

Food, Gender, and Environmental Justice in Mexico

Undergraduate and Master's students

**Class Schedule:**

This course will take place in person, over 3 weeks, in Mexico

DATE: 1-21 May, 2024

Instructor Information:

Name: Marie-Josée Massicotte

Email: massicot@UOTTAWA.CA – Please use as subject: Mexico course

Office Hours: Wednesday 3-5 pm, preferably by appointment

Photo:

Marcha de las mujeres, 8 de marzo 2023, CDMX

Communication Preferences: pronoun: she/her/ella/elle

Call Me: Marie-Josée, or professor.

Before emailing a question, please *fully* read this syllabus and explore the associated resources. The answers to many questions can be found in this document and students may be referred to the syllabus if the answer is already available. Please allow at least **two (2) business days** for responses to inquiries before pursuing another route of communication.

Official Course Description

Intensive field research undertaken under close supervision during the summer term, including a preparatory training. Students will complete a research paper about the field survey.

Reserved for students in the Joint Honours or Honours programs of the Faculty of Social Sciences, including Master students. Enrollment is limited and requires the approval of the Faculty of Social Sciences according to criteria established by the Faculty of Social Sciences. *Spanish speaking is an asset.*

Indigenous Affirmation

ANISHINÀBE

Ni manàdjiyànàinig Màmìwininì Anishinàbeg, ogog kà nàgadawàbandadjig iyo akì eko weshkad. Ako nongom ega wìkàd kì mìgiwewàdj.

Ni manàdjiyànàinig kakina Anishinàbeg ondaje kaye ogog kakina eniyagizidjig enigokamigàg Kanadàng eji ondàpinangig endàwàdjìn Odàwàng.

Ninisidawinawànàinig kenawendamòdjig kije kikenindamàwin; weshkinìgidjig kaye kejeyàdizidjig.

Nigijeweninmànàinig ogog kà nìgàni sòngideyedjig; weshkad, nongom; kaye àyànikàdj.

[Listen to the audio file](#)

ENGLISH

We pay respect to the Algonquin people, who are the traditional guardians of this land. We acknowledge their longstanding relationship with this territory, which remains unceded. We pay respect to all Indigenous people in this region, from all nations across Canada, who call Ottawa home.

We acknowledge the traditional knowledge keepers, both young and old. And we honour their courageous leaders: past, present, and future.

Three preparatory sessions will be held on Saturday during the Winter 2024 semester.

1st session: 20 January, 14:00-17:00

Ice breaker, Q&As, discussion on expectations, mutual responsibilities, objectives, daily activities, and logistics in Mexico (2 ½ - 3 hours).

2nd session: 10 February 10:30-1:30

Introduction to Mexican politics, economy and culture. Discussion based on required readings.

Lunch, Mexican restaurant nearby.

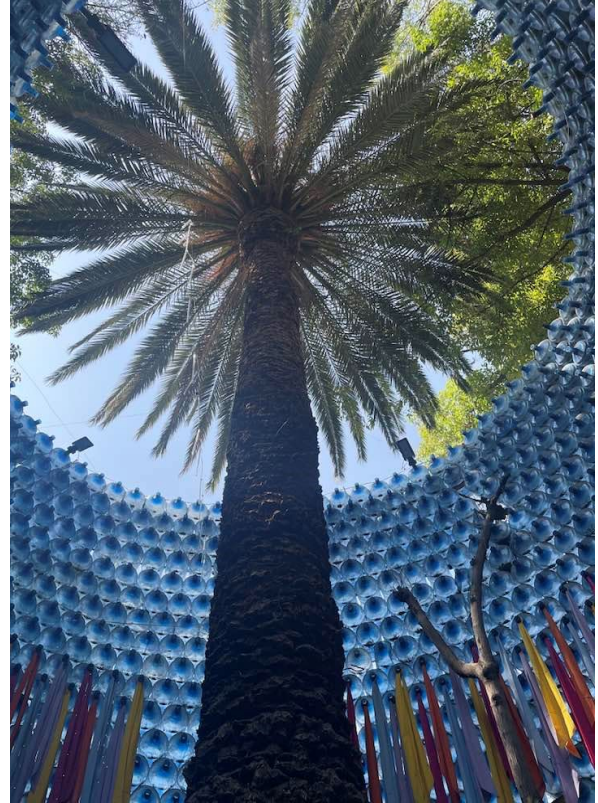
3rd session: 9 March, 14:00-17:00

Preliminary discussion of students' interest for their research project around the main research questions (see below). Brief introduction to methodologies and ethics related to "doing field research abroad" and avoiding white saviorism.

