

Agriculture, Food, and Society

Development Sociology 340

Cornell University

Fall Semester 2007

Credit Hours: 3

Class Meeting Time & Place: MWF 11:15-12:05, 260 Warren Hall

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Introduction

Because we all depend on food to live, food is a very serious topic. To live in good health, we also depend on our food supplying the right nutrients and being relatively free of harmful substances and pathogens. Agriculture and the other parts of our food system largely govern what foods we have available and their amounts and qualities. Although food systems now go well beyond agriculture, for most of history agriculture has been at the core. Agriculture and food is also embedded in society. Humans, interacting with each other, with things they have created, and with natural ecosystems, generate food system(s) and, for reasons that we will examine in this course, such systems are neither accidental nor something that we should take for granted. In fact, I think that the long-term viability of our food systems depends very much on people being well informed about them. I also believe that sociology provides very important perspectives for understanding these systems, as well as providing a good basis for an effective problem-solving attitude.

In DSoc 340 we will examine through a sociological lens the social context, trends, issues, and future opportunities associated with our contemporary food systems involving agriculture, aquaculture, silviculture, materials processing, distribution, retailing, etc. The trends include patterned changes in organizational structures, i.e., characteristics of the groups and organizations involved in agriculture, food processing, distribution, retailing, etc. These trends also include globalization and adopting principles and practices derived from industrial manufacturing. Among the key issues arising from these patterns of change are those pertaining both to the sustainability of the emerging systems and to their consequences for human health, our environment, and society. I argue that these changing food and agriculture systems are socially-constructed "landscapes" with different potential development strategies. Perceived opportunities range from, on one hand, preparing to participate competitively in a global food system to, on the other hand, developing many locally-controlled food and fiber systems. Each of these contrasting possibilities has major implications for the character and conditions of both rural and urban communities and for the ecosystems in which we are embedded.

Main Course Objectives

My goals for Development Sociology 340 are that it will:

1. contribute substantially to your abilities to identify and understand the extent and importance of the social influences on food and agriculture systems and to interpret and evaluate food system information sociologically.

2. familiarize you with food and agriculture systems and their associated issues, including (a) what is at issue, (b) how opposing sides define these debates and what they presuppose, (c) what categories of people tend to be on the different sides, and (d) what are the shorter- and longer-term social and environmental implications of these positions.
3. improve your ability to discuss food system topics rationally using sociological concepts and insights, especially with people with whom you disagree.
4. add to your capacity to get information about agriculture, food systems and modern society from personal observation and from print, electronic, and other sources.
5. increase your skills for working with others to (a) define practical, sociologically-informed questions, (b) research those questions, and (c) draw rational conclusions from the information gathered.

Course Texts

The following required texts can be purchased at the Cornell Campus Store:

- Harper, Douglas. 2001. *Changing Works: Visions of a Lost Agriculture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lyson, Thomas A. 2004. *Civic Agriculture: Reconnecting Farm, Food, and Community*. Medford, MA: Tufts University Press.
- Pollan, Michael. 2006. *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York: Penguin Press.

Course Outline and Schedule

The following working outline and schedule includes (1) the topics that we will cover, (2) reading assignments for each topic, (3) due dates for assignments, (4) handout and due dates for the prelim and the final exam, and (5) dates for other course activities. An asterisk (*) denotes that an assigned item will be on E-Reserve. A plus sign (+) indicates that it will be a document on the course Blackboard site (<http://blackboard.cornell.edu/>). Please note that an absence of specific reading assignments for a day should not be construed to mean that no effort outside of class will be needed. The reading load is intentionally adjusted to correspond with the demand for effort on other course activities, like the food system issues discussions and the course group project.

Welcome and Introduction

- What is a food system? What is agriculture's place in it?

August 24 (Fri.)

Introductions and general overview of the course

August 27 (Mon.)

+Gillespie, "The Concept of Food System"

Pollan, "Introduction: Our National Eating Disorder" (pp. 1-11)

+Gillespie, Two handout exercises, "What is food?" and "What do you eat and from where does it come," to be discussed in class

The Social Bases of Food and Agriculture Systems: Changing Input Manufacturing, Farming (“Pharming?”), Processing, Selling, and Consuming in Local and Global Contexts

- How does one understand food systems and agriculture as social phenomena, i.e., sociologically?
- How are food and agriculture systems changing?
- How can changes in food and agriculture systems be explained sociologically?
- How are food and agriculture systems integrated into modern society, changing with its technological and social developments?

August 29 (Wed.)

+Gillespie, “Introduction to a Sociology of Food Systems: Perspectives”

Pollan, Chap. 1, “The Plant: Corn’s Conquest” (pp. 15-31)

Pollan, Chap. 2, “The Farm” (pp. 32-56)

August 31 (Fri.)

