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Collaborative Course Design: A Contribution Toward a Radical Food Systems Pedagogy

by Michael Classens, Nadia Gericke, Amara Digout, Aden Fisher, Madeleine Frechette, Christina Wong

FROZEN FOODS WITH STRING BEANS, NEW YORK - 1977, IRVING PENN. COPYRIGHT THE IRVING PENN FOUNDATION

Conversation is the central location of the democratic educator.

- bell hooks, 2003, 44

Introduction

The relatively nascent (sub)field of critical food systems pedagogy has developed, in part, through a critique of existing approaches to teaching and learning about food and agriculture. Early on, Jordan et al., (2014) for example concluded that conventional food systems pedagogy was too narrowly conceived and rigidly disciplinarian. Perhaps most damningly, Jordan et al., (2014) and others criticized conventional food systems pedagogy as being abstracted from broader social, economic, cultural, political, and ecological contexts that shape food systems in the first place (Sumner, 2016; Valley et al., 2017). Given the importance of matrices of power in shaping food access, and the inequitably distributed socio-ecological devastation wrought by the capital-intensive, industrialized food system, these omissions are inexcusable at best, and dangerous at worst.

In response to both the inadequacy of conventional food systems education, and the urgency of attending to the global polycrisis – including the climate crisis, biodiversity collapse, geopolitical instability, and ongoing structural violence and oppression – critical food systems scholars have developed a range of approaches "not just concerned with any type of change but with change that addresses power and injustice" (Sumner, 2016, xix). Meek and Tarlau (2016) insist that food systems educators must reckon with an explicitly political choice to "use education to reproduce the current food system, raise awareness about the inequities of the food system, or *utilize education as a means to form individuals who are determined to transform the food system*" (p. 246, emphasis added). These recent scholarly interventions gesture towards a critical food systems pedagogy praxis within which theorizing socioecological justice and equity within food systems directly informs curricular innovations. We discuss this in more detail below but suffice to say for now this work is resulting in "fundamental changes…in both *what* and *how* we teach" (Galt, Clark, and Parr 2012, 43. Emphasis original). Our intervention builds on this work through experimentation with *how we design what to teach*.

We draw inspiration from the above cohort of critical food systems pedagogues and seek to build upon and add to their contributions by thinking about how critical food systems pedagogy can be advanced by challenging the hierarchies of power within universities and colleges that antagonize the pursuit of transformative education practice. We take seriously Allan Sears' (2003, 23) contention that conventional education "does not prepare students to take power. On the contrary, it prepares them to be ruled" – and ask, what might a class that prepares students to take power look like? In these days of what Kai Heron (2023, np) has recently described as "capitalist catastrophism and eco-apartheid", we also take inspiration from Raymond Williams' words, and see in them a pedagogical provocation: "To be truly radical is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing" (1989, 118).

Our specific, modest intervention focuses on engaging students, in conversation, in the process of curriculum co-design (Bovil et al., 2011; Bovil et al., 2016; Woolmer et al., 2016). We explore this through a case study of co-designing The Edible Campus, a combined 4th year and graduate level course offered through the School of the Environment at The University of Toronto that situates students and campuses within the context of broader movements for more ecologically rational and socially-just food systems. Ultimately our approach to curriculum co-design was meant to interrupt and reimagine what Elizabeth Ellsworth observed over 30 years ago as the "business-as-usual – that is, prevailing social relations – in a university classroom" (1989, 299).

The University of Toronto is a very large urban university located in Toronto, Ontario, with three campuses – one downtown and two suburban campuses east (Scarborough) and west (Mississauga) of the downtown campus respectively. There are several faculty members involved in food systems research across the tri-campus, and a minor program in food studies at University of Toronto, Scarborough campus, though there is no department of food studies or agriculture at The University of Toronto. There are many campus food systems alternatives (Classens, Adam, and Srebot, 2023) – from a 10-acre campus farm at University of Toronto, Scarborough campus, and smaller food growing spaces to student-run food banks and cafes scattered across all three campuses. The University of Toronto is also home to the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), a pre-eminent institute of critical pedagogy and teacher training. Dr. Jennifer Sumner, considered one of the founders of critical food systems pedagogy, is a faculty member at OISE.

