

HR933-15 Introduction to Food Systems, Food Production and Food Security

27/28

Department

Life Sciences

Level

Taught Postgraduate Level

Module leader

Rosemary Collier

Credit value

15

Module duration

3 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

The module introduces students to the structure and dynamics of food systems and the concept of food security, progressing from core principles to forward-looking strategies for building resilient and equitable food systems.

[Module web page](#)

Module aims

The module aims to introduce the concept of the food system and food systems thinking, helping students understand that food insecurity is not merely a problem of inadequate production, but a complex and interconnected challenge shaped by environmental limits, economic dynamics, governance arrangements, and power structures. This foundation is designed to equip students with the background knowledge needed to apply the principles of food security and a food systems approach in subsequent modules.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

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Introduction to the module and framing the food system - What is a food system? Food security vs nutrition security vs food sovereignty; The pillars of food security: availability, access, utilisation, stability (+ agency); Systems thinking tools; Food ethics

Resources - water, fossil fuel dependency, waste, and soil/water will be covered in detail in HR902.

Food access, markets and trade - Poverty, income, and food prices; Trade, globalisation, and price volatility; Urban food systems and informal markets

Nutrition, diets and consumption - Malnutrition in all its forms (undernutrition, micronutrient deficiency, obesity); Cultural, gender, and intra-household dynamics; Ultra-processed foods and nutrition transition

Governance, Policy & Power - National food policies and institutions; Global governance (FAO, WFP, WTO); Subsidies, safety nets, and price controls; Land tenure, gender, and indigenous rights; Corporate concentration and power asymmetries

Shocks, Resilience & Future Pathways - Conflict, climate extremes, and pandemics; Resilience vs transformation; Technology: digital ag-tech, alternative proteins; Agroecology vs “sustainable intensification”; Scenario thinking for food systems; Climate change will be covered in HR920.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Understand the concept of a food system and distinguish between food security, nutrition security, and food sovereignty.
- Describe and critically interpret the pillars of food security (availability, access, utilization, stability, and agency) across different contexts
- Evaluate how environmental, economic, social, and political factors interact within food systems at local and global scales.
- Evaluate how poverty, markets, trade, and price volatility affect food access and vulnerability.
- Critique food system responses to shocks (conflict, climate extremes, pandemics).
- Demonstrate critical engagement and creativity with regard to exploration of a theme relating to the food system and food security.

Indicative reading list

[Reading lists can be found in Talis](#)

[Specific reading list for the module](#)

Research element

There is a research element within the assessed assignments

Interdisciplinary

Food systems and food security are inherently interdisciplinary topics and a key aim of the module is for students to gain an appreciation of the importance of interdisciplinarity.

International

Food systems and food security are international topics.

Subject specific skills

Evaluate and critique the approaches being taken to analyse and address issues associated with the food system and global food security

Transferable skills

Oral and written communication

Synthesis of information

Evaluation and analysis of information

Group working

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	20 sessions of 1 hour (13%)
Seminars	(0%)
Other activity	8 hours (5%)
Private study	84 hours (56%)
Assessment	38 hours (25%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

Independent research

Other activity description

Workshop sessions - partly lecture and partly group activity.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A2

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Assessment component			
Student devised assignment	33%	13 hours	Yes (extension)
The devised piece is an opportunity to display a student's critical engagement with the themes and theories addressed in the module and for them to take a considered and creative approach as to how they might practically apply what they have learned, in a medium of their choosing. The form of the devised piece is down to the student, who should consider which issues and theories they want to address, and then develop a piece of work in whatever form/medium they feel they can use to describe them best. This could be a story, workshop, presentation, blog, video, piece of academic writing, website, learning resource, diary, etc. 'Food' is a very complex, interdisciplinary topic, and it will be helpful to the students to address it using a different medium from the 'normal' academic ones, although they still have the option to do so. Students will be supported in their chosen activity either by SLS staff or wider University colleagues, including ITS, through available guidance/training resources. In assessing the work, we will look for an explanation of the rationale for their choice of form/medium. First and foremost, the student needs to make sure that they clearly demonstrate their understanding of and critical engagement with the theory. To ensure consistency of assessment and to help students contextualise their work, each student is required to write an accompanying explanation (maximum 750 words excluding bibliography), which will be assessed together with the piece of work they have prepared. If they did choose to do a 'conventional' essay, then they would still be required to explain why they chose that medium. Students will be provided with a full explanation of this assessment method at the start of their module and will be supported throughout the activity. This type of assessment will encourage			

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
them to engage with wider University resources (e.g. central ITS, the Library, etc.), thus contributing to a more holistic University student experience.			
Reassessment component is the same			
Assessment component			
Group presentation and linked 1000 word summary of individual contribution	67%	25 hours	No
This assignment consists of preparing and delivering a group seminar presentation, along with each individual submitting a 1,000-word written description of their personal contribution. Students are allocated to groups randomly. Each group chooses a country or a 'region/continent'. Each group must consider a different region. Each group researches the food system and food security issues in that region now and in the future. Each student must research a different aspect of the food system so that the group presentations are balanced. So they should choose from, e.g. production, logistics (including storage), waste, access to food, food affordability, climate change, food systems, justice, poverty, conflict, etc. The group prepares and gives a presentation on the country/region covering the food system and current and future food security issues. They can also make suggestions about how food security might be improved in future. In addition, each student submits a 1,000-word description of their individual contribution.			
Reassessment component			
Presentation			No
Individual presentation and a linked 1000-word summary			

Feedback on assessment

Written feedback through Tabula

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- TESA-H1C1 Postgraduate Taught in Humanitarian Engineering

- Year 1 of H1C1 Humanitarian Engineering
- Year 1 of H1C3 Humanitarian Engineering (with Management)
- Year 1 of H1C2 Humanitarian Engineering (with Sustainability)