URBAN FARMING AND THE ENVIRONMENT
Course Syllabus - Spring 2008

Course Information
Course Number: 99-232 (9 units)
Department: Environmental Education Program/Office of Indira Nair
Homepage: http://www.cmu.edu/blackboard
Time: Wednesdays, 6:30-8:20 pm
Location: Doherty Hall 2122

Instructors
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Course Description
Farming has occurred in areas other than the rural countryside for centuries. However, in recent years, urban farming, market-based food production in the city, has gained currency both as an individual business strategy and a collective entrepreneurial pursuit that may address a wide range of socio-economic and environmental issues from food insecurity to climate change. This interdisciplinary course uses the concept and practice of urban farming as a platform for deeper inquiry into our evolving food systems and how its challenges may be negotiated through new forms and new sites of food production and consumption.

Course readings spanning policy, food politics, urban/cultural geography and organizational theory will allow students to understand the following multi-dimensional contexts of urban farming:

- The political-economic context by way of the global food system and local food movements;
- The historical and cultural context through the lens of contemporary land-use planning;
- The Pittsburgh urban context through the experiences of local urban farms and farmers.

Through written assignments, fieldtrips and participation in Carnegie Mellon’s Spring Public Lecture Series “Local Economy and Urban Farming” running concurrently with the course, students will be prepared to rigorously analyze the past, present and future of urban farming in Pittsburgh through a final case study research project.
Course Objectives
This course is not intended to provide technical training in farming or organizational know-how for starting an urban farm business. The principal focus of this course is to meet the following academic objectives:

- To develop critical thinking skills through readings, assignments and class discussions that link broader understandings of food and agriculture in society to urban farming
- To apply a wide range of theoretical constructs in enabling understanding of urban farming as a concept and practice
- To develop skills in researching and writing about the food system

Course Structure
The course is divided into the following four thematic sections:

1) Global Political Economic Context of Food Systems
   - The Global Marshall Plan and justification for “local living economies” via food-based initiatives
   - Broader global trends in our evolving food systems

2) Geographies of Food Production and Consumption
   - Historical and cultural perspectives into the evolving landscapes of agriculture (rural and urban)
   - Cities and the global food crisis
   - Cities and local food initiatives

3) Urban Farming and New Sites of Food Production and Consumption
   - Spiral Dynamics and organizational concepts applicable to urban farming and local food systems
   - Case studies in urban farming: Cuba, U.S.

4) Visions and Experiences of Urban Farming
   - Design and planning of food systems: urban farming in land-use planning, building design and permaculture
   - The concept of “local living economies” and its potential for urban farming enterprises

Required Texts
In addition to readings provided online or on reserve at the Hunt Library, students will be required to purchase the following texts. These texts can be purchased through the Carnegie Mellon Bookstore or online.


*Please see the attached course calendar for the complete list of readings for each week.*

**Course Requirements**

**Attendance and Class Participation**

Attendance to class sessions, field trips and the Carnegie Mellon Spring Public Lecture Series and Workshop is mandatory for all students. Class sessions will follow an informal roundtable discussion format to facilitate lively but grounded academic discussion based on insights gained from class readings and the public lecture series. In order for all to benefit collectively from this course, it is imperative that students come to class prepared to contribute to each week’s discussions.

**Quarterly Written Assignments**

Students will be assigned a small writing or research project in the middle of each of the four course sections. Course instructors will distribute additional guidelines regarding format, content and expected length of assignments on the dates indicated on the course calendar. All of these assignments will be due at the end of each course section and must be submitted in a typed, hard copy format on the deadlines provided.

**Diaries**

Students will be required to complete a 500-1000 word written response for the class following each public lecture. These diaries must link course material with the content presented at each individual lecture and must be uploaded to course Blackboard site by noon on the deadlines provided. Course instructors will provide additional guidelines for all diaries during class on January 30.

**Final Project**

Students will be required to develop a descriptive case study on a local urban farm in the city of Pittsburgh and/or its surrounding boroughs. In teams, students will produce a research paper that is grounded in course readings, outside literature and field research of an urban farm assigned by the instructors. Please refer to the final project description in this document for details. Course instructors will provide further guidance regarding format, content and expected length during class on March 26.

**Evaluation and Grading**

Grades are determined by the quality of work performed on all interim and final projects and by the degree of substance offered in class. The following breakdown will be applied to final grades:

- Participation (class, lectures, field trips): 10%
- Diaries: 15% (3 diaries at 5% each)
- Quarterly Written Assignments: 30% (3 assignments at 10% each)
• Final Paper and Presentation: 45%

Additional Readings
Global Political Economic Context of Food Systems


• [www.foodandwaterwatch.org](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org)

• [www.farmpolicyfacts.org](http://www.farmpolicyfacts.org)

Geographies of Food Production and Consumption


• [www.locavores.com](http://www.locavores.com)

Urban Farming and New Sites of Food Production and Consumption


• [www.ruaf.org](http://www.ruaf.org)

Visions and Experiences of Urban Farming


• [www.cityfarming.org](http://www.cityfarming.org)
Final Project: Descriptive Case Study

Five student teams will be assigned an establishment previously defined as an “urban farm.” On their respective farms, teams will be required to conduct interviews, observe operations and participate in on-site activities. Data should be generated via field notes and one or more audiovisual recording methods (photographs, audio recordings and/or video). Using the data you have generated, look for patterns and themes around which you can organize a cohesive narrative description and analysis of the organization of the urban farm.

By “organization” we mean the following:

1) Social organization
   a. Description: Who are the actors, on and off the farm that allow this urban farm to function? Think about all processes involved from production to sale.

   b. Analysis: Apply principles of Spiral Dynamics and Living Systems Theory to discern why and how the individual activities that constitute the practice of “farming” occur. Approach the farm as a lens through which you view the negotiations required to achieve these activities.

2) Physical organization
   a. Description: What are the spatial characteristics of the farm and how does it relate to its surroundings?

   b. Analysis: Draw upon your understandings of the micro (i.e. permaculture) and macro (i.e. urban farm as land use strategy) aspects of food system design to analyze your assigned urban farm’s physical organization.

Urban Farms (tentative):

1. Garden Dreams Urban Farm, Wilkinsburg
2. Mung Dynasty, Southside neighborhood, Pittsburgh
3. Braddock Farm, Braddock
4. Healcrest Urban Community Farm, Garfield neighborhood, Pittsburgh
5. Mildred’s Daughters Urban Farm, Stanton Heights neighborhood, Pittsburgh

Additional guidelines and readings will be provided during the March 26th class.