

Sociology 139F: Social Problems of the Food Industry

Fall 2022

INSTRUCTOR Jill Bakehorn, Ph.D. (Pronouns: she/her or they/them)
E-mail: jabakehorn@berkeley.edu

Sign-up Office Hours: Mondays 4:00-5:00pm
Tuesdays and Thursdays 8:30-9:30am
Sign-up: <https://calendly.com/bakehorn/office-hours>

CLASS MEETING Mondays, Wednesdays, & Fridays 12:00pm-12:59pm
20 Social Sciences Building

Course Description

This course explores the social construction and material effects of social problems. We will begin with an examination of the social constructionist approach to social phenomena and will specifically explore how sociologists study social problems.

Unlike other social problems courses which tend to study a wide variety of social problems, this course will focus on one industry--the food industry--and some of the social problems associated with it. Thus, we will apply sociological theories to the study of various aspects of the food industry by examining the treatment of workers, impacts on health, governmental policies, and environmental issues.

One goal of this class is to help you gain a better understanding of the sociology of social problems and to understand how connected and systematic social problems can be. For instance, when it comes to issues of health and eating habits, many argue it is up to the individual to choose healthy foods and maintain good health. This argument is particularly relevant to current discussions of obesity. But in this class you will find that matters of health are not as simple as individual choice. We will look at structural components of the food industry that constrain choice and actually impede good health. We will deconstruct the very notion of "health."

Keep in mind this is a sociology course. Just to refresh your memory, sociology is the study of human social activity, organization, and interaction. Sociology is about the search for patterned behavior and social, rather than individual, explanations for this behavior. Sociologists look beyond the taken-for-granted notions of our social environment to examine the many layers of social meaning in the human experience. (If this doesn't sound familiar to you, or you are unclear about the *sociological perspective*, please refer to an introductory sociology text for a refresher.)

This class will be **challenging** on a number of levels:

- ❖ You will be expected to keep up with a number of readings for each class meeting.
- ❖ These readings will be challenging not only in terms of their length and number, but also in terms of the subject matter presented and the complex theories proposed.
- ❖ We will be speaking frankly about issues of race, class, gender, and health. Some topics may be challenging; you may find the subject matter embarrassing or difficult to discuss. We will be discussing racial and gender inequality, harassment, abuse, sexual assault, and disordered eating among other topics.

This course challenges many taken-for-granted assumptions about the social world. Keep in mind that your personal experiences may not match the general sociological insights discussed in the course. This does not negate the insights. Ask yourself why this might be the case. You may not agree with everything we read and discuss, but I expect you to have an open mind and demonstrate your knowledge of the sociological perspective. Disagreements and debates are expected and welcome in this class, however, I will not tolerate personal attacks.

Course Goals

- ❖ Use a social constructionist approach to studying social problems
- ❖ Explore the social problems associated with industrial food production
- ❖ Analyze the social structures that lead to the dehumanization and mistreatment of food workers
- ❖ Identify the ways corporations influence health policies
- ❖ Explain how “nutrition” and food safety are political
- ❖ Deconstruct obesity as a social problem
- ❖ Utilize critical gender and race approaches

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester you should be able to:

- ❖ Explain the social problems perspective
- ❖ Articulate the various social problems associated with industrial food production
- ❖ Use an intersectional approach
- ❖ Critically analyze media/“common sense” understandings of food policies, practices, choices, and notions of health
- ❖ Write succinct papers that effectively synthesize course materials and apply theory

Required Texts

Holmes, Seth. 2013. *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (Available as a PDF on bCourses and [online via the library](#))

Jayaraman, Saru. 2013. *Behind the Kitchen Door*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. (Available as a PDF on bCourses and [online via the library](#))

Guthman, Julie. 2011. *Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (Available as a PDF on bCourses and [online via the library](#))

Course Reader: Individual files are available digitally on bCourses and a bound reader is available from Copy Central.

Classroom Safety

Students must follow county and campus regulations regarding coronavirus safety protocols. Vaccinations are required to attend in-person classes. Even if not required by campus, consider wearing a face mask that covers both your nose and mouth while indoors to help protect yourself and those most vulnerable to severe illness. These protocols are in place to ensure the safety of everyone.

Assignments

Food Journal: You will keep a food journal throughout the semester where you reflect on your consumption practices in light of the themes of the course. I will assign 4 specific journal entries / themes. Worth 25% of your final grade.