Photo: **Huerto Roma Verde**, CDMX 2023

Additional Course Description

Please note: this is a preliminary version but it gives you a very good idea of what we will be doing. This three-week field research course in Mexico is an introduction to engaged research methodology, collective knowledge production and mutual learning. It will focus on food politics, gender issues and environmental justice, in both rural and urban areas. We will have the opportunity to visit various civil society organizations, meaningful sites and communities who are playing a leadership role in their milieu. In Mexico City, we will visit the “Central de abastos”, the mega-food market for food provisioning of one of the largest cities in the world, as well as small scale, agroecological food producers, a farmers’ market, and a community garden.



We will also meet with activist-researchers to learn about their research and some community initiatives. In so doing, students will be introduced to the extremely complex food networks in Mexico City. They will learn about the different actors and responses that they are promoting to improve the agrifood systems, environmental conditions, and people’s quality of life in this mega-city.

We will then travel to Oaxaca where we will pursue our learning activities with various guest speakers and visits, but this time in rural areas, including Indigenous (mining) communities, fair trade coffee and artisanal mezcal producers. Gender, food and environmental justice perspectives will help us to deepen our understanding of the working conditions, the cultural riches, and the challenges of members of the communities we will have the privilege to exchange with. During visits, students will be invited to familiarize themselves with (non)participant observation, note-taking, oral history, and interview technics. Class discussions and debriefing will help to prepare for community visits, and to think critically about the different topics for final research projects. In small groups, students will have the opportunity to lead an interview with one of the partners’ organizations. Translation will be provided as needed.



Course Learning Outcomes

General Course Learning Outcomes

One of the major objectives of this 6 credit course will be to get acquainted with the power dynamics, challenges, and citizens' organizing strategies as they relate to food (in)security, food production, gender inequalities, and environmental crises. The main questions we will seek to address are:

- How can we explain the unequal access to quality food, especially among women and peasants who are themselves producing food?
- What are some of the programs and policies that the Mexican government has implemented to address existing problems and inequities related to food, gender, and the environment, with what kind of results (e.g. promotion of agroecology, Sembrando Vida...)?
- What are the impacts of the dominant agrifood system on the environment, rural and urban ecosystems, health and communities (Otero, Orsini)?
- What does a food justice, environmental justice, or gender justice perspective allow us to see and analyze that other perspectives would not be able to do?

The course is an introduction to these extremely challenging questions and research methods, which may motivate students to deepen their understanding on the subjects, and potentially engage in further research/activities on related subjects. By the end of the course, students will be able to discuss some of the key challenges within today's dominant food system and some of the strategies that Mexican organizations and individuals have developed to respond to social and environmental injustices. They will also have a better understanding of some of the benefits and limits of doing qualitative, engaged research, and what is required from researchers who wish to pursue such research. Moreover, it is important to note that this is an

interdisciplinary course that will draw on political, gender, food, and environmental studies, as well as sociology, anthropology, and geography. This will offer students a much richer understanding of the complexity of the issues under study.

Specific Course Learning Outcomes

- Get acquainted with qualitative research methods, (non)participant observation, interviews, oral history, and engaged research, as well as research ethics.
- Learn about and develop a critical perspective on the historical, political, economic, and social context in which existing agrifood systems have developed in urban and rural Mexico.
- Learn about the gender and environmental implications of existing agri-food practices and policies.
- Learn about and be able to recognize food justice, gender justice and environmental justice perspectives, and how these perspectives contribute to our understanding of contemporary crises.
- Get a better sense and critical perspective about what civil society and community organizations are doing and what pushed them to organize in the first place. What kinds of impacts do they have?
- Develop your skills for taking notes, elaborating good questions, conducting an interview, intercultural exchanges, doing an oral presentation and producing a final research project.



uOttawa students



Classroom, SURCO

Teaching Methods

Seeing with your own eyes, listening with your ears, sharing, eating with others, and walking on the land. These are among the best ways to learn and deepen our understanding of various phenomenon. After COVID-19 and online learning, this field research course offers a great opportunity to get out of the classroom and meet with experts, community leaders and researchers promoting food, gender, and environmental justice. It relies heavily on **interactive**,

experiential, and participatory learning, whether in the pre-departure preparatory sessions, or in the classroom and field visits learning and exchanges while in Mexico. I will be with the group for all activities, as well as Mexico-based partners from SURCO A.C. All the above will only be possible if we build together a respectful environment for every participant, including our guests.