Pollan, Chap. 3, “The Elevator” (pp. 57-64)

Pollan, Chap. 4, “The Feedlot: Making Meat” (pp. 65-84)

Pollan, Chap. 5, “The Processing Plant” (pp. 85-99)

September 3 (Mon. & Labor Day)

Pollan, Chap. 6, “The Consumer: A Republic of Fat” (pp. 100-108)

Pollan, Chap. 7, “The Meal: Fast Food” pp. (109-119)

September 5 (Wed.)

Harper, “Introduction” (pp. 5-13)

Harper, “Research with Photographs” (pp. 15-27)

Harper, “Historical Frameworks” (pp. 29-43)

September 7 (Fri.)

+Gillespie, “Why Is Agriculture and the Rest of the Food System Changing? Major Farm-Level Trends and Willard Cochrane’s Theory”

Lyson, Chap. 1, “Introduction” (pp. 1-7)

Lyson, Chap. 2, “From Subsistence to Production” (pp. 8-29)

September 10 (Mon.)

Harper, “The Machine in the Garden” (pp. 44-59)

Harper, “Horses and Tractors”(pp. 61-83)

September 12 (Wed.)

Harper, “Making Hay” (pp. 85-111)

September 14 (Fri.)

Harper, “Oats and Corn” (pp. 113-157)

📅 **Target date for organizing project groups**

September 17 (Mon.)

Harper, “The Meaning of Changing Works” (pp. 158-181)

Harper, “Gendered Worlds” (pp. 183-205)

September 19 (Wed.)

*Salamon, Sonia. 2003. "From Hometown to Nontown: Rural Community Effects of Suburbanization." *Rural Sociology* 68:1-24.

+Gillespie, “Why Is Agriculture and the Rest of the Food System Changing? What Is Community and What Is Happening to Communities?”

September 21 (Fri.)

Harper, "Souping Up Cows" (pp. 207-245)

September 24 (Mon.)

Harper, "History Since Then" (pp. 249-278)

+Gillespie, "Why Is Agriculture and the Rest of the Food System Changing? Current Trends and Some of Their Implications"

September 26 (Wed.)

+Gillespie, "Why Is Agriculture and the Rest of the Food System Changing? Major Food System Trends (More or Less) Beyond the Farm Level"

Lyson, Chap. 3, "Going Global" (pp. 30-47)

September 28 (Fri.)

Lyson, Chap. 4, "The Global Supply Chain" (pp. 48-60)

Lyson, Chap. 5, "Toward a Civic Agriculture" (pp. 61-83)

☞ **Prelim handed out**

October 1 (Mon.)

☞ **Prelim due**

Issues of Modern Food and Agriculture Systems: Perspectives, Science, Assessments, and Public Discussion

- What are the major issues of food and agriculture systems? Why are these issues? Who takes what side on these issues? For what reasons?
- What is the value of science in food system issues?
- What is the value of assessing impacts? What are the strengths and limits of assessments?
- How can we have effective public examination and discussion of food system issues?

October 3 (Wed.)

+Gillespie, "Issues of Modern Food and Agriculture Systems: Introduction"

*Mouillesseaux-Kunzman, Heidi. 2005. Chapter 5, "Social Paradigm Theory and Agricultural Paradigms" (pp. 84-105)

☞ **Target date for organizing food system issues discussion guide groups** (see the description in the class participation section below)

October 5 (Fri.)

+Gillespie, "Issues of Modern Food and Agriculture Systems: Perspectives"

*Mouillesseaux-Kunzman, Heidi. 2005. Chapter 6, "Food System Paradigms" (pp. 106-128)

Fall Break Sat., Oct. 6 - Tue., Oct. 9

October 10 (Wed.)

+Gillespie, "Issues of Modern Food and Agriculture Systems: Science, As It Relates to Technology and Society"

*Scott, Pam, et al. 1990. "Captives Of Controversy: The Myth of the Neutral Social Researcher in Contemporary Scientific Controversies." *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 15:474-494.

*Smith, Stephen M. 2000. "Letter: Acceptable Evidence." *Science* 289:2050-2051.

October 11 (Fri.)

+Gillespie, "Issues of Modern Food and Agriculture Systems: Social Inequality, Power, and the State"

*Brown, James R. 2000. "Privatizing the University--The New Tragedy of the Commons." *Science* 290:1701-1702.

+Gillespie, "Issues of Modern Food and Agriculture Systems: Public Policy and Regulation"

*Montague, Peter. 1995. "Cigarette Science at Johns Hopkins." *Rachel's Environment and Health Weekly* #464 (October 19).