Reflection Papers: Critical examinations of your participation in the food system based on your food journals and applying course readings. You will complete two reflections—a midterm and final; each is worth 30% of your final grade.

All work must be original (you cannot re-use work from other courses).

Weekly Memos: These assignments are designed to keep you motivated and engaged with the course, to provide opportunities for you to check your comprehension, and to prepare for graded assignments. Assignments will be due on Mondays at 11:59pm (exceptions made for Monday holidays-due date is Tuesday).

These assignments are designed to give you a space to practice the skills you will later be graded on. **You must complete 10 of the 12 assignments in order to get full credit** (the lowest two scores will be dropped).

Grade Breakdown

Food Journal: 25%

Reflection Papers: 60%

Weekly Memos: 15%

GRADE SCALE

Grade Range		Grade
100%	97%	A+
96%	93%	A
92%	90%	A-
89%	87%	B+
86%	83%	B
82%	80%	B-
79%	77%	C+
76%	73%	C
72%	70%	C-
69%	67%	D+
66%	63%	D
62%	60%	D-
59%	50%	F

Course Format and Policies

Readings: Readings should be completed prior to class. You must keep up with the readings to participate in class discussions and complete assignments.

Email: Clearly indicate to which class you are referring in your emails to me. I endeavor to respond to emails within 24 hours, but this is not always possible; please be patient. Please note that **I will respond to emails during regular business hours.**

Names and Pronouns: You have the right to be referred to by the name you prefer and with the correct gender pronouns. Because the name listed in University records may not correspond to your preferred name, please inform me of your name (and pronunciation) and your pronouns so that I can ensure you are properly recognized and respected.

You can refer to me as Prof. Bakehorn, Dr. Bakehorn, or Jill. My pronouns are she/they.

Grading Policies

Extensions are provided for those with this accommodation from DSP.

I will accept late work, but you will receive a **5% penalty for each day the paper is late** (up to 7 days past due date). Please note that bCourses rounds up to the next whole number. For example, if you submit an assignment 1.3 days (32 hours) late, the late penalty will round up to 2 days. **You do not need to contact me to turn in a paper late.**

Life sometimes prevents us from meeting all of our obligations. I don't think that one missed assignment should derail a student's academic progress. If you do not turn in one of the graded assignments, you will receive a grade of 50. This will allow you to recover from this setback rather than tanking your grade for the class and potentially impacting your GPA. Any subsequent missing assignments will receive a 0.

Assignments will be checked by TurnItIn for plagiarism. Keep in mind, this program keeps a database of previously turned in papers as well as searching the internet.

To **request a re-grade** of an assignment: first, wait 24 hours after the assignment was returned and second, write up a statement detailing why you believe you deserve a higher grade. This statement should be about the substance of your work, not about effort. Be sure to make specific reference to your work, don't simply say that you responded to the questions asked. Demonstrate how you did so. **Request a re-grade within 7 days of the assignment being returned.** My assessment and grade of your work will be used, even if that means you get a lower score than originally given for that work.

Academic Dishonesty

The University defines academic misconduct as “any action or attempted action that may result in creating an unfair academic advantage for oneself or an unfair academic advantage or disadvantage for any other member or members of the academic community” (UC Berkeley Code of Student Conduct).

Academic dishonesty includes cheating and plagiarism. Cheating is collaboration with other students on papers and exams. Plagiarism includes turning in any work that is not your own as well as improper or missing citations of others' works. As a student of the University of California, you are bound by the Code of Academic Conduct. Any cases of cheating or plagiarism will result in a referral to The Center for Student Conduct and a 0 for that assignment.

Plagiarism is most likely to occur because students are unaware of how to cite sources or because they feel desperate. If you get to this point in your writing, contact me ASAP rather than doing something you'll very likely regret. I am happy to help.

Office Hours

Please see Page 1 or [this link](#) for information about my office hours. These office hours are specifically for you. We can discuss readings, assignments, post-college plans, existential dread, how to access resources, letters of recommendation, any issues you are having—doesn't have to be related to this class—what is bringing you joy, whatever.

If you are having any difficulties with the material or assignments for the course or if you are having any personal problems that are affecting your ability to complete assignments on time, please take advantage of office hours—I am here to help!

Remember that office hours are an important resource if for no other reason than getting to know your instructors could help you in the future when you may need letters of recommendation. You do not need to be struggling or have course-specific questions to go to office hours.

All office hours will be via Zoom.

