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### SW 594.01: Assessing the Food System through Action Research

Neva Hassanein

University of Montana - Missoula, [neva.hassanein@umontana.edu](mailto:neva.hassanein@umontana.edu)

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**EVST/SW 594:**  
**Assessing the Food System through Action Research**  
Fall Semester, 2003  
Liberal Arts Room 138, Thursdays 2:10-5:00

**Instructors:**

Neva Hassanein, 101A Rankin Hall  
Phone: 243-6271  
Email: neva@selway.umt.edu  
Office Hours: Tues. 2:30-4; Wed., 1-2:30

Maxine Jacobson, 116 Rankin Hall  
Phone: 243-6384  
Email: mj@selway.umt.edu  
Office Hours: Wed. and Thurs. 9-11

**Course Overview:**

This graduate workshop will give students a unique opportunity to engage in community-based action research to produce a community food assessment for Missoula County. A food assessment is a collaborative and participatory process that systematically examines a broad range of community food issues and assets. The purpose is to inform social actions that will make our community food system more secure and sustainable.

A steering committee from the Missoula area was assembled last spring and has been working throughout the summer to identify the specific research questions to be explored in the assessment. Three main areas of research came out of this process (please note that these questions will undergo additional refinement!):

- A. **Food System Indicators.** We will compile information from existing (i.e., secondary) data sources in order to put together a set of “indicators” or measures that tell us something about the state of Missoula County’s food system.
- B. **Food production and processing.** What is needed (including land) for viable (long-term and sustainable) food production and processing operations in and around Missoula? Include commercial, home use, and extra income livelihoods. What are the barriers to doing this (including transportation and distribution)?
- C. **Food consumption.** What concerns do Missoulians of various income levels (and neighborhoods) have about food (including quality, access, transportation to food outlets, cost, eating behaviors and choices)?

The steering committee will continue to play a key role in the food assessment by helping to refine the research questions, by identifying existing data and resources, and by determining how the assessment will be put into action. Based on the input of the steering committee, students will: (1) conduct team research projects on particular facets of the assessment, (2) produce a written report as part of the assessment, and (3) release the report to the community through a variety of means (e.g., media, local government officials, public forum). If we run into a time crunch, those who are interested and able may pursue Step 3 during spring semester, but our goal is to get to that step during the fall term. Students will periodically interact with the steering committee to involve them in the process.

**Course Objectives:**

1. To develop students’ knowledge of the food system and how its various elements (i.e., food production, processing, distribution, consumption, waste) interconnect at the community level.
2. To produce and disseminate a community food assessment report for Missoula county.

3. To learn the principles and practices of community-based action research (CBAR).
4. To provide students and local food system stakeholders with an experience in a CBAR project as co-participants and co-learners in the food assessment process; and thus demonstrate how university faculty and students can form meaningful partnerships with community members by conducting research on relevant, local issues.
5. To develop student skills in research design, collection of primary and secondary data, data analysis, generation of recommendations for change, and oral and written communication of research results.
6. To develop student understanding of how to use the media and organize public forums for disseminating assessment results.
7. To develop student skills in important facets of CBAR such as team-building, meeting facilitation, and group work.

### **Specific Concentration-Year Objectives for Social Work Majors Related to Course:**

Obj. 1: Prepare students to apply the principles of integrated practice to work with individuals, families, organizations, and communities.

Obj. 3: Develop students' capacities to conceptualize and implement collaborative partnerships with relevant community, state and federal organizations.

Obj. 5: Provide students opportunities to carry out supervised organizational or community-based research (e.g. community strengths/needs assessment, program evaluation, etc.), present findings, and receive feedback from faculty, colleagues, and community members.

Obj. 9: Promote students' capacities to engage diverse stakeholders in decision-making processes that respect difference and promote social and economic justice.

Obj. 10: Provide students with opportunities to apply research knowledge and derive intervention strategies that are based on understandings of urban and rural communities that enlist the cooperation of organizations and citizen groups in arriving at collaborative decisions.

### **Readings:**

Our primary text will be available during the first class for \$13:

Pothukuchi, Kami, Hugh Joseph, Hannah Burton, and Andy Fischer. 2002. *What's Cooking in Your Food System? A Guide to Community Food Assessment*. Venice, CA: Community Food Security Coalition.

All other readings are on traditional and electronic reserve in Mansfield Library. You might find it useful to go to the library and simply copy all of the reading on traditional reserve at the beginning of the term. Access electronic reserve at: <http://www.lib.umt.edu> **The password is: comfood**

Additional readings on research methods and on food and agricultural topics will be assigned as necessary.

### **Organization of the Course and Assignments:**

This workshop is organized into four phases:

**Phase I (Sept. 4 – Sept. 18): Introduction.** During this introductory phase of the workshop, we will read literature to provide students with a general overview of food system issues and with a basic understanding of community-based action research. A reading list is attached, and weekly assignments are listed on the course schedule below. You will be introduced to the steering committee members and begin to identify some local contact people who will be useful to you during the assessment.