*Marshall, Eliot. 1983. "The Murky World of Toxicity Testing." *Science* 220:1130-1132.

October 15 (Mon.)

+Gillespie, "Issues of Modern Food and Agriculture Systems: Modeling and Assessment"

*Andrews, Richard N. L. 1994. "Risk Assessment: Regulation and Beyond." Pp. 167-186 in *Environmental Policy in the 1990s: Toward a New Agenda*, edited by N. J. Vig and M. E. Kraft. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press.

October 17 (Wed.)

*Myers, Nancy. 2004. "The Rise of the Precautionary Principle: A Social Movement Gathers Strength." *Multinational Monitor* 25(9):9-15.

*Montague, Peter. 2004. "Welcome to NanoWorld: Nanotechnology and the Precautionary Principle Imperative." *Multinational Monitor* 25(9):16-19.


+Gillespie, "Issues of Modern Food and Agriculture Systems: Conclusion"

+Gillespie, "Issues of Modern Food and Agriculture Systems: Case for Discussion"

October 19 (Fri.)

Food System Issues discussion and course tour orientation

October 20 (Sat.)

 **Target date for the course tour (required)**

October 22 (Mon.)

Food system issue case presentations and discussion

October 24 (Wed.)

Food system issue case presentations and discussion

October 26 (Fri.)

Food system issue case presentations and discussion

October 29 (Mon.)

Food system issue case presentations and discussion

Future Food Systems: Implications of Continuing Trends and Potential Development Alternatives

- What are some alternative possible (or interesting improbable) future development strategies for our food and agriculture systems?
- What would these possible "futures" (and improbable ones, too) in food and agriculture systems imply for farming households, rural communities, food system participants, consumers, and governments?

October 31 (Wed.)

+Gillespie, "Future Food Systems: Implications of Continuing Food System Trends and Potential Development Alternatives"

Pollan, Chap. 8, "All Flesh Is Grass," pp. 123-133

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- Pollan, Chap. 9, "Big Organic," pp. 134-158
☞ **Assignment due: "Project concept statement"**
- November 2 (Fri.)
Pollan, Chap. 9, "Big Organic" (continued), pp. 158-184
Pollan, Chap. 10, "Grass: Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Pasture," pp. 185-207
- November 5 (Mon.)
Pollan, Chap. 11, "The Animals: Practicing Complexity," pp. 208-225
Pollan, Chap. 12, "Slaughter: In a Glass Abattoir," pp. 226-238
- November 7 (Wed.)
Pollan, Chap. 13, "The Market: 'Greetings from the Non-Barcode People,'" pp. 239-261
Pollan, Chap. 14, "The Meal: Grass-Fed," pp. 262-273
- November 9 (Fri.)
Lyson, Chap. 6, "Civic Agriculture and Community Agriculture Development" (pp. 84-98)
Lyson, Chap. 7, "From Commodity Agriculture to Civic Agriculture" (pp. 99-105)
- November 12 (Mon.)
Pollan, Chap. 15, "The Forager," pp. 277-286
Pollan, Chap. 16, "The Omnivore's Dilemma," pp. 287-303
- November 14 (Wed.)
Pollan, Chap. 17, "The Ethics of Eating Animals," pp. 304-333
- November 16 (Fri.)
Pollan, Chap. 18, "Hunting: The Meat," pp. 334-363
Pollan, Chap. 19, "Gathering: The Fungi," pp. 364-390
- November 19 (Mon.)
Pollan, Chap. 20, "The Perfect Meal," pp. 391-411
☞ **Assignment due: "Project draft"**
- November 21 (Wed.)
Project presentations
Thanksgiving Recess (Wed., November 21 [after class] - Sun. November 21)
- November 26 (Mon.)
Project presentations
- November 28 (Wed.)
Project presentations
- November 30 (Fri.)
+Gillespie, "Future Food Systems: Concluding Thoughts"
Course "wrap-up"
- December 4 (Tue.) 12:00
☞ **Assignment due: "Project report"**
- December 5 (Wed.) 09:00
☞ **Final exam available**
- December 10 (Mon.) 09:00-11:30
☞ **Final exam due**

Course Activities and Grades

In the syllabus introduction I explained why I think sociology is important for understanding the interrelationships among agriculture, food, and society. Because I think it is important, I want to help you learn as much about it as possible. My intent is that the effort you invest will be highly

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correlated what you learn and with your final grade. For this reason, I have written the remainder of the course outline to inform you about course expectations, activities, and assignments. My goal is to help you to focus your efforts productively. Therefore, please feel free to talk to me if and when you have questions or concerns. If you cannot visit me during my regular office hours, please contact me after class, by e-mail, or by telephone.

