

Sociology 139F: Social Problems of the Food Industry

Fall 2023

INSTRUCTOR

Jill Bakehorn, Ph.D. (she/they)
jabakehorn@berkeley.edu

Office Hours: Tues 3-4pm & Thurs, 8:30-9:30am on Zoom;
Wednesdays 12:30-1:30pm in person

Sign-up: <https://calendly.com/bakehorn>

CLASS MEETING

Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays 10:00-10:59am
126 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**. And in fact, we will deconstruct the very notion of "health."

Keep in mind this is a sociology course. **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.** Sociology is built upon empirical data, not opinions. 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 if you are unclear about the *sociological perspective*, please refer to an introductory sociology text for a refresher.)

This course challenges many taken-for-granted assumptions about the social world. 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.

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 have an open mind, be ready to have your understanding deepened, and demonstrate an understanding of the sociological perspective.

Course Goals

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

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 in studying social problems
- ❖ Critically analyze media and “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.

Jayaraman, Saru and Kathryn De Master, eds. 2020. *Bite Back: People Taking on Corporate Food and Winning*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Guthman, Julie. 2011. *Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

The books are available as a PDF on bCourses

Course Reader: Individual files are available digitally on bCourses and a bound reader is available from [Copy Central](#).

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 3 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 and to provide opportunities for you to check your comprehension in preparation for the graded assignments. Assignments will be due on Mondays at 11:59pm (exceptions made for Monday holidays-the due date will be Tuesday).

These assignments give you a space to practice the skills you will later be graded on.

Complete 10 of the 12 assignments in order to get full credit (the lowest two scores will be dropped). **Please note that these submissions are graded for completion, not proficiency.**

Grade Breakdown

Food Journal: 25%

Reflection Papers: 60%

Weekly Memos: 15%

Be sure to carefully consider assignment feedback; it is provided to help you improve on future assignments. For in-text feedback, **click on the link "View Feedback."**

Course Format and Policies

Readings

Complete readings prior to class to better prepare you to participate in class discussions and complete assignments. You will get a lot more out of lecture if you come prepared and I am happy to answer any questions you have.

Email

Please put the class number/name in the subject of the email. 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 normal 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.

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

Grading Policies

Extensions

Extensions are provided for those with this accommodation from DSP. Please contact me to discuss extensions and we will agree on a new due date.

Grace Period

My priority for this class, and the focus of my assessment of your work, is **learning**. Due dates are a practical necessity for many reasons, but life sometimes prevents us from meeting all of our obligations on time. **Every assignment has a set due date with a grace period of 5 days. You will be able to submit your assignment within that 5 day window without penalty and without requesting an extension.** After that grace period, assignments will not be accepted without prior approval.

You should plan to get your assignments in by the due date and reserve the grace period for those times when you really need it. It can be easy to start to think of the grace period deadline as the *real* due date which could get you into trouble if something comes up that prevents you from completing the assignment. Focus on the due date as the goal but with the comfort of knowing that should something unexpected happen, you have some breathing room to turn in your assignment.

TurnItIn

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.

Re-Grades

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.

****Note that re-grades are likely not possible on final exams due to the tight grading timeline and university grade reporting deadlines.**

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.

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, 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.

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, 8/23 Welcome + Introductions

Friday, 8/25 Introducing Social Problems of the Food Industry

Week Two: The Social Construction of Social Problems

Monday, 8/28 + The Social Construction of Social Problems
Wednesday, 8/30

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-Five: Industrialization & Corporatization of Food

Friday, 9/1 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, 9/4 HOLIDAY: NO CLASS

Wednesday, 9/6 **Introducing *Bite Back***

Marion Nestle: "Forward" in *Bite Back: People Taking on Corporate Food and Winning*

Kathryn De Master and Saru Jayaraman: "Introduction" in *Bite Back*

Friday, 9/8 **Corporate Control of Seeds**

Philip H. Howard: "How Corporations Control Our Seeds" in *Bite Back*

Kristina "Kiki" Hubbard: "Taking Back Our Seeds" in *Bite Back*

Monday, 9/11 + **Pesticides and Corporate Power**
Wednesday, 9/13

Jill Lindsey Harrison: "Pesticide Purveyors and Corporate Power" in *Bite Back*

Emily Marquez, Marcia Ishii-Eiteman, and Kristin Schafer: "Drift Catchers Combatting Pesticide Power" in *Bite Back*

Friday, 9/15 **Where Corn Ends Up**
JOURNAL ENTRY 1 DUE

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, 9/18 + **Industrial Animal Agriculture**
Wednesday, 9/20

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.

