

**SOAN 0370: Sociology of Knowledge and Food Systems**  
Meets Monday and Wednesday, 12:15-1:30, Munroe Hall 314

**Professor Erica Morrell**

**Office Hours:** M 10:30am-12pm, W 1:30pm-3pm, and By Appointment

**Office:** 209 Munroe Hall

**Email:** [emorrell@middlebury.edu](mailto:emorrell@middlebury.edu)

**Course Description:**

What is knowledge? In this course, we will explore the rise of the authority of science across much of the globe. We will regard potential problems with and challenges to science's dominant position, and we will analyze whether and how other forms of knowledge may shape contemporary social, cultural, and political life. Practical cases to illustrate these dynamics will largely draw from the food system—including through significant engagement with our local community's emergency food system.

**Requirements and Policies:**

▪ ***Attendance and Preparation***

Attendance is mandatory. I have worked to assign a reasonable amount of readings, provide engaging and diverse classroom lessons, and ensure there are opportunities for instruction and feedback on all assignments so that this class enables you to develop quality, critical, and creative insights into the sociology of knowledge and food systems. In return, I expect you to arrive to class on time and prepared to contribute. Even a day's absence means that you will be missing a substantive part of the material. If you must miss class, please make arrangements with me ahead of time whenever possible. Absences occurred on the due date of assignments will not extend your deadline except on case-by-case circumstances.

▪ ***Class Conduct and Academic Integrity***

Middlebury College (and myself) is committed to maintaining a diverse and inclusive campus environment where hatred and intolerance are unacceptable. The College and I strictly prohibit discrimination and harassment. Middlebury also does not tolerate plagiarism, or other forms of academic misconduct. I strongly enforce the College's stance:

[http://www.middlebury.edu/about/handbook/student\\_policies/Academic\\_Disciplinary\\_Policies](http://www.middlebury.edu/about/handbook/student_policies/Academic_Disciplinary_Policies)

• ***Disability Accommodation:***

Middlebury College complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended, and applicable state laws. If you have a disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please contact myself and/or the ADA Coordinator from Student Accessibility Services (Meeker House, 802-443-5936).

▪ ***Laptops/Cell Phones/Tablets/Etc***

Please TURN OFF and PUT AWAY all electronic devices (cell phones, computers, tablets, etc) prior to the start of class. Speak to me if you feel you or a particular day of class/assignment merits an exception to this.

- **Late Paper Policy**

If you do not make prior arrangements with me, late papers will drop by *a half letter grade* each day past the deadline (some exceptions will be made for emergencies). Prior arrangements for extensions will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

**Assignments and Grading:**

- **Reading Reflections** (10% of total grade)

Readings are listed on the syllabus for the **day they are due**. All readings will be posted on our Canvas course website. At the *beginning* of each class for which a reflection is due, you should have a prepared reflection containing your thoughts on the reading assigned for that day. The reflection should *contain 1-3 questions, quotes, or other relevant reflections per assigned reading*. These reflections will be used to prepare you for and then inform our class discussions. You will be awarded 1 point for each reflection you turn in, 1/2 point for insufficient summaries, 0 points for no contribution (roughly totaling 10pts, or 10% of your total grade for the term). You will turn in reflections in at the end of class. **Please write your full name on the reflections so that I can give you credit.** I will return reflections for you to reference later if/as needed.

\*NOTE: I will not accept make-up reflections for absent students, and you may not give your reflection to another student to hand-in.

- **Class Participation** (14% of total grade)

Drawing on your reflections and additional resources, in class you will frequently be asked to speak up, discuss various topics, and engage in activities. Additionally, there are several times throughout this course when you will also be asked—*instead of reading and writing reflections*—to take on tasks during and in-preparation for our class meetings that relate to our Addison County Emergency Food System Assessment. Participation in these classroom elements is what makes this course enriching and exciting both for you and your peers. Meaningful participation in these activities thus makes up 14% of your total grade.

- **Addison County Emergency Food System Assessment Site Visits** (20% of total grade)

As part of this course, you will arrange and conduct two site visits/assessments with members of the Addison County emergency food system in the Middlebury community. Details on this will be provided in class. Each site visit/assessment is worth 10% of your grade.

