consent, your reflections will be shared with the class through a Dropbox folder. If you have concerns about this please speak to me directly.

Participation

Your substantive, constructive and respectful participation in weekly class discussions is crucial for the success of this course. While I will provide structure for our discussions I expect everyone to make thoughtful contributions to the discussions on the weekly topics and readings. Your comments should always be respectful of others and we should all strive to be considerate of everyone’s specific backgrounds, perspectives, stages of study and comfort level regarding participation. Relations of race, gender, sexuality, class and learning styles subvert experiences of the classroom. Finally, I ask that everyone be mindful about the amount of space they are occupying. There needs to be time and space for everyone to contribute and sometimes that may mean not immediately conveying some burning thought or idea. If I feel that someone is dominating the discussions or is being unconstructive I may speak with you about the situation. I flag this simply in the spirit of fostering a productive, equitable and safe learning environment.
Mid-Course Check-In

Individual meetings will be scheduled on **Feb. 13** during which we will discuss your progress in the course, your Reading Reflections, your thoughts on the course and my instruction and what might be working and what might require rethinking during the second half of the semester. The meeting will also be an opportunity to have preliminary discussions around your Major Research Proposal and Paper.

**Major Paper**

In addition to the topics covered on this syllabus, you will also have an opportunity to research and write a term paper on a related theme of personal interest. The topic of your paper is of your choice, however, it must be sufficiently related to the agrarian question and/or the political ecology of food and agriculture. Your paper may take on different forms depending on your stage of study and specific interests but it could include a critical literature review, a theoretically oriented argument, a paper based on empirical/concrete/discursive research or even a grant application. If you are uncertain whether your topic is appropriate, please discuss it with me in office hours or during the scheduled meeting.

The length of the papers should be between 20-25 double-spaced pages, excluding the bibliography. There is no minimum number of pages, however there is a firm maximum of 25 pages, again excluding the references. All papers should develop a clear and well-supported thesis. Evaluation of your essays will be based upon your demonstrated knowledge of – and thoughtful engagement with – the relevant academic literature, additional research and the quality of your writing. Like most readers, including the editors of academic journals, I value well-organized essays and concise writing. The minimum number of sources will depend upon the type of texts you are engaging with and the substantiveness of the engagement. Obviously, reading a book takes more time than an article. I expect that you will read the equivalent of 10-20 journal articles for this assignment. You are welcome to use your preferred citation style (APA, AAG, Chicago, etc.), but please use it consistently throughout your paper.

Essays are due **no later than April 24**. Please send them to me as an email attachment, preferably in a format that is compatible with Microsoft Word. It is much harder to comment on PDF files.

**Major Paper Proposal**

Quality writing typically requires a long gestation period and I encourage you to begin researching and refining your major paper topic as soon as possible. To encourage this, a proposal for your major research paper is due **no later than February 27**. It should clearly identify the topic that you intend to research and explain how it relates to the political ecology of food and the agrarian question. If you are uncertain whether your chosen topic is appropriate, I would be happy to discuss it with you. Your proposal should also articulate a tentative thesis/argument. I encourage you to clearly spell out the significance and/or relevance of your proposed topic for your own research interests and for broader debates. You should also provide a basic outline of your paper and identify and comment on at least five relevant texts that you plan to draw upon. Your proposal should be 5 double-spaced pages in length and should be submitted to me as an email attachment in a Word-compatible format.
Deadline Policy

Late work will be penalized by two percentage points per day, excluding weekends.

Course Texts

All of the course texts will be available through a course Dropbox folder. You can also bring a memory stick to my office hours and I can transfer the files for you.

Weekly Topics and Readings

This course and syllabus are works in progress. Please feel free to offer any suggestions or constructive criticism about the subject matter, readings, methods of evaluation, and class dynamics. As a class we may alter this syllabus – including the topics and readings – as we deem appropriate at any time during the course of the semester. You will be expected to adjust your reading accordingly.

I. Starting Points: Political Ecology and Agrarian Questions

Class 1 (Jan. 7): Introduction – Political Ecology, Agrarian Questions, and Food System Transformation

Required:


Recommended:


Class 2 (Jan. 14): The Agrarian Question: Marx, Kautsky and Lenin

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


Class 3 (Jan. 21): The Peasant Economy: Chayanov

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


**II. Food Rights and Politics in Peasant Economies**

**Class 4 (Jan. 28): Peasant Uprisings and Politics**

*Required:*


*Recommended:*


Class 5 (Feb. 4): Peasantries and the Moral Economy

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


III. Beyond the Classical Agrarian Question: Social Difference, Commodities and Ontology

Class 6 (Feb. 11): On the Commodity Trail: ‘Freedom’ and Labour

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


February 17th – No Class, Reading Week

Class 7 (Feb. 25): Broadening Agrarian Transformations: Social Difference

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


Paper Proposals Due No Later Than February 27th – Please Submit via Email

Class 8 (Mar. 3): Indigenous Politics, Land and Decolonizing Food

**Required:**


nationhood. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3(3), 159-166.