Weeks Six-Eight: Agricultural Workers

Friday, 9/22 + **Introducing *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies***
Monday, 9/25

Seth Holmes: Chapter One: Introduction: "Worth Risking Your Life?" in *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States*

Joann Lo and Jose Oliva: "Food Workers versus Food Giants" in *Bite Back*

Wednesday, 9/27 **"We Are Fieldworkers"**

Seth Holmes: Chapter Two: "We Are Fieldworkers": Embodied Anthropology of Migration in *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies*

Friday, 9/29 + **Ethnic Segregation on the Farms**
Monday, 10/2

Seth Holmes: Chapter Three: Segregation of the Farm: Ethnic Hierarchies at Work in *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies*

Wednesday, 10/4 **The Structural Violence of Segregated Labor**

Seth Holmes: Chapter Four: "How the Poor Suffer": Embodying the Violence Continuum in *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies*

Friday, 10/6 **The Clinical Gaze**
[JOURNAL ENTRY 2 DUE](#)

Seth Holmes: Chapter Five: "Doctors Don't Know Anything": The Clinical Gaze in Migrant Health in *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies*

Monday, 10/9 **The Clinical Gaze (Cont)**

Wednesday, 10/11 Naturalizing Human Suffering

Seth Holmes: Chapter Six: “Because They’re Lower to the Ground”: Naturalizing Social Suffering in *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies*

Friday, 10/13 Film Screening: *Rape in the Fields* + Concluding *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies*

Seth Holmes: Chapter Seven: Conclusion: Change, Pragmatic Solidarity, and Beyond in *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies*

Saru Jayaraman: “Food Workers Taking on Goliath” in *Bite Back*

Week Nine: Reflection 1

Monday, 10/16 Review/Catch Up

Wednesday, 10/18 Work on Reflection—NO CLASS

**Friday, 10/20 REFLECTION 1 DUE
NO CLASS**

Weeks Ten-Eleven: Corporate Influence Peddling

**Monday, 10/23 + Food Industry Pushers
Wednesday, 10/25**

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 *Unsavoury Truth: How Food Companies Skew the Science of What We Eat*. New York: Basic Books.

Friday, 10/27

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, 10/30

Corporate Influence on Diets

Kristine Madsen and Wendi Gosliner: "Fast Food Embodied: Industrial Diets" in *Bite Back*

Anne Lappé and Kelle Louaillier: "Moving a McMountain" in *Bite Back*

Wednesday, 11/1 +

Corporate Influence on Government

Friday, 11/3

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.

Weeks Twelve-Fifteen: Constructing Obesity

Monday, 11/6 + Constructing the Obesity Problem
Wednesday, 11/8

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? in *Weighing In*

Friday, 11/10 HOLIDAY: NO CLASS

Monday, 11/13 Whose Problem is Obesity?

Julie Guthman: Chapter 3: Whose Problem is Obesity? in *Weighing In*

Wednesday, 11/15 What Makes Us Fat?

Julie Guthman: Chapter 5: Does Eating (Too Much) Make You Fat? in *Weighing In*

Friday, 11/17 The Role of Farm Policy
JOURNAL ENTRY 3 DUE

Julie Guthman: Chapter 6: Does Farm Policy Make You Fat? in *Weighing In*

Monday, 11/20 Mental Health Day: NO CLASS

Wednesday, 11/22 HOLIDAY: NO CLASS

Friday, 11/24 HOLIDAY: NO CLASS

Monday, 11/27 Are Organics the Solution?

Julie Guthman: Chapter 7: Will Fresh, Local, Organic Food Make You Thin? in *Weighing In*

Wednesday, 11/29 The Role of Capitalism and Neoliberalism

Julie Guthman: Chapter 8: What's Capitalism Got to Do With It? in *Weighing In*

Friday, 12/1 Conclusions + Wrap Up Semester

Julie Guthman: Chapter 9: Conclusion: What's on the Menu? in *Weighing In*

Saru Jayaraman and Kathryn De Master: "Conclusion: Stand Up, Bite Back" in *Bite Back*

Week Sixteen: Reading, Review, and Recitation

Monday, December 4—Friday, December 8

REFLECTION 2: Due Monday, 12/11 at 11:00am

UC Berkeley sits on the territory of xučyun (Huichin), the ancestral and unceded land of the Chochenyo speaking Ohlone people, the successors of the sovereign Verona Band of Alameda County. This land was and continues to be of great importance to the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe and other familial descendants of the Verona Band. We recognize that every member of the Berkeley community has benefitted, and continues to benefit, from the use and occupation of this land since the institution's founding in 1868. Consistent with our values of community, inclusion and diversity, we have a responsibility to acknowledge and make visible the university's relationship to Native peoples. As members of the Berkeley community, it is vitally important that we not only recognize the history of the land on which we stand, but also, we recognize that the Muwekma Ohlone people are alive and flourishing members of the Berkeley and broader Bay Area communities today.

**This acknowledgement was co-created with the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe and Native American Student Development*