I also believe that you will learn more by working with your classmates, so I provide incentive for this by assigning your final grade on the percentage of the total points you earn, rather than according to a curve. Like many other good things in life, however, collaboration does have bounds of acceptability. Not surprisingly, unauthorized collaboration during exams and any other activities that violate the *Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity* are outside them.

I recommend that you begin by skimming this part of the syllabus to get a general idea about what it contains. Then, you can refer to the relevant sections as you need information about the specific assignments and activities. I will, of course, be happy to further explain and discuss my goals and expectations with you either individually or in class.

Course Grade

I will base your course grade on the diverse set of course activities outlined below: class participation, exams, and course project work. The points possible for each category and the percentage of 600 points will be as follows:

<u>Course Activity</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Class participation		
Attendance & active participation	160	26.7%
Food system issues dialogue	25	4.2%
Course tour	15	2.5%
Exams		
Prelim	100	16.7%
Final	100	16.7%
Course Group Project		
Project concept statement	50	8.3%
Project draft	30	5.0%
Project presentation	20	3.3%
Project report	100	16.7%
Total	600	100.0%

I will assign final course grades based on the percentage of total possible points according to the following schedule:

Total Points:			600		
<u>Grade</u>	<u>Minimum for Grade</u>		<u>Grade</u>	<u>Minimum for Grade</u>	
	Points	%		Points	%
A+	582	97	C+	480	80
A	564	94	C	450	75
A-	552	92	C-	420	70
B+	540	90	D+	390	65
B	510	85	D	360	60
B-	492	82	D-	300	50

General Tips for Earning a High Grade in DSoc 340

1. Keep up on the reading.
2. Decide what will be the focus of your course project early in the semester.
3. Talk to me right away if you have concerns.
4. Please keep in mind that with a diversified portfolio like this, different people tend to do well on different things, some are good at the exams, some are good at class discussion. To get a *really* high grade, you will need to do well in all aspects.

Readings and Class Participation

Readings

The assigned readings provide a core of shared information for the class, so I consider each assigned reading (including those posted on the course Blackboard site) to be important whether or not we discuss it in class. I expect that you will read each piece of the assigned material intelligently, actively, skeptically, and selectively. I strongly encourage you to manifest your work on completing the readings through contributing to class discussion by commenting on what you find stimulating in the readings and by asking questions and raising issues about things that you find unclear, puzzling, implausible, or unpalatable.

Attendance and class discussion (160 points)

Since I intend to promote your learning by encouraging your active participation in the class, we will devote much class time to discussing readings and issues and, therefore, a significant part of your grade will be based on class participation during the semester. I will be asking you to contribute by answering questions, summarizing readings, and leading discussions. To arrive at your class participation grade I will consider the following: (1) regularity of attendance, (2) effort toward making class discussions informative, stimulating, and productive for all members (e.g., sharing appropriate outside information and personal experiences, helping to answer questions by referring to relevant ideas, concepts, theories, issues, and themes covered in the readings, lectures, and class discussions, critically evaluating readings, raising pertinent questions, and conjecturing about issues), (3) evidence of openness to differing views and respect for and fairness to other class members, and (4) the ease with which you participate in class discussions (I try to take into account the fact that some students are shy and, thus, find participating in class discussions difficult, while others find *not* participating difficult).

I want to foster candid exploration of issues while making all members of the class feel that their knowledge, experiences, and insights are welcomed and valued. Although I intend to provide active leadership during class meetings, I do not intend to dominate them, except during lectures and when other positive direction from the class is absent. Therefore, I will welcome and value your (and your classmates') efforts to shape what happens in class by your contributions, questions, and suggestions. Examples: (1) "You say that increasing scale in the food production will not necessarily continue, but I'm also taking Animal Science xxx where we are learning that it is inevitable. [details] How should we think about this?" (2) "It strikes me that if everyone adopted the kinds of food system that Michael Pollan seems to prefer, food would cost a lot, and we wouldn't have any variety. I just don't think people would go for that."