Another demonstrated tool to deepen your knowledge is through reading of various authors and sources. We will have a list of required readings, a small number, but it is expected that everyone comes to class with their personal notes, ready to discuss the content: main argument, perspective, key concepts, limits, etc. Between these readings, our class discussion, and our visits, we will be able to connect theory with practice, directly engaging with community members and researchers. This is experiential learning at its best. This might be the only opportunity during your undergraduate studies that you will have the capacity to use original data 'from the field' to produce your final research project.

Required Materials

- All the reading materials will be available online.
- For Mexico, a few notebooks will be necessary, even if you decide to bring a laptop.
- No cell phone will be allowed during our daily activities, with a few exceptions.

Assessment Strategy and Expectations

Presence in all classes and activities is mandatory.

More details are available below but please note that the final project is due at the latest on June 12, 2024, at 1 p.m., or any time before. Otherwise, I will deduct 5% per day, including weekend, and you will get zero after 4 days late. Writing skills are also essential and you have many tools to make sure you hand in a well-crafted paper. I will deduct up to 10% of your grade for poor language, punctuation, structure, unclear ideas... You also must have a complete and adequate bibliography and reference method.

Active, daily participation: 20%

During the 3 weeks in Mexico as well as the pre-departure sessions (Winter semester), students are expected to actively participate in discussions, complete the readings, prepare questions and be ready to share their reflections with the group. This field course is heavily based on experiential learning, which means that on-going engagement and participation is expected from all participants, during presentations, in class discussions, and during our visits to communities and organizations. Active participation also means respectful observation and listening to speakers, community members and peer. It means helping one another and sharing knowledge and reflection. For some of you, it may include translating for other students or helping them to find what they need.

Oral presentation (draft of final, team project): 20%

After completing key readings, and based on your observations and fieldnotes, you will present the draft version of your final essay: research question, method, activities, synthesis of key texts/authors. You will then receive feedback from your peer, SURCO mentors and myself. Each of you will prepare a 10 minute presentation, followed by a question and discussion period.

Teamwork is highly recommended for the final project so you will likely present here as a team. In this case you may have 15-20 minutes to present.

Report Back: 20%

As a team of 2-3 students, you will be in charge of taking particularly good notes during one of the visits to be able to organize those notes, collectively write a short report with your critical reflections (to be shared with other students), and present for the group (12-15 minutes). There are many ways to do this, and creativity is welcome. You just need to make sure you are doing justice to the activities and the information that are shared with us. This does not mean that you cannot be critical by highlighting some difficulties or organizing challenges, for instance. Just think about what is the most constructive feedback that you would like to receive to orient and improve your work and write it in such way that you would be comfortable to go back and present your report to them. Your written report will be shared with other students to complement each other's notes and reflection.

**Journal (individual fieldnotes): 10%**

Every student will keep a field journal, taking notes during each visit (not on a computer or cell): topics discussed, individuals and organizations met, description of the site, the light (lack of), questions asked or not asked, learnings, surprising information, how you felt.... You can also write other observations, outside of our collective activities, that may be relevant or just notes that you'd like to keep. As we will actively seek to debunk stereotypes and decolonize

knowledge, the journal will be an excellent way to gather your own reflections and **ask yourself how knowledge is produced, by whom, and for what purpose?** What knowledge is shared and valued or silenced and made invisible. How various cultural contexts may impact the way individuals are explaining and valuing differently a river, for example. I highly encourage each of you to write down, before to leave, a few questions about our main topic, and some stereotypes about Mexican politics, culture, religion, etc. and later see how it may differ, or not, at the end of the course. For the 10% grade, I will only grade based on what you are ready to share with me and you will keep the notebooks. These are precious to the researchers *en devenir* that you are. It is most important to write down everything you'd like to and then decide what are some of the most important "findings", reflection, and information you want to share with me (by email, you can include a few photos of your notes/drawing as relevant).