- **“Object” Writing—Assignments 1-6** (36% of total grade)

Regularly you will be assigned 1-3 pages of writing that ask you to consider a specific aspect of the sociology of knowledge in relation to an “object” of your choosing. This is your chance to critically think about knowledge in the context of whatever topic you are most passionate about/interested in, whether food systems related or not. Further details on each of these assignments will be provided in class. There will be 6 assignments, worth 6% each, for a total of 36% of your grade. Serious engagement in these writings will also greatly benefit your final assignment, which heavily incorporates them.

- **“Object” Writing—Final** (20% of total grade)

Your final for this class is a writing assignment that requires you to critically reflect on multiple different aspects of the sociology of knowledge in the context of whatever topic you are most passionate about/interested in, whether food systems related or not. This final incorporates and

builds on the 6 shorter writing assignments you are asked to complete earlier in the course. Details will be provided in class. Your final is worth 20% of your total class grade.

### **Reading Materials**

Readings are listed on the syllabus for the day they are **due**. All readings are posted online.

### **Class Schedule**

#### **Week 1: Introduction to Sociology of Knowledge**

##### **Monday, September 11: Class Introductions**

- Review Syllabus

Plan for Class: Class overview and introductions.

Assignment for Class: Be prepared to discuss why you chose to take this class and what you hope to get out of the course. Questions about the course and syllabus welcome.

##### **Assignment 1: Choose 2-3 ‘Objects’**

##### **Wednesday, September 13: Social Construction and Object Workshopping**

- Opel, Andy. 1999. “Constructing Purity: Bottled Water and the Commodification of Nature.” *Journal of American Culture*. 22: 67-76.

Plan for Class: Lecture and discussion on social construction. ‘Object’ workshopping.

Assignment for Class: Reading Reflection #1 Due. We will discuss the readings. Please be prepared with questions, comments, etc.

##### **Assignment 1 DUE**

##### **Assignment 2: Write 1-3 Pages about Your Chosen Object**

#### **Week 2: The Rise of Scientific and Credentialed Expert Authority**

##### **Monday, September 18: The Rise of Science and Credentialed Experts and Expertise**

- Gieryn, Thomas. 1983. “Boundary Work and the Demarcations of Science from Non-Science: Strains and Interests in Professional Ideologies of Scientists.” *American Sociological Review*. 48(6): 781-795.
- Ellsworth, Jessica. 2001. *Pp 1-13 ONLY* in “This History of Organic Food Regulation.” Food and Drug Law, 3<sup>rd</sup> Year Paper, Harvard University.

Plan for Class: Lecture and discussion on the rising authority of science and credentialed experts.

Exemplar: organics and the organic standards board.

Assignment for Class: Reading Reflection #2 Due. We will discuss the readings. Please be prepared with questions, comments, etc.

##### **Assignment 2 DUE**

##### **Assignment 3: Write 1-3 Pages about Who the Experts of Your Chosen Object Are, including How They Are Made and Maintained**

##### **Wednesday, September 20: Protecting Scientific and Credentialed Knowledge**

- Aoki, Keith. 2008. Pp 3-58 (Chapters 1, 2, and 3) in *Seed Wars: Controversies and Cases on Plant Genetic Resources and Intellectual Property*.

Plan for Class: Lecture and discussion on how the authority of science and credentialed experts is maintained. Exemplar: patents in food and agriculture.

Assignment for Class: Reading Reflection #3 Due. We will discuss the readings. Please be prepared with questions, comments, etc.

### **Week 3: Hunger in Vermont and Addison County**

#### **Monday, September 25: Guest Speakers on Hunger in Vermont**

- Hunger Council of Addison County. 2017. “Welcome to the Hunger Council of Addison County!” Mission and overview statement.

Plan for Class: Guest speakers on hunger in Vermont.

Assignment for Class: We will discuss hunger in Vermont. Please be prepared with questions, comments, etc.

#### **Wednesday, September 27: Guest Speaker on Addison County’s Emergency Food System**

- Nesheim, Oria, and Yih, eds. 2015. “The U.S. Food and Agriculture System as a Complex Adaptive System.” Pp 233-242 in *A Framework for Assessing Effects of the Food System*. National Academies Pres.
- Familiarize yourself with the emergency food system in Addison County

Plan for Class: Guest speaker, discussion, and activity regarding the emergency food system in Addison County.

Assignment for Class: We will discuss the emergency food system in Addison County. Please be prepared with questions, comments, etc

**Assignment 3 DUE**

### **Week 4: Potential Problems with Science and Credentialed Experts’ Authority**

#### **Monday, October 2: Addison County Emergency Food System Discussion and Assessment Planning**

- Herrera and Bradley. 2016. “Decolonizing Food Justice: Naming, Resisting, and Researching Colonizing Forces in the Movement.” *Antipode*. 48(1): 97-114.