Finally, I wish to stress that I do not intend to make your class participation grade a function of how much you agree with particular sociological perspectives or with my own views on particular topics. I recognize, however, that taking an independent stance has risks for students. My

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sociological opinion is that some of my former students have chosen not to take that risk and have strategically “taken a dive.”¹ Unfortunately I have forgotten the specific source from which I have borrowed and transposed this term, but you may be able to imagine a social structural similarity between the situations of early-to-mid-20th-Century poor, homeless men in cities and—heaven forbid—those of contemporary Cornell students. The homeless men studied by a certain sociologist apparently perceived that staff of Christian mission houses would not give them food unless they “accepted Jesus as their Savior.” Therefore, these men were reported to have shrewdly developed repertoires of acting out “conversions” that they themselves cynically termed “taking a dive.” Despite the underlying insincerity, these strategies apparently functioned satisfactorily for getting food (at least these homeless men seemed to believe that these strategies were effective). They perhaps also had the side-effect of giving naive mission workers false senses of success and of meaning and purpose in their work. As a teacher, having students bow in awe to one’s great knowledge and mastery of “truth” is, of course, gratifying, but unfortunately this may close off opportunities for exploring important issues and for the mutual learning that can result from such exploration. Therefore, I seek to foster your becoming more thoughtful rather than becoming more committed to certain beliefs. Not only will I learn more and find the class more interesting, but I hope that you will find the same. I am convinced that any hope for a promising future depends on people like you being thoughtful about food and agriculture.

Food system issues discussion (25 points)

Because the capacity to discuss and deal rationally and thoughtfully with issues seems to me to a critical skill for citizens of our modern world, as part of class participation I am asking you to participate with a group of about 6 classmates in developing and presenting a case study on a food system issue that we mutually agree upon. These are scheduled for the end of the “Issues of Modern Food and Agriculture Systems” section of the course when I hope that you will have a good foundation for the assignment. I will be expecting each group to examine facets of their chosen issue like: What is at issue? How did it come to be so (sociological analysis of belief systems, values, interests, etc.)? What are the three main “policy” options? What are the arguments supporting and opposing each option? What are the trade-offs of each option? After considering the options, how would someone identify their preferences?

My model for this assignment is the National Issues Forums (<http://www.nifi.org/>) which . . . *provide a way for people of diverse views and experiences to seek a shared understanding of the problem and to search for common ground for action. Forums . . . use an issue discussion guide that frames the issue by presenting the overall problem and then three or four broad approaches to the problem. Forum participants work through the issue by considering each approach; examining what appeals to them or concerns them, and also what the costs, consequences, and trade offs may be that would be incurred in following that approach.* (<http://www.nifi.org/forums/about.aspx>, accessed August 21, 2006)

To make the assignment manageable, I am asking you to focus particularly on the development of the issues with limited emphasis on the scientific grounding for each of the issue positions (which could be a monumental task). By searching the Internet you will likely find that bits of this work has already been done by others (though most probably not all in one web site and almost all such sources will have definite slants). In other words, the main focus of this assignment is on exploring

¹You may, of course, know such strategies by other labels, but those that I have heard seem too indelicate for me to mention them in my syllabus.

a method for dealing rationally with the kind of tough issues that we will have to face in the future. Examples of appropriate issue topic areas include food security, industrialization or globalization of food, organic production systems, energy in the food system, and vegetarianism. In general, each finished “case study” should be about 10 pages long, comprised of an issue overview, three alternative approaches to dealing with this issue to be deliberated, explanations of the considerations involved in each approach, some questions to promote deliberation, and a one-page questionnaire to help class members to decide how they stand on the issue. See the course Blackboard site for more information, including both an outline for the assignment and the issues discussion collaboration evaluation form (see the group project collaboration section at the end of the syllabus for an elaboration of the principles behind this). Of course, I will talk about this assignment in class and will be happy to answer your questions.

Course Tour/Alternative (15/12 points)

Typically a minority of the students taking DSoc 340 have direct experience with agriculture or other aspects of the food system. The purpose for including the main course tour is to provide an experiential component that is important for a good understanding what is covered in class. My goal is to include different kinds of farms and agricultural support enterprises (such experiences tend to be rare in today’s society). If you have such agricultural experience, the tour creates a context for discussing agriculture and food topics intelligently with your classmates (an opportunity that is also rare in today’s segmented and polarized society). I am grateful for the generous support of the Development Sociology Department, which makes this tour possible. Because class members have a wide variety of schedules, I have found that the only workable day for the tour is a Saturday. See the course outline and schedule above for the planned tour date and the course Blackboard site for more information (I will include last year’s tour information until I have this year’s organized). Everyone who participates in the full tour gets 15 points.

Since not everyone can participate in a Saturday tour and a second regular tour is not feasible, I offer an alternative for those who have a good reason for missing the tour: a self-guided local foods tour with a written report. Since I consider this alternative to be a worthwhile, but inferior experience to the regular tour, it is worth a maximum of 12 points. See the Blackboard site for more information about the alternative local foods tour.