In the section immediately following this brief introduction we summarize the contours of critical food systems pedagogy. We outline current and ongoing threats to higher education, and summarize scholarship that problematizes, though ultimately remains optimistic about the university as a site of socio-ecological transformation. Next, we review literature on curriculum co-design and discuss how this practice can serve to undermine damaging prevailing trends on campus. After this, we describe our case study of The Edible Campus and provide some insight into the co-design process, and what resulted from this collaboration. We end with a brief reflection on the limits and possibilities of curricular co-production as we understand them.

(Critical) Food Systems Education & The Antagonisms (and Opportunities) Within Higher Education

Up until relatively recently, there was a notable absence of scholarly interest at the intersection of food and pedagogy. As Jennifer Sumner observed, "those who study learning have not often turned their gaze toward food, while those who study food have generally overlooked the learning associated with it" (2016, p. xix). This lack of critical reflexivity has functioned, in part, to reproduce teaching and learning practices within the context of food and agriculture that perpetuated socio-ecologically damaging narratives and practices. This is not surprising given that, in many ways, the parameters of teaching and learning about food in North America were established within the context of the Morrill Land-Grant Act in 1862. The Act was a key driver in expanding the territorialization and political-economic project of settler colonialism in North America (Harvey, 2021). The Act enabled a land grab of nearly 11 million acres of land in the US alone. Similar initiatives throughout the settler colonial world resulted in the theft of an additional roughly 4 million acres spread across the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand world, to establish and finance a fledgling higher education sector. In exchange, 'land grab universities' were instructed by the Act to "teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts" (Morrill Land-Grant Act, as quoted in Sayre, 2022, p. 6).

For over a century and half land grab institutions in the North American context have been riven with colonial, modernist, and industrial logics designed to maintain (settler) colonial power (Palmer, 2023) – and these logics have no doubt shaped the contours of food systems pedagogies. By and large, food systems education remains beholden to commitments to a productivist paradigm focused on the maximization of agricultural profit. This creates a self-referential and self-fulfilling circularity wherein institutes of higher education train students very narrowly; those graduates bring this to bear on the industrialized and capital-intensive food system; and this, in turn, further reinforces the blinkered training regime. As Will Valley and colleagues put it, "Traditional agriculture and food-related curricula often follow linear, cause-and-effect rationalities that focus on a limited range of objectives (e.g., agricultural yield, micronutrient intake, or return on investment)" (2018, p. 468). To be clear, these foci are preferred by the industrialized model of agriculture. The political economy and financialization of agriculture demand a reductive focus on yields, which when coupled with state subsidies, results in a (relatively) cheap supply of food. Conventional agriculture pedagogy underwrites this system by stripping away the broader context within which food systems and socio-ecologies are reproduced.

More recently there have been encouraging signs of a reimagined food systems pedagogy – one that embraces interdisciplinarity and ontological and epistemological equity (WITHHELD; Valley et al., 2017). Valley and colleagues, for example, find that notions of collective action and systems thinking are key features of four sustainable food systems education programs in North America (2017; 470). Meanwhile in Canada, a recent special issue of *Canadian Food Studies* comprising 17 articles documents how teachers and program administrators are forging new directions in a distinctly *critical* food studies pedagogy. The collection documents programs and practices from across the country, sketching the contours of a food systems education informed by commitments to decolonization, racial justice, intergenerational and arts-based learning, interdisciplinarity, and ultimately, socio-ecological change of and through food systems (Classens and Sumner, 2021).

We don't mean to be too hastily celebratory – but rather we argue that the recent interventions are suggestive of a meaningful trend of food systems scholars taking seriously the transformative potential of food systems education. In the process, commitments of sustainable and just food systems as espoused by activists for decades – democratization, empowerment of under-represented voices, social and ecological change – are being woven in the fabric of critical food systems pedagogy.

There are, of course, counter-tends that threaten to undo the progress already made, and halt future innovations. The incursion of neoliberal logic within academic spaces beginning over 40 years ago, has through the passage of time, become normalized. Increasing faculty-student ratios, precaritization of labour, increasing tuition costs, customer-centricity, and education instrumentality and entrepreneurialism are all now ossified operational logics of higher education (Cornelius-Bell and Bell, 2020; Sears, 2003). Henry Giroux observes, in no uncertain terms, the toxic impact of neoliberalism within the academy:

> [I]t legitimates a culture of harsh competitiveness and wages war against public values and those public spheres that contest the rule and ideology of capital. It saps the democratic foundation of solidarity, degrades collaboration, and tears up all forms of social obligation (2023, np.)

