

URP 536 – Transformative Food Systems Seminar – Fall 2023 to Winter 2024

NOTE: Other masters students also enroll in this class, through: EAS 556 and NUTR 563

Course description

Food systems around the globe are in a state of crisis. Bold leaders are needed who are committed to reversing the environmental degradation, health pandemics, and economic inequities that characterize so many of today's food systems. Many courses at the University of Michigan examine the root causes of these problems and the "what" – the content of changes needed to achieve more sustainable, health-promoting and equitable food systems. This course focuses more on the "how" – practical actions that can transform food systems – by learning from hopeful solutions taking root across Michigan, the U.S. and other countries.

Course objectives

The goal of this course is to prepare reflective, visionary and strategic food systems scientists, community leaders, entrepreneurs and professionals who use systems thinking and an ethics of sustainability and justice as they strive to transform food systems. A major emphasis is placed on building students' "equity competency" – the knowledge, skills and values needed to recognize and address historical and persistent structural inequities that pervade today's food systems and that underlie food systems crises. We will draw on multiple knowledges; experiential, interdisciplinary, and peer learning; co-learning with the instructors; field trips; speakers; critical reflection and discussion; and project-based learning. By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Propose diverse strategies for overcoming inequities, health challenges and environmental crises facing food systems across various dimensions, scales, and geographies,
- Identify diverse career pathways for catalyzing food systems change,
- Articulate how personal identities, values, implicit biases, and leadership styles shape efforts to transform food systems, and
- Demonstrate interpersonal, communication and leadership skills needed for collective action.

Eligible Students: The TFS Seminar is required for the 6 incoming 2023 TFS Fellows. Other Master's students in all fields are eligible to participate via instructor permission (via a short application) and must commit to a full year - Fall and Winter semesters – and also to the field trip dates (one full day to Detroit in the Fall and a 3-day retreat at the end of the Winter semester). A call for applications will be distributed in early May, 2023 and decisions about admission to the class will be made by early June, 2023. Only 15 students total can be accommodated. Priority is given to students who aim to make food systems a core part of their future careers (with a focus on equitable, sustainable and/or health-promoting) and those who have lived experience and/or who have studied or worked in food systems.

(*Likely) Instructors: Fall 2022: Lesli Hoey (URP) and *Ivette Perfecto (SEAS)
Winter 2023: Lesli Hoey (URP) and *Jennifer Blesh (SEAS)

Grading and credits: Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory, 1.5 credits Fall, 1.5 credits Winter

Meeting time: We meet most (but not all) Fridays 2:30 to 4p.m.

Class location:

- September and October, 2022: Matthaei Botanical Gardens; 1800 N Dixboro Rd, Ann Arbor; Campus Farm Straw Bale House. *Transportation will be available, if needed.*
- November to April: Argus Farm Stop Packard Cafe, 1200 Packard St, basement meeting room