Student Support Services

Course Accessibility

This course is intended for all UC Berkeley students, including those with mental, emotional, physical, or cognitive disabilities, illnesses, injuries, impairments, or any other condition that can negatively impact equal access to education. If, at any point in the semester, you find yourself not able to fully access the space, content, and experience of this course, you are welcome (but not required) to contact me by email or during office hours to discuss your specific needs.

I also encourage you to contact the [Disabled Students' Program](#). If you have a diagnosis, DSP can help you document your needs and create an accommodation plan. By making a plan through DSP, you can ensure appropriate accommodations without disclosing your condition or diagnosis to course instructors.

Student Learning Center

“The primary academic support service for students at Berkeley, the [SLC](#) helps students transition to Cal; navigate the academic terrain; create networks of resources; and achieve academic, personal and professional goals.”

Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Services

To learn more about these issues, how to support survivors, or how to file a report and receive support services, start here: [Survivor Support](#). **Please note that I am not a confidential advocate; I am a mandated reporter.** You can speak to a [Confidential Care Advocate](#) at the Path to Care Center.

Economic, Food, and Housing Support

If you are in need of economic, food, or housing support, you can find help at [the Basic Needs Center](#). You may be eligible for money to buy groceries via [Calfresh](#) or our [Food Assistance Program](#). If you are in need of food immediately, please contact our UC Berkeley [Food Pantry](#). More information can be found [here](#).

Mental Health Resources

All students — regardless of background or identity — may experience a range of issues that can become barriers to learning like strained relationships, anxiety, depression, alcohol and other drug problems, difficulties with concentration, sleep, and eating, and/or lack of motivation. UC Berkeley offers many services like [Recalibrate](#) and [Student Mental Health](#).

Course Outline

Complete readings on the day listed below. Course schedule is subject to change.

Week One: Introductions

Wednesday, 8/24 Welcome + Introductions

Friday, 8/26 Introducing Social Problems of the Food Industry

Week Two: The Social Construction of Social Problems

Monday, 8/29 + The Social Construction of Social Problems
Wednesday, 8/31

Johnson, Allan G. 1997. "The Forest, the Trees, and the One Thing." Pp 7-35 in *The Forest and the Trees: Sociology as Life, Practice, and Promise*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Heiner, Robert. 2002. "An Introduction to the Sociology of Social Problems." Pp 1-19 in *Social Problems: An Introduction to Critical Constructionism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Weeks Three-Four: Industrialization of Food

Friday, 9/2 The Rise of Corn

Pollan, Michael. 2006. "Chapter One: The Plant: Corn's Conquest." Pp 15-31 in *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York: Penguin.

———. "Chapter Two: The Farm." Pp 32-56 in *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York: Penguin.

Monday, 9/5 Holiday: NO CLASS

Wednesday, 9/7+ Where Corn Ends Up
Friday, 9/9

Pollan, Michael. 2006. "Chapter Three: The Elevator." Pp 57-64 in *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York: Penguin.

———. "Chapter Four: The Feedlot: Making Meat." Pp 65-84 in *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York: Penguin.

Monday, 9/12 + Industrial Animal Agriculture
Wednesday, 9/14

Leonard, Christopher. 2014. "Chapter 4: The Industrial Animal (1970-1995)." Pp 91-111 in *The Meat Racket: The Secret Takeover of America's Food Business*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

———. "Chapter 5: Cage Match (2004-2012)." Pp 113-146 in *The Meat Racket: The Secret Takeover of America's Food Business*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Friday, 9/16 Catch-Up/Review
JOURNAL ENTRY 1 DUE

Weeks Five-Seven: Agricultural Workers

Monday, 9/19 + "We Are Fieldworkers"
Wednesday, 9/21

Seth Holmes: Chapter One: Introduction in *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States*

Seth Holmes: Chapter Two: "We Are Fieldworkers"

Friday, 9/23+ Ethnic Segregation
Monday, 9/26

Seth Holmes: Chapter Three: Segregation of the Farm: Ethnic Hierarchies at Work

Wednesday, 9/28 The Structural Violence of Segregated Labor

Seth Holmes: Chapter Four: “How the Poor Suffer”: Embodying the Violence Continuum

**Friday, 9/30 + The Clinical Gaze
Monday, 10/3**

Seth Holmes: Chapter Five: “Doctors Don’t Know Anything”: The Clinical Gaze in Migrant Health

Wednesday, 10/5 Naturalizing Human Suffering

Seth Holmes: Chapter Six: “Because They’re Lower to the Ground”: Naturalizing Social Suffering