Exams: Types, Coverage, and Questions (200 points)

I will give a prelim (100 points) and a final exam (100 points). See the “course outline and schedule” above for the dates and times. The prelim and final will each consist of one general take-home essay question on a major course topic or theme. You will be expected to incorporate relevant ideas, concepts, theories, issues, and themes covered in the readings, lectures, and class discussions to date (N.B.: the final exam will be assumed to be cumulative). You will have from Friday to Monday to write the prelim and six days to write the final exam. For each exam I will expect you to incorporate what *you* understand to be relevant into a coherent essay of five to ten double-spaced typed pages using 12 point type. In previous semesters, essays that have earned high scores typically have both contained reference to many concepts and other items of information covered in the course and used in appropriate contexts with brief explanations of their meanings and pushed the 10 page limit. You can see a sample of previous exam questions (some with sample essays) on the course Blackboard web site.

Since I dislike reading soporific essays written by students who I surmise must have abhorred writing them, I will ask you to write your essays as informal dialogues between you and someone else (e.g., your roommate, a friend, an antagonist, a sibling, a parent). So, *please* mix some

fun and humor with the serious work of writing to persuade me that you have learned much (and, by implication, that I should give you a high grade).

In exams, as in class discussion, I do not expect you to agree with every position that you might perceive me to take on issues covered in this course or with the arguments found in every assigned reading. Moreover, I do not regard exam answers as “statements of faith” to which I will expect you to be true outside of the structured social inequality of an exam. Therefore, I will do my best to write questions that will enable expressions of opposing views and minimize the extent to which you might potentially feel a need to “perjure” yourself to get a good grade (although I surmise that most Cornell students are cynical enough to be able to enact such “perjury” without experiencing serious moral anxiety). However, I do **not** regard lack of agreement with particular ideas, concepts, theories, issues, and themes covered in the course as being an acceptable reason for not being familiar with and understanding such things intellectually.

In the context of the above discussion, I believe that your exam essays will be more effective when you (as appropriate for the particular question): (1) identify major course ideas, concepts, theories, issues, and themes appropriate to the question (perhaps not surprisingly, one question I will ask myself is whether you could have written your essay without reading the course materials or attended to what was discussed in class or covered in the course tour), (2) identify and explain the significant sociological aspects implied in the question (manifest “sociological imagination”), (3) use appropriate concepts and supporting “facts” in constructing your arguments, (4) synthesize or contrast material from different sources (including sources from outside the course), (5) show that you comprehend the differing positions on relevant issues, and (6) contribute your own creative insights and critiques reflecting your own personal experience. This last expectation in particular is expressed in the following quotation:

*Learning how to do something is not just copying what someone else does; it may start that way, but a teacher's estimate of his[/her] pupil's prowess will lie in the latter's ability to do things which he[/she] could precisely **not** simply have copied* (Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, Humanities Press, 1958, p. 58).

Examination Anxiety? I acknowledge that ambiguous assignments like the DSoc 340 exams can arouse anxiety. I think that two keys for avoiding this are keeping up with the readings and engaging in class discussion. Please keep in mind that my intent is that the exams be learning experiences in the sense of providing an opportunity for you to review and to apply what you have learned. To enact this intent, I will provide further orientation and practice opportunities. I will also provide consultation and support as needed during the exam-writing periods.

Cannot take an exam when scheduled? If you know ahead of time that you will be unable to take an exam at the scheduled time, please talk to me **before** the exam is given (perhaps we can negotiate a mutually agreeable alternative arrangement). Otherwise, if your reason for missing an exam is certified, serious illness in you or a member of your immediate family or death of a close family member, I will prepare and give a make-up exam.

Course Group Project

Purposes

My primary purpose for assigning this class project is for you to gain information and develop sociological insights about an interesting and practical topic pertinent to the food system (including agriculture). I intend that your project will serve as a vehicle through which you develop

your information acquisition skills, analytical skills, problem-solving skills, and collaborative work skills and, therefore, will enable you to more effectively bring sociological insights and understanding to other topics, both now and in the future.

General Description

The course project will be a joint effort with two or three of your classmates participating in a simulated “blue-ribbon panel” to assess some aspect of the future of the food system.² We will imagine that your panel is appointed by Cornell President David Skorton or Governor Eliot Spitzer. “Blue-ribbon panel” is a colloquial term typically used to describe a group that the President of the U.S., a governor, a mayor, a college president, or other official convenes to gather information about a topic of concern, to analyze that information, and to prepare a report to the group’s convener. The people appointed to such panels tend to be prominent people: well-known scientists with relevant expertises, political leaders, representatives of affected interest groups, and, sometimes, outstanding “citizens.” These panels usually receive technical and administrative support for their activities, including receiving testimony from both experts in the topic area and people with economic and other interests in it, touring to get first-hand information, and staff to search for applicable information and write the report. Although I am unable to provide you with the kind of administrative support that President Skorton or Governor Spitzer could, I am able to offer you a valuable introductory experience that will help to prepare you for when you do get “the call” to be a member of such a panel. I look forward to helping you make *your* project something of which we both can be proud. I will endeavor to help you to build a base of information through readings, guest speakers, and tours of farms, processors, and other elements of our food system.

