**URP 527 and URP 427 - Foundations of Sustainable Food Systems**

Fall 2025

Tuesday and Thursday, 1:00PM – 2:30PM, Dana Building 2024 (Central Campus)
Professors: Lesli Hoey (URP), Andy Jones (SPH), Jennifer Blesh (SEAS)

NOTE: Other masters and upper-level undergraduates also enroll in this class, through:

 ENVIRON 462, EAS 528, and NUTR 555

Demand is growing for systems-thinking scholars and professionals who are equipped to address the well-documented social, ecological, and health-related costs caused by the dominant industrial food system. Urban planners are increasingly playing an important role in (re)building more just, green, and democratic food systems, but they also routinely overlook food systems. Unknowingly, transportation plans, housing programs, economic development initiatives, and zoning and land use decisions unintentionally exacerbate issues related to diet-related disease, equitable food access, food security, and the intertwined energy, water, and climate crises that are tied to food systems production, distribution, and waste. Food system sustainability requires urgent action along multiple dimensions: reconnecting agriculture with ecological systems, reshaping food production systems to be more nutrition-sensitive, and ensuring that policies and institutions that impact the food system safeguard social equity and the environment. This course will offer a unique opportunity for students to gain interdisciplinary knowledge of food systems and to integrate theory and practice through experiential learning and dialogue-based inquiry both on campus and in the community. Benefitting from collaborative instruction that draws on the expertise of professors from three different departments, students will incorporate multiple perspectives from local to global levels, examine how those perspectives are underpinned by different epistemologies and value systems, and practice systems thinking.

**Course objectives**

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. describe key concepts across disciplines and perspectives related to sustainable food systems;
2. apply systems thinking tools to the analysis of food systems issues including those related to agroecology, public health, and food policy and urban planning;
3. evaluate assumptions and values about food systems that underpin one’s own thinking and that of others;
4. apply and synthesize scientific evidence in support of arguments that address food systems research questions and professional problem-solving;
5. analyze and critically evaluate food systems research results and policies for evidence-based assessments and ethical decision-making;
6. communicate clearly and effectively about food systems through writing and oral presentations in a professional setting of diverse peers; and
7. engage in respectful dialogue, collaborative teamwork, and problem-solving with those of differing viewpoints and backgrounds.

**Suggested prior coursework**

Because this course is open to students from different academic disciplines and professional backgrounds, and because it is available to both upper-level undergraduate and graduate students, we expect students to bring with them a diversity of skills, knowledge and practical experiences that will broadly benefit the entire class. For these same reasons, however, it is unrealistic to expect that every student should have completed a similar curriculum prior to enrolling in this course. We suggest, though, that students will benefit from having completed one or more of the following courses prior to joining this class: an introductory course in biology, environmental science, ecology, urban planning, food policy, epidemiology, and/or human nutrition.