**Phase II (Sept. 11- Oct. 2): Food System Indicators and Research Design.** As we continue to do some background reading, students will gather information from existing (i.e., secondary) data sources in order to put together a set of “indicators” or measures that describe the state of Missoula County and its food system. These indicators will help us to describe trends in the following relevant categories:

1. demographics;
2. environmental resources and impacts;
3. agricultural resource base;
4. food distribution network;
5. ag/food-related economic productivity;
6. food system wages and employment;
7. food consumption;
8. community food security and access;
9. ag/food-related education and advocacy; and
10. food-related health issues (e.g., diabetes, obesity).

We will rely on the work of others to guide us in this process (see, for example, the appendix listing indicators in the back of *What’s Cooking?*). We will divide the work among students (probably in teams of two).

On Oct. 2, students will present in oral and written formats the data they have collected to the Steering Committee. We will discuss the format of the presentation much more during class.

Also during this phase, Neva and Maxine will develop the research design that will guide us during Phase III of the course. We will seek your input on the design, and will present it to the Steering Committee on Oct. 2. In addition, we will learn about research ethics.

**Phase III (Oct. 9 – Nov. 6): Data Collection and Preliminary Analysis.** During this phase of the workshop, we will collect (mostly) original data to answer questions B and C, listed on page one of the syllabus. The class will be divided into two groups, each focusing on a different question, and those teams will likely be divided further into particular subsets of the research. Much more will be said about the specifics of this in class. The instructors will give you specific assignments and due dates.

**Phase IV (Nov. 13 – Dec. 11): Data Analysis, Report Preparation, and Evaluation.** During this final phase of the course, we will analyze the data collected during Phase III and prepare a report of findings. The instructors will give you specific assignments and due dates.

At a minimum, we will present the findings to the Steering Committee, and hopefully to the community at large. Some students and faculty may choose to continue to refine the report, work with the steering committee on recommendations, and release it to the larger community during the spring semester, if necessary.

Reflection paper. Also during this final phase, you will write a paper reflecting on all of the following: (1) the research we have done and the process used; (2) the quality of your own work (What do you think you did well? What might you have improved upon?); and (3) the “take home lessons” that you want to carry forward. The reflection paper is due on Friday, Dec. 12 at 5 pm in Neva or Maxine’s mailbox in Rankin Hall.

**Our List Serve: Communicating Between Classes:**

Our class project demands on-going dialogue to accommodate action/reflection shifts; therefore, we will need to be in communication with one another in between class periods. For this reason we set up a list serve for the class. The list serve will provide us with a communication network that will allow all of us to read each other’s messages. The directions for subscribing to the list serve are below. Please subscribe after our first class and email one of us should you experience any difficulties getting yourself signed onto the list serve. There are two ways to get signed onto the list serve:

1. Type in the following email address: [evstsw594-request@majordomo.umt.edu](mailto:evstsw594-request@majordomo.umt.edu) In the body of your message type the word subscribe (make sure you have your signature turned off or it won’t work)
2. Type in the following email address: [majordomo@majordomo.umt.edu](mailto:majordomo@majordomo.umt.edu) In the body of your message type the following: subscribe evstsw594

To post messages to the list serve, address them to: [evstsw594@majordomo.umt.edu](mailto:evstsw594@majordomo.umt.edu)

**Human Subjects Protection and Institutional Review Board:**

The UM requires all students who participate in a research project to complete an on-line course on protection of human subjects and all professors to submit their course research projects to the University’s Institutional Review Board. The Board is responsible for ensuring that students and faculty adhere to ethical research practices to ensure the protection of human subjects. Below are the directions for how to access the on-line course and complete your certification, which you must do by Sept. 25.

**Two ways to get into IRB website to complete certification:**

A. Short cut - <http://www.umt.edu/research/irb.htm>

B. Long cut -

1. Get to University of Montana homepage
2. Click on “academics and research”
3. Click on “research”
4. Click on “Institutional Review Board” (subheading of Research and Development, Office of the Vice President
5. Click on “Human Participation in Research” after jotting down the instructions.
6. Follow instructions – pull down Course map on Announcement page.
7. Click on Course Documents
8. Complete Section One, Section Two and Section Six
9. Copy off completion certificates for each section.
10. Print off copy of certificate(s) and submit to instructors no later than Sept. 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Resources:**

The major expenses of the workshop will be paid for from funds provided by the UM School of Pharmacy and Allied Health Sciences, the Environmental Studies Program, and the Office of Civic Engagement. We are grateful for their support. These funds will cover costs directly associated with the research, including report publication, copying, long-distance phone calls, and supplies. Tell the instructors what you need and we will secure those items for you, if appropriate.