**Recommended:**


**IV. Contemporary Transformations in the Political Ecology of Food, Agriculture and Land**

**Class 9 (Mar. 10): Finance, Food and Land**

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


**Class 10 (Mar. 17): How ‘Alternative’ is Alternative Agriculture?**

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


**Class 11 (Mar. 24) Urban Political Ecology and Urban Agriculture**

**Required:**


Recommended:


Class 12 (March 31): Agrarian Social Movements and Food Sovereignty

Required:


Recommended:


**Term Papers Due No Later Than April 24th – Please Submit via Email**
Supplementary Information

Course Readings

All of the required course readings will be available through a shared Dropbox folder that will be established. Please note that will be mindful of not deleting files when accessing the readings. Please do not ‘drag and drop’ and readings from a folder as this will delete them from the Dropbox folder. You must ‘copy’ the files and save them in a separate location.

Course Webpages

The course webpages include information relevant to the course. Course handouts and assignments will be posted online. Other supplementary materials may be made available as the course progresses. Finally, information about any timetable changes, special events and/or lectures will also be posted on the course website. You are encouraged to consult the course webpages frequently and follow the course announcements.

Email Policy

Email is a convenient and effective way to communicate with the Course Director. But please do not expect an immediate reply to your email, although every effort will be made to get back to you within 48 hours (weekends not included). Office hours are available for individual attention. If I think that your question or concern is best dealt with in person I will suggest that you see us during office hours. All email correspondence should have JPG1429 clearly identified in the subject heading.

Accessibility Services

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility as soon as possible. Students may also want to contact Accessibility Services Office if they have problems arising from chronic issues or injuries sustained during the term that affect their ability to do assignments. For more information, see http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/Faculty-and-Staff.htm.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is an academic offense at the University of Toronto. Plagiarism is quoting (or paraphrasing) the work of an author (including the work of fellow students) without proper use of citation (and quotations marks when using an author’s words). Students also should not be submitting any academic work for which credit has previously been obtained or is being sought, without first discussing with the instructor. Please consult the “Rules and Regulations” section of the Arts and Science Calendar (http://www.artsandscience.utoronto.ca/ofr/calendar/Rules_&_Regulations.html). For further information and check the ‘How not to plagiarize’ website at: http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize. For further advice and suggestions for instructors around issues of academic integrity, see: http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/facultyandstaff/prevention
## Graduate Course Policies

### Important Dates

Graduate courses are normally a minimum of 2-3 hours/week for 12 weeks. Reading week is optional for graduate courses. If observed, the instructor will inform the class and provide a make up date for the missed class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 15</td>
<td>Course enrolment begins</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 9</td>
<td>Most formal graduate courses and seminars begin</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 11</td>
<td>Summer session grades available for viewing online in ACORN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 23</td>
<td>Final date to add full-year and Fall session courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 14</td>
<td>Thanksgiving Day (University closed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October &amp; November</td>
<td>Undergraduate Reading Week: UTM – Oct. 15-18; UTSC – Oct. 12-18; STG – Nov 4-8*</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 28</td>
<td>Final date to drop fall session half or full courses without academic penalty</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 25-29</td>
<td>Last week of graduate classes*</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 23</td>
<td>University closed for winter break until January 3 inclusive</td>
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### Winter 2020

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>January 6</td>
<td>University reopens, most formal graduate courses and seminars begin</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 8</td>
<td>Submission deadline for Fall session grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 15</td>
<td>Fall session grades available for viewing online in ACORN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 20</td>
<td>Final date to add Winter session courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 17</td>
<td>Family Day (University closed)</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 24</td>
<td>Undergraduate Reading Week: UTM – Feb. 18-21; UTSC – Feb 15-21; STG – Feb 17-21*</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 23-27</td>
<td>Final date to drop full-year and winter courses without academic penalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 10</td>
<td>Good Friday (University closed)</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 15</td>
<td>Winter grades due for students graduating in June 2020</td>
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### Summer 2020

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>May 6</td>
<td>Submission deadline for Winter session grades (for students not graduating in June)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 13</td>
<td>Full-year and Winter session grades available for viewing online in ACORN</td>
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*If undergraduate reading week is observed, the instructor must provide a make-up date for the missed class. This may include an extra class at the end of term.

### Course Syllabi

A final course syllabus, which includes all assignments, deadlines and weighting of methods of evaluation, must be made available to all students enrolled in the course as early as possible, no later than the deadline for enrolling in classes (September 23, 2019 for fall courses and January 20, 2020 for winter courses).

