THE OBJECTIVES of this seminar are: (1) to provide participants a thorough grounding in some of the main debates in Critical Agrarian Studies and a deepened appreciation for the connections between agriculture, trade, environment, climate, food, energy, water, health, technology, property, conflicts, governance, livelihoods, and rights; and (2) to develop and/or advance research projects with a focus on rural or rural-urban aspects of any of these or related issues.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EXPLANATIONS FOR THE REQUIREMENTS:

(1) **Active and informed participation** in class discussions of assigned readings and other participants’ research projects. What you learn in this course (and your grade) will depend significantly on how deeply you engage with the material and with the other people in the course. If you are extremely shy or inhibited (as many of us are or once were), use this course as an opportunity to challenge yourself. Anthropologists need to be able to interact with people as part of their fieldwork and in academic and other professional settings. If you are not shy, it is very important that you contribute to creating a supportive environment for those who might be.

(2) A **statement (one page) about a planned research project** for the course, to be submitted via email no later than (and preferably before) **March 10**. Include a preliminary list of sources. The best research and writing have long gestation periods. You probably can’t produce a really good paper at the last minute. It is important that you begin thinking about a term paper topic early in the semester, that you discuss it with the instructor and with your classmates, and that you begin the research and writing well before the end-of-semester crunch.

(3) An **oral presentation** of approximately 30 minutes that outlines the approach and/or the main findings of the research for the course paper (presenters may assign a rough draft of their paper or other material in advance of the meeting). This will occur toward the end of the semester and is an opportunity to share with the rest of the group what you have been doing and to get feedback and suggestions. I understand that presentations will be of works-in-progress, not polished texts. This means that the findings may still be tentative and that some aspects of the planned paper may not be fully fleshed out. That is expected and perfectly okay.

And (4) a written **course paper** due at the end of the semester (by **May 19**). Writing and publishing excellent, original papers is the key to advancement in academia. Many (not all) term papers in Graduate Center courses are publishable, even if the authors don’t always try to publish them. I always recommend that doctoral students publish something (and preferably several things) before they obtain the PhD. How else in this lousy job market can they obtain a full-time position or a post-doc?
A NOTE ABOUT WRITING:

As much as possible, term papers should be of professional quality in every sense. They should analyze a significant problem, be evidence-based and well organized, carefully proofread, and—hopefully—of publishable quality and exciting to read. I prefer lucid prose to academic “thick writing,” and data-based arguments to unsupported assertions (this can be helpful in grant proposals too). Length is less important than content and clarity (most journals have word limits of around 8,000). Any system of citation (APA, Chicago, etc.) is fine, as long as it is used consistently. You must use citation software, such as Zotero, to assure that consistency (and to facilitate the rest of your scholarly and mentoring work). I welcome papers that express views or that use approaches different than my own. Late papers will be accepted only under unusual circumstances. Papers must be submitted as Word (not pdf or Google docs) email attachments (name your file with your last or family name and then your given name and a brief title). This will facilitate commenting and editing.

Doctoral students often strive to write overly complicated “academic” prose and some are very good at it. This is lamentable, since academic prose is frequently terrible and since research proposals written that way are rarely successful. I strongly encourage you to consult an excellent, very short guide to writing well, “Cutting Out Lard” (“lard” refers to all those excess, “clutter” or “fat” words that don’t do any communicative “work,” that ought to be trimmed, and that academics, students and novice writers insert in their prose, thinking that this makes it sound more sophisticated or that it’s what professors want). Use simple, straightforward, clear prose and you’ll do better in this course and in your professional life.

https://people.umass.edu/curtis/academics/editingtoolbox/cuttinglard.html

For those who wish to have a publishable manuscript ready soon and/or who wish to make a more serious commitment to writing clear and effective prose, these optional books are highly recommended (older editions are fine and less expensive):


COURSE BOOKS

Assigned articles will be available either through hyperlinks in this syllabus or on the Blackboard site. We will read the following books, as well as articles and other documents listed in the schedule below:


COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Week 1


**Recommended:**


Week 2

**Tues. Feb. 4**

**Agrarian classes and sociopolitical outcomes**

Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, read pp. xi-xix, 413-508 AND AT LEAST ONE CHAPTER EACH FROM PART ONE AND PART TWO.

**Recommended:**


The differentiation debate and its consequences


Recommended:


Week 4  
Tues. Feb. 18  
Agrarian reforms and counter-reforms


**Recommended:**


**Week 5**  
**Tues. Feb. 25**  
A pause for synthesis and catching up. Student-directed activity, to be discussed.

**Week 6**  
**Tues. March 3**  
**Intensification of dispossession: land and water**


Rede Social, GRAIN, Inter Pares, and Solidarity Sweden-Latin America. 2015. “Foreign pension funds and land grabbing in Brazil.” Barcelona: GRAIN.

Week 7  
Tues. March 10  
ONE-PAGE PAPER PROPOSAL DUE  
Food regimes and industrial agriculture versus agroecology


Week 7  
Tues. March 17  
The new authoritarianism: rural roots and impacts


Week 8  
Tues. March 24  
Soy, seeds and flex crops: a case study in Argentina

Lapegna, *Soybeans and Power*, (entire book)

**Recommended:**


Soy production in South America by volume, 2013
Week 9  
Tues. March 31  
Food, Agriculture and the Climate Crisis


Project Drawdown. 2019. “Summary of Solutions by Overall Rank.”

Project Drawdown. 2019. Read at least five of the following food and agriculture sector solutions:

- Reduced Food Waste
- Plant-Rich Diet
- Silvopasture
- Regenerative Agriculture
- Tropical Staple Trees
- Conservation Agriculture
- Tree Intercropping
- Managed Grazing
- Clean Cookstoves
- Farmland Restoration
- Improved Rice Cultivation
- Multistrata Agroforestry
- System of Rice Intensification
- Composting
- Nutrient Management
- Farmland Irrigation
- Biochar

NO CLASS Tues. Apr. 7 (classes follow Wednesday schedule)

CUNY RECESS April 8-16

Week 10  
Tues. Apr. 21  
Capitalism through a commodity lens: Cotton

Beckert, Empire of Cotton (entire book)

Earth Day & Global Climate Strike April 22-24
Week 11  
Tues. Apr. 28

Presentations by seminar participants.

Week 12  
Tues. May 5

Presentations by seminar participants.

Week 13  
Tues. May 12

Presentations by seminar participants.

**COURSE PAPER DUE MAY 19 (submit via email)**