Final essay: 30% (2-3 students, teamwork)

Each team will choose between the following options:

A. Conventional research paper, including data from at least *one on-site interview*;

B. Oral history with a member of a Oaxaqueña community (need to be fluent in Spanish, individual paper);

C. Video analysing a community experience/initiative from one of the theoretical perspectives that will be introduced (need to be fluent in Spanish);

In all these options, you will construct your research project in a way that it could be useful for the partner organization. Before departure, each student will read background documents and academic articles related to the main topics of the course, as well as *preparing an annotated bibliography* for the final research project, whatever option you chose. You will need to specify and develop your project during your stay in Mexico (thus bringing with you the necessary books and articles, but also getting access to relevant grey literature and primary/secondary sources, completing at least one interview on-site). Yet, it is mostly **upon return** that you will finalize the research project. You **MUST** include the final WORD counts for option A and B.

Option A - Research paper: hard copy SVP, double sided is better if you can

An essay of 2000-3000 words, combining the research done in Canada, the sources/information found in Mexico, and at least one interview with a Mexico-based resource person while in the country (typically government official, NGOs, social movement or community participants). The essay must have a clear argument or research question to be answered and demonstrated, or to be rejected, or nuanced. Papers should include a title, title page, page numbers and complete and coherent bibliography, as well as a copy of the interview guidelines and questions asked in annex. All citations and bibliographies should be presented in APA style without the use of footnotes or endnotes (cf. <http://www.sass.uottawa.ca/writing/kit/apa.doc>). Make prior arrangements with the professor to submit the final paper (by June 12, at 1 p.m. at the latest). Email copy + hard copy SVP.

Option B – Oral history:

You're better in oral than written communications and analysis? You are a good listener, interested in, and sensitive to people's experiences, approaches, and opinions? This option may be for you! Oral history involves the systematic collection of someone's unique experiences through testimony. A growing number of social scientists now recognizes the value of people's everyday lives and memories. Yet making good oral histories is extremely demanding. In term of preparation: you'll need to familiarize yourself with the techniques, the do's and don't (see http://dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html - DOIT). You also need to prepare adequately and get the approval of the local ethic committee. You should be fluent in Spanish, or team up with someone who is fluent to choose this option. Oral histories also require that you **verify** the stories and information you get, **analyze** them, put them into **context**, and **make sure you store them adequately, respecting ethical norms**. This technique can be emotionally challenging as some of the interviewees have gone through very tough experiences that they may wish to share or not with you. As with every type of field research, BEFORE TO USE and diffuse any of their information/image/voice in print or other media, you will need to get the explicit (oral or written, as appropriate) CONSENT from your informants/interviewees.

One page proposal explaining the context, main topics, description of the person/organization, + **key questions** (in Spanish *and* English or French) will need to be approved by the ethic committee, **at least 4 days** before the interview takes place. The final product should be around 8-12 pages long (2000-3000 words) and you will need to submit the tape of the interview--including the oral or written consent, as well as your proposal and final interview questions for evaluation. The best oral histories may eventually be published if different venues become available, and with the consent of the participants.

Option C – Video: using a smartphone, webcam, or digital video camera

This option would require that you are fluent in Spanish and have some familiarity with the technology to be confident that you can produce a good final product, about 10-20 minute long (not more!). Please read the directives for oral history above that are also relevant here, but in this case, the final product will be a well-produced and formatted video, including context, interview(s), and critical analysis, rather than a written story. To verify the information, you may need to meet more than once with the same person or interview more individuals and do some extra research to complete your project. For evaluation, you will submit the final video, along with the interview recording, the interview questions and the proposal that was first approved by the ethic committee--including the oral or written consent. The best videos may be posted online, **if and only IF** you can get the formal **consent** of participants AND an **appropriate venue**.

Assessment Policies and Expectations

Every part of the evaluation must be completed to succeed and receive a final grade, otherwise you will have an incomplete (EIN). This includes regular, on-going, respectful, and active participation to every activity.