**Grading and Evaluation:**

We expect all written work to be completed on time and to be well written and organized. We will evaluate your contribution to the course using the following guidelines:

- Course participation (regular attendance, preparation for and contribution to discussion) = 25%
- Preparation of indicators assigned. We will be interested in whether your work is comprehensive and whether your results are clearly and logically presented in written and oral formats. = 25%
- Contribution to the original research questions pursued during the semester (including the quality of all assigned tasks, accountability to teammates, prepared progress reports) = 40%
- Personal reflection and evaluation paper. = 10%

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

*Subject to change, if necessary*

### **Thurs., Sept. 4 – Introduction to the course and each other**

- Introduction of participants
- Circulate contact list. Review list serve instructions.
- Why do a community food assessment?
- Background on the process in Missoula
- Review of syllabus and dissemination of CFA guidebook
- Meet the Steering Committee (3:30-5:00)

### **Thurs., Sept. 11 – Understanding the food system and action research. Assignment of indicators and presentation guidelines to teams.**

Assigned readings:

- *What's Cooking?* Chapters 1 through 3
- Park (1997)
- Stringer (1996)
- Gottlieb and Fisher (1996)
- Kloppenburg and Lezberg (1996)
- Feenstra (1997)

### **Thurs., Sept. 18 – More on the food system**

Assigned readings:

- *What's Cooking?* Chapter 5 – carefully. Skim chapter 4.
- Lyson, Geisler and Schlough (1999)
- Pothukuchi and Kaufman (1999)

### **Thurs., Sept. 25 – More on the food system. Ethical considerations and community-based research. Draft research design presented to class by instructors for student input.**

- Each student must complete the on-line course on protection of human subjects and bring certificate of completion to class.
- Assigned reading:
  - Berg (2001)
  - Gardner and Halwell (2000)
  - Morgen (2002)
  - Poppendieck (2000)
- Supplemental:
  - Allen (1999)
  - Riches (1999)

### **Thurs., Oct. 2 – Food system indicators DUE. Finalization of research design.**

Presentation of indicators and proposed research plans to the Steering Committee.

### **Thurs., Oct. 9 – On foodshed analysis, guest lecture.**

Guest lecturer: Dr. Jack Kloppenburg, Professor of Rural Sociology, University of Wisconsin – Madison.

In-class reports on data collection process and opportunity for problem solving.

**STRONGLY RECOMMENDED:** Public lecture by Kloppenburg, “Coming in to the foodshed.” 7 pm, North Underground Lecture Hall.

**Thurs., Oct. 16 – Data collection.**

**Thurs., Oct. 23 – Data collection.**

**Thurs., Oct. 30– Data collection and preliminary analysis**

- Read Chapter 6 in *What's Cooking?*

**Thurs., Nov. 6 – Data analysis**

**Thurs., Nov. 13 – Data analysis**

**Thurs., Nov. 20 – Data analysis DUE. Meeting with steering committee to present findings and preliminary analysis.**

**Thurs., Nov. 27 – Thanksgiving Holiday**

**Thurs., Dec. 4 – Report writing.**

**Thurs., Dec. 11—Next steps, evaluation, and wrap up.**

**Fri. Dec. 12 – Final reflection paper due.**



## Course Reading List

- Allen, Patricia. (1999). Reweaving the food security safety net: Mediating entitlement and entrepreneurship. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 16:117-129.
- Berg, Bruce L. 2001. Ethical Issues. Pp. 39-65 in *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Fourth edition. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Feenstra, Gail W. 1997. Local food systems and sustainable communities. *American Journal of Alternative Agriculture* 12(1):28-36.
- Gardner, G. & Halweil, B. (2000). Escaping hunger, escaping excess. *World Watch*, 13(4): 24-35.
- Gottlieb, Robert and Andrew Fisher. (1996). Community food security and environmental justice: Searching for a common discourse. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 13(3):23-31.
- Green, L., Daniel, M., & Novick L. (2001). Partnerships and coalitions for community based research. *Public Health Reports (2001 Supplement)*, 116:20-31.
- Hartford Food System. Community Food Survey: Executive Summary. Downloaded from Hartford Food System's website.
- Kloppenborg, Jack and Sharon Lezberg. (1996). Getting it straight before we eat ourselves to death: From food system to foodshed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Society and Natural Resources*, 9:93-96.
- Lyson, T.A., C.C. Geisler, and C. Schlough. (1999). Preserving community agriculture in a global economy. In R. K. Olson & T. Lyson (Eds.) *Under the Blade: The Conversion of Agricultural Landscapes*, (181-216). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Morgen, S. (2002). The politics of welfare and of poverty research. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 75(4):745-757.
- Park, Peter. (1997). Participatory research, democracy, and community. *Practicing Anthropology*, 19(3):8-13.
- Poppendieck, J. (2000). Want amid plenty: From hunger to inequality. In F. Magdoff, J.B. Foster, & F. Buttel (Eds.), *Hungry for profit: The agribusiness threat to farmers, food, and the environment*. NY, New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Pothukuchi, Kameshwari and Jerome L. Kaufman. (1999). Placing the food system on the urban agenda: The role of municipal institutions in food systems planning. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 16:213-224.
- Riches, G. (1999). Advancing the human right to food in Canada: Social policy and the politics of hunger, welfare, and food security. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 16:203-211.
- Stringer, E. T. (1996). Principles of community-based participatory research. In E. T. Stringer, *Action research: A handbook for practitioners* (15-38). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.