Plan for Class: Critical discussion on the Addison County emergency food system, including who is participating, who holds power, what knowledge is represented, and how we want to analyze this.

Assignment for Class: Reading Reflection #4 Due. We will discuss the readings. Please be prepared with questions, comments, etc.

#### **Wednesday, October 4: Objectivity and the Exclusion of Other Experts and Expertise**

- Kuhn, Thomas. Pp 1-22, and 35-42 (Chapters 1, 2, and 4) in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.
- Wynne, Brian. 1996. “May the Sheep Safely Graze? A Reflexive View of the Lay-Expert Divide.” Pp. 44-80 in *Risk, Modernity, and the Environment*.

Plan for Class: Lecture and discussion on potential problems with the authority of science and credentialed experts, including the notion of objectivity and exclusion. Exemplar: the role of traditional farmers in food systems decision-making.

Assignment for Class: Reading Reflection #5 Due. We will discuss the readings. Please be prepared with questions, comments, etc.

## **Week 5: Potential Problems with Science and Credentialed Experts' Authority, Continued**

### **Monday, October 9: Exclusion, Continued**

- Haraway, Donna. 1988. "Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective." *Feminist Studies*. 14(3): 575–599.
- Shiva, Vandana. 1991. Pp 12-25 (Chapter 1) in *The Violence of the Green Revolution: Third World Agriculture, Ecology, and Politics*.

Plan for Class: Continue lecture and discussion on potential problems with the authority of science and credentialed experts, including exclusion and dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression. Exemplar: the 'Green Revolution.'

Assignment for Class: Reading Reflection #6 Due. We will discuss the readings. Please be prepared with questions, comments, etc.

**Assignment 4: Write 1-3 Pages about Who Is Not an Expert of Your Object, and Why this May Be Problematic**

### **Wednesday, October 11: Addison County Emergency Food System Assessment Workshopping**

- No new readings
- Site visits plans
- Prepare assessment tools

Plan for Class: Workshop and finalize our Addison County emergency food system assessment tools.

Assignment for Class: We will workshop our Addison County emergency food system site visits and assessment tools. Please come with prepared with questions, comments, etc.

## **Week 6: Addison County Emergency Food System Site Visit and Assessment 1**

### **Monday, October 16: No Formal Class Meeting: Site Visit 1**

- No new readings
- Visit site and conduct assessment

Plan for Class: Class will not meet formally. You will visit and conduct your site 1 assessment either during class period or another time you have arranged with your site between Thursday, October 12 and Tuesday, October 17.

Assignment for Class: Visit and conduct your site 1 assessment.

### **Wednesday, October 18: Site Visit Debrief**

- No new readings
- Site visit summary and debrief

Plan for Class: We will discuss our site visits and assessments.

Assignment for Class: Prepare a summary and presentation on your site visit and assessment. Please be prepared not only to share your experience and findings, but also come prepared to listen, question, and comment on others'.

**Assignment 4 DUE**

## **Week 7: Other Knowledge Forms**

**Monday, October 23: No Class, Midterm Recess**

### **Wednesday, October 25: Discussion of other Knowledge Forms**

- Corburn, Jason. 2005. Pp 47-78 (Chapter 2) in *Street Science: Community Knowledge and Environmental Health Justice*.
- Collins, Patricia H. 2000. Pp. 251-272 (Chapter 11) in *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*.

Plan for Class: We will explore some other knowledge forms. Exemplar: alternative food movements.

Assignment for Class: Reading Reflection #7 Due. We will discuss the readings. Please be prepared with questions, comments, etc.

**Assignment 5: Write 1-3 Pages About other Knowledge Potentially Relevant to Your Object and Why this Might Have Value...Also, What is the Knowledge You Bring to Your Object? Are You or Aren't You An Expert of Your Object? Why or Why Not?**

## **Week 8: Addison County Emergency Food System Site Visit and Assessment 2**

**Monday, October 30: No Formal Class Meeting: Site Visit 2**

- No new readings
- Visit site and conduct assessment

Plan for Class: Class will not meet formally. You will visit and conduct your site 2 assessment either during class period or another time you have arranged with your site between Thursday, October 25 and Tuesday, October 31.

Assignment for Class: Visit and conduct your site 2 assessment.

### **Wednesday, November 1: Site Visit Debrief**

- No new readings
- Site visit summary and debrief

Plan for Class: We will discuss our site visits and assessments.