The more recent trend of creeping fascism on campus is perhaps more alarming. So-called 'anti-woke' legislation introduced by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis seeks a total ban on state funding for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs. At a press conference to announce the proposed legislation, DeSantis was clear: "Florida's getting out of that game. You want to do things like gender ideology? Go to Berkeley. Go to some of those other places." (DeSantis, quoted in Bridges, 2023, np.) As of the spring of 2023, similar legislation has been introduced in over 20 other US states (Lu et al., 2023). More recently in Canada there have been glimpses of a discursive move to unite fascistic and neoliberal logics. In an op-ed published in the National Post, a professor at Augustine College in Ottawa opined, "To stop the poisonous radicalism within academia, privatize universities" (Robson, 2023, np).

In some ways, none of this new. Lauren Shepherd's (2023) recent work demonstrates how the right has, for decades, seen campuses as centrally important terrain in their reactionary political-economic and cultural project. And certainly, the co-opting of student movements and genuinely radical alternatives on campus remains on ongoing spectre within this context (see Brady, 2020; Dolhinow, 2020). However, considering the urgent need to transform food systems and the vitally important role of critical food systems pedagogy within this context, the stakes of the struggle to realize the campus as a site of transformation have perhaps never been higher. Encouragingly, the evolution of critical food systems pedagogy, concerned fundamentally with socio-ecological transformation, has flourished despite this antagonistic milieu.

Co-creative Course Design and Alternative World Making

As students are continually re-cast as consumers in the contemporary academy, including them in the (co)production of curriculum and pedagogical design is an important exercise in imaging the university otherwise. Bovill and colleagues (2016) suggest that co-creation occurs "when staff and students work collaboratively with one another to create components of curricula and and/or pedagogical approaches" (196). While there has been an uptick in scholarly and practitioner interest in curriculum co-creation in the last decade or so, the idea itself is not new (Bovil and Woolmer, 2019). Over 100 years ago John Dewey compellingly made the case for democratized approaches to curriculum development, which in turn informs key aspects of critical pedagogy as defined by Freire, Giroux, and others (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1993; Giroux, 1981).

At the heart of curriculum co-creation is a desire to disrupt conventional power dynamics that reify the teacher-student dichotomy while remedying the fact that students often lack agency over their education (Mann, 2008; Bovil et al., 2016). For Healey et al. (2014) reimagining curriculum design is fundamentally about the (re)distribution of power in higher ed. There are many noted benefits of this approach, from gaining a deeper understanding of learning and improving the classroom experience, through to improved enthusiasm for learning and developing a stronger sense of self (Bovill, Cook-Sather and Felton, 2011; Cook-Slather et al, 2014).

However, beyond this there is also an intrinsic, democratizing value to the process of co-creating curriculum (McMahon and Portelli, 2004). Given the centrally important role students have had within the context of broader movements for socio-ecological transformation for decades (Rhoades, 2019), we argue that intentionally making space for students to transform higher ed through curriculum co-development is a promising strategy. Rogers and colleagues note the role of students' "imagination or dreaming as an untapped resource for alternative worldmaking" (2023, 145). Mirra and Garcia (2020, 297), meanwhile, consider 'speculative civic literacy' that supports students to re-story "public life in ways that honor their experiences, relationships, and dreams for the future".

Bovil and colleagues (2016) make a useful distinction between co-creation *of* the curriculum and co-creation *in* the curriculum. The latter occurs when students are engaged in the process of co-design *during* the course. As an example, in an article titled "No syllabus, no problem", Connell (2022) describes the process of co-creating the syllabus with students in his first-year course, Food, Agriculture & Society. Connell facilitates a process by which students directly inform what topics, under the broad rubric of food, agriculture and society, are attended to within the course. Co-creation *of* the curriculum, on the other hand, is when the co-design process occurs before the course takes place (Bovil, 2019). We would consider our project, as described in detail below, as a case of co-creation of the curriculum. We move now to that discussion.