The course project involves posing a problem(s) or question(s) that both the members of your group and I agree is appropriate, studying this problem or answering the question by gathering, evaluating, and synthesizing information, and then drawing conclusions and making recommendations based on this work. The project has four graded products:

- (1) *Project Concept Statement* (50 points)
- (2) *Project Draft* (30 points)
- (3) *Project Presentation* (20 points)
- (4) *Project Report* (100 points)

I will also ask you and the other members of your group to evaluate each other's participation in the project and I will use that as a basis for adjusting final grades on the project to reflect the effort invested.

***Project Concept Statement* (50 points)**

The project concept statement is a major step toward completing your project (please refer to the course Blackboard site for an outline of the concept statement and for the outline for the final project report). I expect that concept statement will (1) help you to focus your project research, (2) provide structure for negotiating the details of your project with your collaborators, (3) help you at an early stage to assess the feasibility of what you are proposing, and (4) give me the opportunity to suggest information sources and to comment on how you might make your work more productive and easier. As you are working through your project topic for your concept statement, I will welcome having discussions with you (but don’t expect me to tell you what to do). Although the concept statement is preliminary and is for purposes of planning and organizing your work, my goal

²I offer any graduate student the option of negotiating with me an individual project that will both accomplish my goals for the course and advance his or her program.

is that you will have between one-third and one-half of the work of the project completed when you hand in the statement.

Selecting your project focus. Your **first criterion** for selecting what you will investigate in your project should be what you and your collaborators find interesting about food systems. I recommend that you and your colleagues capitalize on your collective experiences and knowledge. Since covering every potentially relevant topic in a course project is simply infeasible, play to the members of your group's strengths and interests. If you are interested in a topic and know something about it, you will be more likely to find the work more rewarding and to have more intrinsic motivation to finish the task. This semester I am encouraging projects that examine the "civic character" of some "slice" of the food system in New York State, e.g., dairy farming, organic vegetable production, food processing, food retailing, etc. with specific attention to the social aspects of such topics as (but not limited to) ongoing changes in production, processing, distribution, or marketing; public policies; consumer issues; organic regulation; and environmental impacts of aspects like distribution systems or waste management. However, a project could focus on a particular county or region of the state; or it could focus mainly on particular sectors of an industry, e.g., processing or marketing of organic or local products.

A **second criterion** must be that you can give significant attention to the social aspects of your topic(s), that is, that you attend to the social roots and implications of the current or unfolding situation. In other words, what can a sociological perspective contribute to the topic(s). You may find sociological literature that is directly relevant to your topic(s), but you should also apply (transpose) sociological concepts from the readings, lectures, and other writings by sociologists. By the time you hand in your project concept statement, you should have located and assessed the available sociological material pertaining to your topic(s). You will not find most such materials searching the Internet with a search engine like Google™ (which may be very appropriate and useful for locating other kinds of information for your project). To find relevant sociological materials efficiently I highly recommend *Agricola*, *Sociological Abstracts*, and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*. The last one is especially useful once you find one or more citations of particular interest. To locate these databases, go to the "Cornell University Library Gateway," click on "Databases," and enter the name of one of these databases. Each database differs in procedure from the others, but all tend to have good instructions. Should you feel that you need help with any of these databases, I recommend asking a reference librarian at a library service desk.

Concept statement format. Each project group should collaborate in preparing a joint concept statement that consists of the sections outlined in the Group Project Concept Statement document on the course Blackboard site. That document also includes a suggested citation and reference format.

Project Report Draft (30 points)

Purpose. My purpose for asking for a draft report is to (1) provide a structure for moving your project along, (2) give me another opportunity to provide guidance, and (3) give you an opportunity to reassess the project division of labor that you established with the project concept statement.

What I expect. (1) The draft should be a 15 to 25 page document that demonstrates major progress toward your final project report, which should be a 20-40 page³ scholarly document written for an intelligent lay audience. Your draft should generally reflect what you proposed in your "project concept statement" unless you have discussed any major changes with me. Your emphasis in the report draft should be on the "project goals," "findings," and "conclusion and recommendations" sections of the final report format outlined in the Final Project Format document on the course Blackboard site. I expect some rough edges in your draft, but I should be able to imagine it readily becoming your final report. As I evaluate your draft report, I will look for the same things that I will look for in the final report (see the course Blackboard site for the list of specific criteria): sociological thinking, evidence of thorough and appropriate literature searches,⁴ creativity and ingenuity, disciplined use of "facts," examination of both sides of issues, appropriate credits to the work of others, and other things commonly expected in scholarly work. "Sociological thinking" includes selecting appropriate sociological concepts and theories and applying these to the information that you have gathered for your report. Such thinking also includes an appropriate focus on the social aspects of the topic.