**Friday, 10/7 Concluding *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies* + Film
Screening: *Rape in the Fields*
JOURNAL ENTRY 2 DUE**

Seth Holmes: Chapter Seven: Conclusion: Change, Pragmatic Solidarity, and Beyond

Weeks Eight-Ten: Restaurant Workers

Monday, 10/10 Sustainable Means Fair Working Conditions

Saru Jayaraman: Chapter 1: The Hands on Your Plate in *Behind the Kitchen Door*

Saru Jayaraman: Chapter 2: *Real Sustainability, Please!*

Wednesday, 10/12 Worker Health Conditions

Saru Jayaraman: Chapter 3: Serving While Sick

**Friday, 10/14+ Wage Issues + Review/Catch Up
Monday, 10/17**

Saru Jayaraman: Chapter 4: \$2.13—The Tipping Point

Wednesday, 10/19 **Work on Reflection—NO CLASS**

Friday, 10/21 **REFLECTION 1 DUE**
NO CLASS

Monday, 10/24 **Race in the Kitchen**

Saru Jayaraman: Chapter 5: Race in the Kitchen

Wednesday, 10/26 **Gender in the Kitchen**

Saru Jayaraman: Chapter 6: Women Waiting on Equality

Friday, 10/28 **Concluding *Beyond the Kitchen Door***

Saru Jayaraman: Chapter 7: Recipes for Change

Weeks Eleven-Twelve: Corporate Influence Peddling

Monday, 10/31 + **Food Industry Pushers**
Wednesday, 11/2

Nestle, Marion. 2013. "Chapter 7: Playing Hardball: Legal or Not" Pp 159-171 in *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Nestle, Marion. 2018. "Chapter 1: The Food Industry and Nutrition." Pp 1-12 in *Unsavory Truth: How Food Companies Skew the Science of What We Eat*. New York: Basic Books.

Friday, 11/4 **Corporate Influence on Research**

Nestle, Marion. 2018. "Chapter 7: Coca-Cola: A Case Study in Itself." Pp 91-105 in *Unsavory Truth: How Food Companies Skew the Science of What We Eat*. New York: Basic Books.

———. "Chapter 9: Co-Opted? The American Society for Nutrition." Pp 125-140 in *Unsavory Truth: How Food Companies Skew the Science of What We Eat*. New York: Basic Books.

Monday, 11/7+ **Corporate Influence on Government**
Wednesday, 11/9

Nestle, Marion. 2013. "Chapter 4: Influencing Government" Pp 95-110 in *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

———. "Chapter 6: Winning Friends, Disarming Critics" Pp 137-158 in *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Nestle, Marion. 2018. "Chapter 5: Selling Meat and Dairy Foods." Pp 61-74 in *Unsavory Truth: How Food Companies Skew the Science of What We Eat*. New York: Basic Books.

Friday, 11/11 **Holiday: NO CLASS**

Weeks Thirteen-Fifteen: Constructing Obesity

Monday, 11/14 **Constructing the Obesity Problem**
JOURNAL ENTRY 3 DUE

Julie Guthman: Chapter 1: Introduction: What's the Problem? in *Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism*

Julie Guthman: Chapter 2: How Do We Know Obesity is a Problem?

Wednesday, 11/16 **Whose Problem is Obesity?**

Julie Guthman: Chapter 3: Whose Problem is Obesity?

Friday, 11/18 **What Makes Us Fat?**

Julie Guthman: Chapter 5: Does Eating (Too Much) Make You Fat?

Monday, 11/21 **Mental Health Day: NO CLASS**

Wednesday, 11/23 **HOLIDAY: NO CLASS**

Friday, 11/25 **HOLIDAY: NO CLASS**

Monday, 11/28 **The Role of Farm Policy**

Julie Guthman: Chapter 6: Does Farm Policy Make You Fat?

Wednesday, 11/30 **What are the Solutions?**

Julie Guthman: Chapter 7: Will Fresh, Local, Organic Food Make You Thin?

Friday, 12/2 **Conclusions + Wrap Up Semester**
JOURNAL ENTRY 4 DUE

Julie Guthman: Chapter 8: What's Capitalism Got to Do With It?

Julie Guthman: Chapter 9: Conclusion: What's on the Menu?

Week Sixteen: Reading, Review, and Recitation

Monday, December 5—Friday, December 9

REFLECTION 2: Due Friday, 12/16 at 2:30pm