Methods

The first two authors met during an agricultural walking tour of the downtown campus of The University of Toronto. The following year (during the 2022-23 academic year) Nadia enrolled in one of Michael's 4th year classes. At the same time, Michael was in the early stages of planning for the co-creation process for The Edible Campus, which was to be introduced in the fall of 2023. The general idea for a course focused broadly on campuses and food systems issues emerged from Michael's research over the past few years (Classens, Adams, and Srebot, 2023; Classens and Burton, 2023; Classens and Sumner, 2022; Classens *et al*., 2021). Having worked and learned with student activists throughout that time, Michael was motivated to cede power, as it were, and to engage in a process of co-creation with students. In late 2022 Michael hired Nadia as a research collaborator to begin working on the process of co-producing The Edible Campus. The next four authors were among the first cohort of graduate students enrolled in The Edible Campus.

Michael is a white settler, cis-gendered, straight male and Assistant Professor – Teaching Stream in the School of the Environment at The University of Toronto. Nadia is a white-passing, non-binary, assigned female at birth of German and Chicano-Mexican (Spanish and Indigenous) ancestry who recently graduated with degrees in Environmental Science and Sociocultural Anthropology from The University of Toronto. Aden is a settler Canadian of English and Indian background who recently earned a Master of Environment and Sustainability degree from The University of Toronto. Christina is a woman-identifying second-generation Chinese Canadian who recently earned a Master of Health Sciences degree from The University of Toronto. Amara is an Indigenous youth with Métis and mixed European settler ancestry, originally from the unceded territories of the Lekwungen speaking peoples. She is currently an MEd student in the Social Justice Education program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and The University of Toronto. Madeleine is a

white settler youth with Irish and French ancestry, born in Toronto, Ontario. She recently earned a Master of Environment and Sustainability degree from The University of Toronto.

The first two authors held collaborative co-creation sessions with people at The University of Toronto – one open to staff, postdocs, and faculty members whose work somehow intersects with food systems issues, broadly defined. Three additional 2hr sessions were held with student organizers, activists, and those curious about food systems issues on campus. We focus our findings here on the latter three sessions. The co-creation events took place in late March and early April 2023, each lasted about two hours, and each was catered by a small, family-run campus eatery. In total about 45 students were engaged through this process. The first and third sessions were held in a relatively nondescript room on the downtown campus, the aesthetic and feel of which would be quite familiar to many of this journal's readers. The second session, by serendipity and some last-minute adjustments, was held at Victoria College at The University of Toronto's downtown campus. At the time Climate Justice UofT, a student-run organization, was holding an occupation of a building at Victoria College to compel the College's administration to commit to fully divesting from fossil fuel investments. We saw holding one of our collaborative co-creation sessions in conjunction with the occupation as an opportunity to both show solidarity with Climate Justice UofT while perhaps engaging other allies in our Edible Campus conversations. Unsurprisingly, this was the liveliest and most uplifting of the three sessions.

Nadia led the discussions, with Michael playing a lesser facilitation role. The discussions were intentionally designed to be free-flowing and open to allow the conversation to evolve based on the composition, interests, and expertise of the participants. We had several prompting questions meant to solicit from participants their perspectives on all design elements of the course. However, we did not see this as an inventory of questions that we needed to get through. We also didn't approach these sessions as needing to specifically inform discrete aspects of curriculum development – that is to say, we didn't ask our co-creators for particular input on assignment design, readings, and the like. Rather, we wanted to create the conditions for a relatively unstructured and free-flowing conversation to invite creativity and reflection beyond conventional assumptions about what a course ought to be. We also wanted our co-creators to take the discussion in directions they felt were appropriate. We elaborate on the discussions and identify key themes in the section immediately below.

The sessions were audio recorded and transcripts of the recordings were generated and uploaded to NVivo. The transcripts were then inductively and iteratively coded by Michael for key themes. This initial thematic analysis was shared with the co-authors and refined collaboratively. The final syllabus was designed by Michael and the course was first taught in the fall of 2023. It is important to note that any overlap between the group of students who supported the design of The Edible Campus, and those who took the class, is purely incidental.

Conversation Key Themes

The conversations were rich and vigorous, with the collaborating participants providing many insights and identifying many challenges. As discussed in the final section, not everything raised at the sessions could be integrated into the initial course design. Some of the discussions went beyond questions of course co-development, though provided the authors with content on which to reflect in the future. We identify three themes below that directly inform various aspects of the course design - food access, time/collectivity, and the campus-scape - and discuss each in turn below.