(2) In your draft I also require a paragraph describing how you explicitly reassessed the division of labor that you agreed upon for your project concept statement. Sometimes certain aspects of a project turn out to take much more time than anticipated and others may take less. This is intentionally structured as an opportunity to talk about this with your collaborators and make needed adjustments. If some members of a project group feel that a collaborator is not contributing his or her fair share, this is a good time to make your views explicit.

Project Presentation (20 points)

Near the end of the semester (see the course outline and schedule above) I ask each project group to present the results of their project work to the rest of the class. My purposes for this are to (1) help you gain experience in working with others to prepare and present your work, (2) give me another opportunity to observe your progress on the project and to make suggestions, (3) give you the opportunity to learn from other groups additional information relevant to the issues we have studied this semester, and (4) provide a deadline for those who need one to move their project work forward. We will pretend that this is the rehearsal for a 25-30 minute meeting with your panel's fictitious "convener:" 15 minutes of presenting findings followed by 10 minutes for questions. Your presentation should both involve all members of your project group and be interesting, clear, and concise, as well as cover the main points you want the "convener" to learn (e.g., why the topic is important, what needs to be done, and anticipated benefits of adopting your recommendations). I can work with you on preparing your presentation and can help with presentation materials and equipment. Because this is only a "rehearsal" presentation, it will be informal and your classmates in other project groups and I can help you to anticipate questions that your "convener" or his or her

³This range of pages assumes standard 8-1/2" by 11" paper, double spacing (26 lines per page), 1 inch margins, and an ordinary 12 point typeface. This also assumes mostly written content. I encourage you to dress up and enliven your report with tables, figures, photographs, or other illustrations if you have the skills and access to the necessary software and equipment to do so. However, I strongly recommend that you talk to me immediately should you begin seriously contemplating a short report supplemented with many graphics to fill the page requirement.

⁴I would be disinclined to assign a high final project grade if I were to do a literature search on a topic covered in your final report for which you cited no sociological sources and I found some. The same applies if only one or two sources were cited in your report and I found many relevant sociological sources in the scholarly literature or if you cited only sources on one side of an issue.

staff might ask. Although the presentation has a serious purpose, I hope you can also have some fun in the process. My intent is that each of the presentation documents be posted on the Blackboard web site immediately after the presentation.

Final Project Report (100 points)

Your final project report should be a polished and further developed version of the project draft report described above in the project draft report section. See the course outline and schedule section for the due date.

Group Project Collaboration

This is a group project and each member of a project group is expected to do their fair share of the work. Given this, the starting point for the group project grade assigned to each collaborator will be the score assigned to the project as a whole (the concept statement, draft, presentation, and final report). Despite the ambiguities stemming from doing different things for the project, different work styles and different personalities, my experience indicates that this "works" for about 80% of project groups. However, I do recognize that slackers are a potential problem in group projects (as they are in real-life work and volunteer settings) and my values are such that I want to see the credit to go where it is due. Therefore, I will provide confidential evaluation forms (see the course Blackboard site for the "group project collaboration evaluation" on which each person in a project group will rate the amount and quality of their own and their colleagues' contributions throughout the project. I will use (as I have done in the past) these ratings to adjust individual grades up or down (sometimes considerably) as I deem appropriate based on the information that I have. How does this work? Take the hypothetical case of a four-person project group whose overall project scores totaled 180 out of the possible 200 points. Assume that three of the members agreed that one of the collaborators had not done his share and that they had both talked with this person and documented this in consultation with me. In such a case I might determine that an appropriate adjustment was 10 points to each of the other collaborators. The net project score would then be 190 points for each of the three collaborators and 150 points for the slacker. Most such adjustments have given 5-20 points to the other project group members. In the highly unlikely event of severe slacking (which has yet to happen in DSoc 340 course projects), I am prepared with other remedies.

If you feel that one or more members of your group are not pulling their weight, please consider that they may not realize this and start with a conversation with them. Calmly let them know how you see the situation (to give them a chance to respond and, if necessary, to rectify the situation is only fair). Do this as soon as you perceive a problem, rather than waiting until a deadline looms. If such discussion seems ineffective, please promptly come to me for assistance and for advice on documenting the problem so I will have a strong rationale for making suitable adjustments in the final project scores.