Food Security and Resilient Communities: Food Systems Theory and Praxis
Appalachian Foodshed Project graduate course

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“Enhancing Food Security by Cultivating Resilient Food Systems and Communities: Place-based Foodshed Analysis from Research to Community Practice”

A collaboration between NC State University, Virginia Tech, West Virginia University, and Community Stakeholders. Funded by a 2011 USDA NIFA-AFRI Grant (Award No. 2011-68004-30079)
• Brief AFP overview

• *Food Security* course development process

• *Food Security* course goals, topics, and assignments

• Student insights

• Questions and discussion
Appalachian Foodshed Project

- AFP uses the *foodshed* concept to address issues of **community food security** in West Virginia and the Appalachian regions of North Carolina and Virginia.

- Using a community-based research approach, the AFP hopes to facilitate and enhance work in the region by creating a **network of organizations and individuals** who are engaging similar issues related to community development, economic viability, health and nutrition, food access, social justice, and agriculture.

- We collaborate with communities, farmers, policymakers, non-profits, and institutions to **improve food access and availability**, while also enhancing viable food economies.
Graduate curriculum is one grant deliverable
Objectives

• Describe current “food system courses”
  a) Diversity of course content
  b) Methods to engage students with community
  c) Levels at which courses are taught.
• Identify key components for teaching food systems courses.

Some Findings from Nationwide Food Systems Curricula

• 70% of courses are graduate level
• 18% are both graduate and undergraduate
• 12% are undergraduate level
• 38% included a community engagement component
• Very diverse curricula and content; no strong common content
Preliminary Analyses of Food System Courses
Schroeder-Moreno, M., Cruz, A., Clark, S., and Beck, J.

Diverse Topics Taught in Food Systems Courses (N=17)
Advanced Concepts in Community Food Systems
Niewolny, K., Virginia Tech, spring 2013

- Food systems graduate course—student request
- AFP involvement—community partner interest
- Course-based Action Research
  - Participatory syllabus planning, implementation, and evaluation
  - Stories of community food work with/in AFP
Understand current knowledge and experience.

Explore interest in course topics and community engagement possibilities.

Gain insights on course design and learning assessments.

Understand what is valuable for student’s educational and career goals while also meeting the needs of AFP stakeholders.
Focus Groups

• IRB approval
  o Spring 2014
  o Informed consent

• Target population
  o NCSU & VA Tech Students (any major/discipline)
  o Email recruitment

• Focus Groups (4/2014)
  o NCSU (2); 15
  o VA Tech (2); 11

Data Analysis

• Literature-based Code Scheme
• Content Analysis
  o Atlas ti
• Transcriptions
• Coding Process
Graduate Student Focus Groups

Designing an Interdisciplinary Graduate Course: A Student Centered Approach to Curriculum Development

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1 Virginia Tech, Department of Agricultural Leadership & Community Education; 2 North Carolina State University, Department of Crop Science; 3 Virginia Tech, Department of Horticulture

• Interdisciplinary
• Food security and food systems
• Theory, practice, & policy
• Domestic & international perspectives and literature
• “Real world” application & community engagement

Goals

- Learn about a personalized knowledge of the content subject matter
- Understand student learning preferences & expectations
- Tools for focus & direction

Use footage to create a dynamic interdisciplinary graduate course in food systems at two land-grant universities

Emergent Themes

Theme

Quote(s)

Opportunity

"Any chance where you get to get all the people from the different disciplines to talk to each other and gain perspectives from very valuable courses.

Involvement of a Community Partner

"I know that the community garden association has classes from the local universities, and they send volunteers, it's a benefit to the community garden association, but at the same time, the students learn a little bit about what it's like to run an organization.

Real World Applications

"The course would give me a much more realistic perspective on what this work looks like, I think it's important that we get to the real community, it really would like that experience before I get out into the job field. I think it would also make me more employable.

Emerging Themes

- Recordings from focus group were transcribed and coded using NVivo7
- Analysis followed descriptive qualitative research
- Transcriptions were interpreted using coding
- Codes were refined through a process that involved the entire design team in scientific dialogue
- Themes where derived from focus groups shared similar characteristics

Focus Group Participants

- Masters and doctoral students
- All at Virginia Tech
- 17 female, 10 males
- 7 departments represented in the scope of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Urban Affairs & Planning

Course Development

- Developed syllabus at VT & NCSU
- Hosted course this fall at Virginia Tech
- Spring 2010, 12 graduate students enrolled

Find the syllabus here

Funded by a 2011 USDA NIFA-APRP Grant (Award No. 2011-68004-30379)
This graduate-level course is a critical and interdisciplinary exploration of issues related to food security and the emerging discourse(s) of food systems.

Course participants will identify, analyze and address the interconnectedness of the complex issues related to food security—as a “wicked problem.” Educational and development agendas are at the heart of this dialogue.

The Appalachian Foodshed Project provides course participants with a theoretical and practical backdrop.
“This commentary is not an attempt to definitively develop a healthy food system model. I think this is neither possible nor practical. Rather, it is my intention to portray the process of moving toward a healthy food system as a wicked problem while suggesting a set of guidelines under which we can proceed to identify strategies for markedly improving the situation.”

~Michael Hamm, 2009
Learning Objectives

• Define, analyze, and articulate theories, practices, and discourses pertaining to food systems.

• Define and critique conceptual and programmatic definitions of and approaches to enhancing food security locally, regionally, and internationally.

• Define and critique scholar/practitioner participation as change agents in the food system

• Incorporate food security concepts and strategies into personal and professional practice for socially just ends.
Course Concepts and Themes

• Focused on the concepts of:
  • Food security & hunger
  • Community food security
  • Food sovereignty
  • Resiliency
  • Agricultural sustainability from local, regional, & international perspectives

• Topics included but were not limited to:
  • Food security definitions & policy
  • Agroecology and sustainability
  • Community food assessments and “Whole Measures”
  • Food justice
  • Neoliberalism and globalization
  • Critical strategies and approaches for social change
• The Appalachian Foodshed Project provided “local” context, including engagement with AFP stakeholders.

• Virginia Farm to School Conference and visit to City Schoolyard Garden-- Charlottesville, VA.

• Participatory learning, critical pedagogy, and critical practitioner frames
Assignments

- Weekly Critical Reflection Papers (25%)

- Student-led Facilitation (20%) (self-assessment)

- “Community Food Work” Narrative Research Assignment (30%)

- Participation Self-Assessment (25%)
Student Insights

- Great graduate class that covers a lot of ground
- Interdisciplinary
- Weekly critical reflection statements
Student Insights

• Student selected themes
  – Engaging and built upon what we had learned

• “Practitioner” narrative assignment
  – Community engagement
  – Exposure to community food work
  – Culmination of all of the themes and discourses we had read about over the semester
Questions

How does policy affect food security in terms of hunger?

Do government delays in implementation cause problems?

Do you inspire someone to speak from their own perspective?

What does a good policy look like?

How can they plan to implement those policies?

How will they ensure policy measures are followed through?

How can we improve the food system to alleviate hunger?

Can food policy actually help people?
Thank you!

www.appalachianfoodshedproject.org

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