

CGS 3201G THINK GLOBAL, ACT LOCAL

The Centre for Global Studies
Huron University College
Winter 2022
Dr. Katherine Lawless



Illustration by Steven Shik for *Detour Detroit*

Course Description

In this course, we will engage with a grassroots community gardening organization in Detroit, Michigan to study a local response to the global problem of food insecurity. The United Nations describes food insecurity as a lack of “regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life.” Current estimates place the percentage of the world population suffering from hunger at roughly 9%, but this has increased substantially as a result of the global pandemic. The second UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG2), “Zero Hunger” seeks to eradicate this problem by 2030. Local organizations such as London Poverty Research Centre (LPRC) are localizing the SDGs by tracking and analyzing local indicators. In the context of “SDG2,” LPRC tracks indicators such as “small scale food production,” “food access,” and “food bank usage.” Ultimately, the goal is to facilitate food security, which, according to the UN Committee on World Food Security, “means that all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life.” Grassroots organizations such as the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN) take this a step further by striving

for food sovereignty, which La Via Campesina International Peasant's Movement defines as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems."

Through our work with a partner organization, we will explore urban gardening as a response to the forces of globalization, with a particular focus on food sovereignty, socio-ecological sustainability, and racial justice. In collaboration, we will develop, design, and deliver initiatives or projects that serve the needs of our partner organization. At the same time, we will learn from this organization in order to think about how a similar project might be initiated in London, ON. This will require us to examine the unique constellation of geography, economics, and politics in Detroit that contributed to the emergence of community gardening as a mode of resistance and resilience, as well as the ways in which this may or may not compare to London. Such a comparative analysis will allow us to further consider community gardening as a response to food insecurity in London. In addition, it will help us to understand not only how two proximate North American locales are differentially affected by broader global structures and globalizing processes such as industrialization and free trade but also the potential transferability of local responses. In our study, we might also assess initiatives undertaken elsewhere for their applicability to both Detroit and London. Throughout this process, we will critically engage with our partner organization's aims and practices and meaningfully participate in community building and research-based critical reflection.

Course Information

Professor	Dr. Katherine (Kate) Lawless, A211
Contact Information	519-438-7224 x705; klawles@uwo.ca
Class Time	Tuesday, 6:30-9:30 (as necessary)
Room	W102

Prerequisite(s): Permission of the Centre for Global Studies.

Course Objectives

- 1) To cultivate a vibrant learning community committed to the eradication of food insecurity, racial injustice and unsustainable agriculture in collaboration with a grassroots community partner
- 2) To develop a rigorous praxis in which scholarly research collaborates with community practice
- 3) To acquire new skills in cross-cultural communication; community-based research and learning; and multi-scalar comparative analysis
- 4) To discover what it means to work holistically and collaboratively toward a collective goal

Course Requirements

- Interest in engaging deeply and critically with the problem of food insecurity and the possibilities of food security and sovereignty across multiple scales of production, social organization, and experience
- Curiosity about how food insecurity intersects with other forms of social, political, and economic inequity
- A strong commitment to conscientious community engagement
- Capacity for collaboration, self-direction, and thinking “outside the box”
- Willingness to engage in self-reflection, self-directedness, and self-evaluation
- Penchant or aspiration for growing things, making things, activating, caring, and connecting, or some variation of these

Learning Outcomes

Together, we will:

- 1) Become deeply familiar with the problem of food insecurity in terms of both its conceptualization at the global level and its expression at the local level
- 2) Explore grassroots urban community gardening as a response to food insecurity, unsustainable agriculture, and racialized regimes of resource distribution
- 3) Develop, design, and deliver an initiative or project in collaboration with and based on the needs of a local community gardening organization in Detroit
- 4) Conduct a comparative study of London and Detroit to determine the feasibility of initiating a similar grassroots urban gardening organization in London
- 5) Promote autonomous, sustainable, and anti-racist modes of food production

Methods of Instruction, Conduct and Expectations

This course will operate differently than most courses. We will meet in the classroom 4-5 times throughout the semester to discuss and reflect on the work we are doing. COVID restrictions permitting, we will make at least one collective field trip to Detroit to work with our selected organization. Outside of these collective elements, you will work individually on your respective elements of the project in conjunction with our community partner. Regardless of the pandemic's status, we will utilize our newly honed virtual-digital skills to work online and connect remotely with each other and our community organization.