Changes to the methods of evaluation or their relative weights cannot be made after this date without the consent of a simple majority of students in the class, provided a vote is announced at the previous class meeting.
Late Assignments
Instructors are not obligated to accept late work, except where there are legitimate, documented reasons beyond a student’s control. In such cases a late penalty is not normally applied. In all other circumstances, if an instructor intends to accept and apply penalties to late assignments this will be clearly set out in the syllabus.

Attendance and Participation
Although attendance makes up no more than 20% of the final course grade, regular and consistent attendance in graduate courses is expected. Most graduate courses are seminar style classes, which involve collaborative work and in-class discussions with other students and instructors. Students who are unable to attend class each week must inform the instructor as early as possible.

Accessibility and Accommodations
The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations because you are disabled, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible: http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/as

Where there is an accommodation recommended by Accessibility Services, the department and/or instructors will be provided with an accommodation letter.

Academic Integrity
Academic misconduct by graduate students is taken very seriously. The University’s policy on academic misconduct is found in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters (the Code). Students in graduate studies are expected to commit to the highest standards of integrity and to understand the importance of protecting and acknowledging intellectual property. For example, it is assumed that they bring to their graduate studies a clear understanding of how to cite references appropriately, thereby avoiding plagiarism.

Regarding plagiarism, the Code includes the following statements:

B.i.1. It shall be an offence for a student knowingly:
(a) to represent as one’s own idea or expression of an idea or work of another in any academic examination or term test or in connection with any other form of academic work, i.e., to commit plagiarism.

Wherever in the Code an offence is described as depending on “knowing,” the offence shall likewise be deemed to have been committed if the person ought reasonably to have known.

Other academic offences include the possession and/or use of unauthorized aids in examinations, submitting the same paper for different courses, forgery (whether of academic records or other documents), concocting facts or references to sources, personating someone, and other forms of cheating and academic dishonesty. Please refer to sections B.i.1. and B.i.3. in the Code for detailed descriptions of offences applicable to students.

The policy on academic misconduct and the process for handling an allegation of academic misconduct is outlined at https://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/policies-guidelines/academic-integrity-resources/

Coursework Extensions
The authority to grant an extension to submit coursework beyond the sessional grade deadline is with the department and not the instructor of the course. To request a formal extension, students must submit a Coursework Extension Form, completed by both the student and course instructor, to the relevant graduate department prior to the final grade deadline.
In order to ensure fairness in granting extensions, the department must be reasonably certain that:

- The reasons for delay are serious and substantiated.
- The student is not granted unfair advantage over other students in the course.
- The student has a reasonable chance of completing the outstanding work within the time allotted.
- The normal and satisfactory completion of any new coursework is not in jeopardy.

Extension requests for medical reasons (e.g. short-term illness) must be accompanied by a medical note. Extension requests for students with accommodations due to disability must be supported by documentation from Accessibility Services. Extension requests for other reasons must be detailed in the form or a note to the department.

**Religious Accommodations**

Students must alert instructors in a timely fashion to any upcoming religious observances and anticipated absences. Instructors will make every reasonable effort to avoid scheduling tests, exams or other compulsory activities at these times. In the case of an unavoidable conflict with a compulsory activity, every reasonable effort is made to give students the opportunity to make up missed work.

**Course Enrolment and Quercus**

Acorn is the only indicator of official course enrolment; Quercus is not. Students enrolled in Acorn will be automatically populated to a course's Quercus site within 24 hours of enrolling. In some cases, if a student is on a course wait list or there is another delay in processing registration an instructor may give a student access to Quercus as a guest. This will not constitute official enrolment and students are responsible for making sure the course is added correctly using Acorn.

**Auditing**

Students who wish to audit a course must obtain permission directly from the course instructor within the first week of class. Permission is subject to available space and can only be granted by the course instructor.

Only registered students at the University of Toronto may audit courses. Auditing entitles a student to attend lectures only. Students may not submit any written work, attend labs/tutorials or write tests/exams. The student will not be enrolled in the course and the course will not appear on their transcript. The department does not provide certificates of attendance.

**Reading Courses**

Reading courses allow students to complete coursework in topics not covered by current course offerings in Geography or Planning. Reading course guidelines and form is found at [https://geography.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/ReadingCourseInstructions.pdf](https://geography.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/ReadingCourseInstructions.pdf). The form must be accompanied by a brief course outline.

**Copyright in Instructional Settings**

If a student wishes to record (tape, video, photograph, etc.) any lecture presentations or other similar materials provided by the instructor; the instructor’s written consent must be obtained beforehand. Otherwise, all such reproduction is infringement of copyright and prohibited. In the case of private use by students with disabilities, the instructor’s consent shall not be unreasonably withheld.