**GEOG 4200W: Geographical Analysis of Urban Social Issues**

Urban & Community Studies

University of Connecticut--Waterbury

Syllabus – Fall 2015

Mon & Wed 2:00-3:15pm

**Instructor**: Dr. Phil Birge-Liberman

**Office**: wtby 109

**Office Hours**: Mon & Wed 12:30-1:30 pm, or by appointment

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**Background Information**

Food deserts, as defined by the US Department of Agriculture, are low-income urban neighborhoods and rural towns without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. Instead of supermarkets and grocery stores, these communities are served only by fast food restaurants and convenience stores that offer residents few healthy, affordable food options. Numerous studies indicate that this lack of access contributes to a poor diet, which can lead to higher levels of obesity and other diet-related diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease.

The USDA focuses on the census tract level to determine if neighborhoods qualify as food deserts. Census tracts qualify as food deserts if they meet low-income and low-access thresholds:

1. They qualify as “***low-income communities***”, based on having: a) a poverty rate of 20 percent or greater, OR b) a median family income at or below 80 percent of the area median family income; AND
2. They qualify as “***low-access communities***”, based on the determination that at least 500 persons and/or at least 33% of the census tract’s population live more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store.

In this class, we analyze Waterbury’s north end to determine if the neighborhood qualifies as a food desert under USDA guidelines.

**Service Learning Component**

According to the Carnegie Foundation: *“Service Learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities”.* This is the definition that UCONN has adopted to guide its Service Learning. Service Learning can take many forms. In this course, students will create a report assessing the food options in the City of Waterbury for our community partner--Neighborhood Housing Services of Waterbury.

**Neighborhood Housing Services of Waterbury (NHSW)**

NHSW is a not-profit housing agency located in Waterbury, CT. The organization has been approved by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development to offer classes and counseling for homebuyers, financial fitness classes, foreclosure prevention classes and counseling, and reverse mortgage counseling. The NHSW staff works closely with neighborhood residents, lenders, and government partners to provide a range of services that promote homeownership, self–sufficiency, and help build strong communities. NHSW is committed to rehabilitating existing housing and developing new single and multi-family housing to revitalize neighborhoods and improve the quality of life for area residents. NHSW is currently developing a 10-unit affordable rental housing complex for families in Waterbury’s north end.

**Learning Objectives**

This course will use Waterbury’s north end as case study to examine food access as a pressing urban social issue. The service learning element of this course will provide students with a unique opportunity to connect theoretical perspectives on urban social issues with a real world example facing residents of Waterbury. By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

1. Evaluate various applied research methods in the social sciences.
2. Formulate research questions for a project by examining the physical, social and economic conditions of the city.
3. Create an agenda and a plan to complete a research project.
4. Employ methods to collect and analyze quantitative and/or qualitative data.
5. Produce a report that analyzes a pressing urban and/or community problem, identifies the role of various stakeholders, and provides possible solutions.

**Statement on Academic Integrity**

Students are assumed to be familiar with the University of Connecticut Policy on Academic Misconduct at: <http://www.ucc.uconn.edu/~dosa8/code2.html>. Any form of academic misconduct or dishonesty in this class—as defined by the University of Connecticut Student Code—will be prosecuted to the fullest extent.

**Format**

Classes will consist of a mixture of lectures, guest speakers, documentaries and movies, and interactive exercises. Lectures and other material will be posted to HuskyCT.

**Required Texts**

* Course readings and media are available within HuskyCT, through either an Internet link or Library Resources.

**Writing Assignments**

Writing assignments will take two forms—informal writing assignments or reflective essays, and a formal report paper that will undergo revision. Reflective essays should be between 400 and 500 words attached to the assignment via HuskyCT. Students need to complete five of the six reflective essays assigned. The final report will be a minimum of 15 pages doubled-spaced 12-point font with 1 inch margins excluding maps, figures, photographs and the like. The writing component of this course will constitute 80% of the course grade. Failure to pass the writing component results in failure of the course. The primary modes of writing instruction will be

written commentary by the instructor, and peer review. All assignments need to be submitted by the due date.

**Late Assignments**

Late assignments will be penalized by one increment (for example B rather than B+) for each business day that they are overdue. Exceptions are made for planned absences, provided I am notified ahead of time, and if students have documented medical reasons for the late assignment.

**Grading & Assessment**

Report                  55%

    Research questions      2.5%

    Article summary      2.5%

    Annotated bibliography      2.5%

    Literature review      5%

    Research design      7.5%

    Peer-review          2.5%

    Review meeting      2.5%

    Draft of findings      7.5%

    Draft of final report      7.5%

    Final report          10%

    Presentation of findings      5%

Reflective essays 5 x 5%      25%

Participation &               20%

class discussion/exercises

**Class Schedule (subject to change)**

Module 1 - Introduction to Service Learning

Module 2 - Social Justice & the City

Module 3 – Community-Based Research

Module 4 - Research Design & Ethics in Social Science Research

Module 5 - Quantitative Research Methods

Module 6 - Qualitative Research Methods

Module 7 - Data Collection & Analysis

Module 8 - Summarizing & Presenting Findings

**Disability Statement**

UCONN is committed to achieving equal educational opportunity and full participation for persons with disabilities. It is my intent that this course be fully accessible and fair for all students. If you need accommodations, please make an appointment to see Dr. Stuart Brown in the Office of Student Affairs (phone 203.236.9847/email stuart.brown@uconn.edu). I will make every effort to accommodate your needs and to maintain your confidentiality.

**Writing Center**

The UConn Waterbury Writing Center assists students who are doing any sort of writing for their classes at UConn. If you’d like assistance, you should bring your assignments to the Writing Center, Room 227E (2nd fl. inside the library). The Writing Center can assist you with:

Pre-writing and revision strategies        Organizing ideas

Fine-tuning thesis statements            Developing more effective sentences

Organizing paragraphs                Proper citation

The Writing Center provides this assistance to students working on rough drafts, short essays, lab reports, term papers, and just about any sort of writing assignment. Tutoring takes place in approximately one-hour sessions (they may be shorter or longer) that combine discussion of the writer's goals and some writing that brings the assignment towards completion. You may drop by for a tutoring session, but it’s suggested that you sign up in advance to assure a session with a tutor. Sign-up sheets are located just outside the door of the Writing Center, room 227E, which is on the second floor inside the library.