Our work:

We are scheduled to meet in the classroom for 3 hours each week on Tuesdays from 6:30-9:30pm. We will not meet every week; rather, we will schedule meetings for the first 2 weeks and then throughout the semester as needed. Outside the classroom, we will collaborate with a community organization in Detroit, Michigan and one or more community organization in

London, ON. We will be in regular communications with these organization either in person or using remote technologies. Our collaboration with a community partner in Detroit will require at least one field trip to Detroit (pandemic pending). If, for any reason, you are unable to cross the border, please let me know in advance and we will make the appropriate adjustments for your participation. In general, our work will involve a combination of academic research and community engagement as well as remote and in person collaboration.

Conduct and Expectations:

During the first two classes, we will create a collectively determine list of expectations for me, the professor, and a complementary list of expectations for you, the students. Certainly, part of my work will be to facilitate and liaise between you and the community partner, and part of your work will be to maintain active participation and openness in collaboration. But we will nail these down more concretely in our opening discussion.

Course Requirements

This course will operate in a different register than most with respect to assessment and evaluation, focusing on the quality of the work from a holistic perspective. You will complete assignments throughout the semester, some formal and others informal. You will receive feedback on these assignments from me, your peers, and our community partner. At the end of the semester, you will receive a grade; however, this grade will not be broken down by attributing specific value to individual assignments. Rather, at the beginning of the term, we will collectively decide what constitutes A-level work in this class, and we will create a list of criteria that can be followed in much the same way as a rubric. Throughout the semester you will complete assignments, independently or collaboratively, you will keep a reflection journal documenting your experiences, and you will submit a final self-reflection in the form of a digital storytelling project. I will ask questions and provide feedback that helps to deepen your engagement with the work. At the end of the semester, you will assign a grade for yourself based on this reflection—though I reserve the right to change grades as appropriate. The intention is to help you focus on the work and learning being done rather than the end result. Ideally, it will allow you to work in a more organic way instead of attempting to produce the work you think I expect you to. It will also facilitate flexibility in the collaboration process, allowing you to contribute to the best of your ability using your unique set of skills rather than holding you to an imagined universal standard. We will discuss the details of this process in our first class.

Formal Assessments

- **Weekly reflection journal:** You will keep a weekly reflection journal documenting your collaborations with our community partner and your peers. This journal should demonstrate the ways in which you work through the conceptual and practical problems encountered in the process. It should be rigorous and honest, and it should incorporate

both ideas and experience, theory and practice. Some entries will respond to a question that I pose to you based on the trajectory of our research and community engagement.

- **Comparative analysis and presentation:** You will engage in an individual or small group project that assesses the possibility of implementing a similar grassroots organization and/or project or initiative in London, ON. To make this assessment, you will need to understand something about the similarities and differences between Detroit and London, particularly in terms of history, economics, politics, geography, and demographics. Each individual or group will investigate one aspect of this comparison and present it to the class virtually or in-person on a collectively determined date.
- **Community-based project or initiative:** Throughout the semester, as a class you will work closely with our selected grassroots organization to develop a project or initiative that serves the needs of the organization. The parameters of this project will be determined in conversation with this organization. However, we will do some brainstorming about possibilities in the second class.
- **Digital storytelling project (critical reflection):** At the end of the semester, you will submit a critical self-reflection on the research process, the work done with partnered community organizations, and the development, design and delivery of the community-based project or initiative. This reflection will take the form of a 2-3-minute digital storytelling project. The aim is to situate the experience of large project development and community engagement within the broader context of local responses to the global problem of food insecurity.
- **CURL Conference Presentation:** As a group, we will present the outcome of our community collaboration at the Centre for Undergraduate Research Learning (CURL) Spring Conference. We will discuss this further in class, but you can find details for the event on the CURL website: <https://www.huronresearch.ca/curl/conferences/>

Course Texts

There are no required texts for this course. I will be posting relevant readings weekly in the Resources section of our OWL site, which can be accessed using the left-hand toolbar. These readings will be based on the trajectory of our community engagement and comparative analysis, so will not be determined in advance.

Course Schedule (TBD)