Evaluation format	Weight	Date
Active, individual participation	20%	On-going, including pre-departure sessions
Oral presentation (team: overview, key elements, questions for final project)	20%	TBD depending on topics
Team report on a visit	20%	TBD
Journal (fieldnotes)	10%	Last day in Mexico, via internet
Final project (2-3 students)	30%	June 12, 2024, hard copy

Attendance

All participants need to attend and participate in the pre-departure sessions as well as all activities, visits, in classroom sessions. Since this is a field course based on experiential learning and the possibility to meet, exchange, and visit communities and partners, it is mandatory for everyone to be present. If you have to miss one activity, you must talk to the professor or SURCO coordinator before the event, or as soon as possible. Missing activities can result in receiving an incomplete (EIN).

Policy on the 'EIN' grade for the School of Political Studies

Course failure – EIN (F): according to [regulation 10.6](#), a student receives the equivalent to a failure mark whenever he or she has failed to **complete one or more evaluations identified as mandatory in the course syllabus approved by the academic unit.**

According to the policy established by the School of Political Studies, “one or more evaluations identified as mandatory” is defined as follows: one or more examinations (mid-term, final) or any work (quizzes, tests, presentations, research paper, etc.) **worth a total of 15% or more of the final grade.**

Please note that a denied request for a deferral may therefore result in the student receiving a failing mark for the course.

In accordance with [Academic Regulation 10.3](#), any student who has concerns about a grade assigned to him or her should contact the professor in order to better understand the reasons behind the grade, and to articulate those concerns. If, despite the explanations provided and any outcome of the discussion with the professor, the student remains convinced that the grade is still not appropriate, he/she must resort to the official grade review process established for this purpose. For further details about how this process works and how to initiate it, see the aforementioned Academic Regulation 10.3. It should be noted that the grading process results from the knowledge and pedagogical experience that professors, teaching assistants and correctors possess and put at the service of student learning. It is not acceptable to harass teaching assistants and professors in this regard, or to persist in trying to

negotiate one's grade. In this connection, students are encouraged to consult [Policy 130, "Student Rights and Responsible Conduct"](#).

Late Assignments

All assignments are to be submitted by their due date and time. If for a serious reason you cannot hand in your paper on time, please communicate with me as soon as possible.

All late submissions will be immediately docked 5%, with an additional 5% for each subsequent day late to a maximum of 3 days, *including weekends*. **After 3 days all outstanding assignments will be given a zero (0%) grade.**

Policy on justification of late submission of assignments and take-home examinations for the School of Political Studies

The new deadline granted by the School will be equal to the number of working days included in the period of disability specified on the medical certificate.

The medical certificate (sent online by the student with the DFR form) **MUST** specify in accordance with academic regulation 9.5:

- the name of the student;
- **the date of both the absence and the return to studies;**
- the medical consultation date and the physician's signature

Determination of the new deadline:

- If the date of both absence and return to studies are before the due date for the assignment: the new deadline will be calculated from the day following the original due date for the assignment or take-home exam.
- If the date of return to studies is during or after the due date for the assignment or take-home exam: the new deadline will be calculated from the day of the date of return to studies specified on the medical certificate.

Please, note that in the case of a short-term absence, the new deadline established by this policy applies even if the request for a deferral has not yet been approved.

Example 1:

- Due date for an assignment: April 20, 2020.
- DFR form submitted on April 24, 2020 (as allowed by Academic Regulation 9.5).
- Disability period specified on the medical certificate: March 19 to 24, 2020 (**6 calendar days but 4 working days**).

New deadline granted: until April 27, 2020, at the same time as on the original due date (**4 working days following April 20, 2020 and assignment to be handed-in on the 5th working day following April 20, 2020**). If the assignment is handed in after the new deadline, the penalty for late submission specified in the course outline may apply.

Example 2:

- Due date for an assignment: April 20, 2020.
- DFR form submitted on April 24, 2020 (as allowed by Academic Regulation 9.5).
- Disability period specified on the medical certificate: April 20, 2020 (**1 working day**).

New deadline granted: until April 22, 2020, at the same time as on the original due date (**1 working day following April 20, 2020 and assignment to be handed-in on the 2nd working day following April 20, 2020**).