Assignment for Class: Prepare a summary and presentation on your site visit and assessment. Please be prepared not only to share your experience, but with questions and comments for others.

## **Week 9: Addison County Emergency Food System Draft Analysis**

**Monday, November 6: Addison County Emergency Food System Draft Analysis**

- No new readings
- Bring draft analysis components

Plan for Class: We will finalize a draft analysis of Addison County's emergency food system and our planned next steps for presentation to the Addison County Hunger Council and state legislators.

Assignment for Class: Please come with your draft analysis components and be prepared to finalize in class with your colleagues.

**Assignment 5 DUE**

**Tues Nov 7: Addison County Hunger Council Meeting and State Legislator Presentation**

- Please attend the Addison County Hunger Council Meeting to Present our Analysis!  
3-5pm, CSAC in Catamount Park off Exchange Street

**Wednesday, November 8: Hunger Council Meeting Debrief and Next Steps Brainstorm**

- No new readings

Plan for Class: We will discuss our experience at the Addison County Hunger Council meeting and prepare our next steps.

**Week 10: Activist Efforts to Democratize Decision-Making**

**Monday, November 13: TBD Based on Our Determined Next Steps**

- TBD Based on Our Determined Next Steps.

Plan for Class: TBD Based on Our Determined Next Steps.

Assignment for Class: TBD Based on Our Determined Next Steps.

**Wednesday, November 15: Activists Democratizing Decision-Making**

- Parthasarathy, Shobita. 2010. “Breaking the expertise barrier: understanding activist strategies in science and technology policy domains.” *Science and Public Policy*. 37(5): 355–367
- Morrell, Erica. 2017. “Localizing Detroit’s Food System: Boundary-Work and the Politics of Experiential Expertise.” *Science as Culture*.

Plan for Class: We will discuss activist efforts to expand whose and what forms of knowledge are represented in decision-making. Exemplar: food justice.

Assignment for Class: Reading Reflection #8 Due. We will discuss the readings. Please be prepared with questions, comments, etc.

**Assignment 6: Write 1-3 Pages on How Your Object Could Be Democratized (or if it is already being democratized, How So and Why?)**

**Week 11: Government and Scientist Efforts to Democratize Decision-Making**

**Monday, November 20: Government and Scientists Democratizing Decision-Making**

- Einsiedel, Edna F., Erling Jelsøe, and Thomas Breck. 2001. “Publics at the technology table: The consensus conference in Denmark, Canada, and Australia.” *Public Understanding of Science*. 10: 83-98.
- Allen, Barbara. 2004. “Shifting boundary work: Issues and tensions in environmental health science in the case of Grand Bois, Louisiana.” *Science as Culture*. (13)4: 429-448

Plan for Class: We will discuss scientists and governments’ efforts to expand whose and what forms of knowledge are represented in decision-making. Exemplar: seed banking.

Assignment for Class: Reading Reflection #9 Due. We will discuss the readings. Please be prepared with questions, comments, etc.

**Wednesday, November 22: No Class, Thanksgiving Recess**

## **Week 12: Addison County Emergency Food System Final Analysis**

### **Monday, November 27: Addison County Emergency Food System Analysis Finalizing**

- No New Readings
- Bring you final analysis components

Plan for Class: We will put together our final Addison County Emergency Food System Analysis and prepare to present them to members of the Addison County Hunger Council.

Assignment for Class: Come prepared with your final analysis components.

**Assignment 6 DUE**

### **Wednesday, November 30: TBD Based on Final Analysis Delivery**

- TBD Based on Our Final Analysis Delivery.

Plan for Class: TBD Based on Our Final Analysis Delivery.

Assignment for Class: TBD Based on Our Final Analysis Delivery.

## **Week 13: The Future of Knowledge**

### **Monday, December 4: The Future of Knowledge**

- Knowledge in the Age of Trump—Reading TBD based on Current Events

Plan for Class: We will discuss the future of knowledge.

Assignment for Class: Reading Reflection #10 Due. We will discuss the readings. Please be prepared with questions, comments, etc.

### **Wednesday, December 6: Course Wrap-Up/Final Presentations**

- No New Readings
- Object Presentations

Plan for Class: “Object” presentations and course wrap-up.

Assignment for Class: You will present on your object and listen to others’ presentations. Plus, course wrap-up and good-byes!

## **Week 14: Final Due**

### **Monday, December 11: Final Due**