If the assignment is submitted on April 24 (**2 days after the new deadline**) or at any time after April 22, 2020, the penalty for late submission specified in the course outline may apply. **Under such circumstances, the student should not wait for the deferral to be approved before handing in the assignment.**

Missed exams and requests for deferral

Students who are excused for missing an evaluation will be required to write a deferred evaluation, except where the professor offers a re-weighting scheme which applies to the student's case. Professors may decline to offer a deferred evaluation and instead re-weight the remaining pieces of work only if (i) the re-weighted scheme is indicated on the syllabus and (ii) it respects both the 25 percent rule ([Academic Regulation A-8](#)) and the final exam rule.

IMPORTANT:

- Students can request a maximum of one (1) deferred evaluation per course, and this evaluation must be taken as soon as possible and within six (6) months after the end of the term.
- All deferred **final** exams for courses at the Faculty of Social Sciences, except for SVS 3505, SVS 3515 and all ECO courses, will take place during the next term (please consult the [Important academic dates and deadlines webpage](#) to know the specific dates).

Exam conflicts

- Any conflict with a midterm exam schedule should be reported to the Professor at the beginning of the term. This request is especially applicable to the type 3 conflict (two in-class exams back-to-back) for students with special learning needs.
- Any conflict with a final exam schedule should be reported to the Faculty's undergraduate office as soon as the final examination schedule is released.



Course Calendar

Date	Activities
Wed. May 1	Arrival Mexico City, dinner and security information Stay at hotel, Centro historico
Thursday May 2	AM: Intro, classroom discussion: Mexico City, food, gender, and urban issues PM: Tour Zocalo, Templo Mayor, archeological site
Friday May 3	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) visit campus, conference presentation by researchers on (alternative) food systems, environmental issues, and citizens organizing, lunch at UNAM Cafeteria

Saturday May 4	AM: Central de Abastos (mega-wholesale food market) PM: Huerto Roma Verde, community garden, talk by activist-researcher
Sunday May 5	AM: visit, organic market (Mercado 100) PM: libre, Celebration Cinco de Mayo
Mon May 6	<i>Conference presentations: Silvia Ribeiro, ETC Group, Tomasso Gravante, UNAM</i>
Tuesday May 7	Visit Chinampas and discussion with agroecological family producers, south of Mexico City, Xochimilco boats
Wed. May 8	Morning free PM: Intro to Surco and Oaxaca while driving to Oaxaca Bed and breakfast near centre de Oaxaca
Thursday May 9	AM in class: food, gender and mining issues in Oaxaca Workshop, discussion of research project: how to, what not to do Selection of teams for each visit presentation PM: city tour (waste, water...)
Friday May 10	Monte Albán, arqueological site Huitzo, visit small organic producers from SURCO consumer network
Sat May 11	Visit commercial production of organic vegetables for California and Quebec
Sun May 12	Cultural visit: Hierve el agua, San Baltazar Guelavila Talk with members of Mezcal Regulatory Association (Consejo de Regulador de Mezcal), witness artisanal production process, walk across agave fields. Lunch on site.
Monday May 13	Zaira Hipolito (leepco) about women's political rights, Nallely Tello (Consortio) about women's movement in Oaxaca (Surco's classroom)
Tu May 14	Capulalpam (Mining, environment, Pueblo Magico) about 4 hour drive, 1 night
Wed May 15	Yaviche: 1 night, organic coffee production, milpa agriculture, sugar cane, etc. Ecological zones in an indigenous Zapotec town of the Sierra Norte, making panela. Home of CEUXhidza, a SURCO project. Meals provided in family homes. Get to know and exchange with young people managing the communal library, share experiences and life expectations. Discussion with participants of the Sembrando Vida program. Brief visit with the communal authorities.

Thursday May 16	Yaviche: morning visit coffee and sugarcane fields, looking at the first stage processing, discussing their importance in the local economy. After lunch, return to Oaxaca.
Fri May 17	Free day
Sat May 18	Drive to coast, Pinotepa (2 nights hotel)
Sunday May 19	Meeting with Afrodescendientes and Yuyé, artist and activist for Afromexican women's rights, currently on the city council of Pinotepa
Monday May 20	Huatzolotitlán, afrodescendencia and papaya farming, staying in Rio Grande (1 night)
Tuesday May 21	Drive to Puerto Escondido – end of program

Bibliography

Preliminary List of Readings :

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