Food Access

Perhaps the clearest theme to emerge from the collaborative co-design sessions was a shared desire to realize enhanced food access on campus. Much of this discussion was rooted firmly in the firsthand experience many of the students have with food injustice/insecurity. For example, a deep dissatisfaction with campus food services was common across all three sessions. This is perhaps not surprising given the corporatization of campus food services across North America and the now-normalized paradigm that food services ought to be profitable (Bohunickey et al., 2019; Martin and Andrée, 2012). This has led to conditions in which low food quality and high food cost is the norm, leading to alarming levels of postsecondary student food insecurity (Maynard et al., 2018; Nazim et al., 2019). Beyond this, the declining balance model of student meal plans creates a perverse pressure on students to spend the money or risk losing it at the end of the semester. It should be added that there is very little transparency with respect to where the money students have left on their cards at the end of the semester goes. One student recounted a story about her friend:

> My friend…had like a thousand dollars left by the end of the school year. And then…she kept buying like venti cappuccinos from Starbucks or she bought all her friends bulk chocolates even though like nobody liked this chocolate and she doesn't even like it herself, but she was just trying to spend money…So it's so absurd how the system functions and it's like you have to pay for something you don't want and you're just putting money in, supporting the things you don't want to support and you don't care about but there's no alternative (Student participant).

Another noted;

> In the last period of my freshman year, I bought 200 cans of soda drinks from the vending machine and from the cafeteria just to spend all of the money. I also heard someone actually is paying for food just to give away to homeless people. I think that this is really nice, but somehow it's also problematic (Student participant).

For some students, changes to campus food services during the height of the pandemic exacerbated their food costs and pushed them closer to food insecurity. At least one of the dining halls on campus moved from an all-you-care-to-eat model to a pay-per-weight model during the pandemic. As one student recalled:

> They switched up the pricing system partway through in Covid where they were like, you're no longer able to have all you can eat. You have to pay for each thing that you buy. So you have to pay for a slice of bread, you have to pay for an orange, you have to pay for peanut butter, you have to pay for everything like this (Student participant).

Another student, a member of a housing co-operative, talked about how their community was organizing for their own food security:

> We've recently started a bulk food purchasing program, so we can actually, through community solidarity, we all pitch in and purchase food together at rates that are much cheaper than what grocery stores offer. So that's one way we're actively trying to deal with food insecurity (Student participant).

Exacerbating student challenges with accessing food is the lack of cooking amenities on campus, even for those students who live in residence. Many students noted that they knew where there was a microwave on campus, but even then there weren't enough of them available. Access to fridges and kitchens, many students felt, would reduce their food costs and enhance their food security. One student noted their struggles to find food storage space for a student-run food bank:

> The Engineers Without Borders food bank…their current problem is actually finding somewhere to store the food. Not that there isn't a need for it, not that the school hasn't recognized that food insecurity is a serious issue among the students, it's actually just getting permission to use the space and use the resources to help people (Student participant).

Time / Collectivity

Another closely related theme to emerge from the conversations had to do with the amount of time students have to prepare their own food, but also, to engage in advocacy and activism. As Evans & Roggio (2023, 13) acknowledge, the neoliberalization of higher education has created the paradigm of "academia as business". Within this model, students are treated as consumers, and as a result there is a deep pressure toward instrumentality. The principles of slow scholarship, having time to learn, cook, and advocate together, are all incongruent with the culture of academic capitalism. Bell and Lewis Jr (2023, 10) define academic capitalism as "the pressure for academic organizations (and faculty) to act entrepreneurially, forcing investment into 'productive' and profitable activities that gain the most return". While Bell and Lewis Jr don't explicitly include students in their analysis, it seems clear from our work that students do feel an intense pressure to spend their time doing things that are (seen to be) 'productive'. As one student put it:

> Cooking for other people and cooking with people is such a beautiful thing and it honestly sucks that time scarcity makes it so that it's difficult to just have a relaxed meal with people and cook together (Student participant).

Within this context, there is an opportunity to reimagine fundamental assumptions about course activities and how, and whether, they are valorized. As an example, one student wondered whether activism and collectivity could be integrated into course work. "We have a lack of time… I would give students time to participate in activism. I think [a course] could be a great place to take collective action" (Student participant).

Another student put a similar sentiment in slightly different terms. They understood opportunities for collective work as an antidote to the pathologies of possessive individualism within academia, and beyond.

> In general it can be very isolating for a lot of people. Um, because you know, in general our society doesn't really lean towards community. There's a lot of sense of individualism and of climbing the ladder. But cultivating a philosophy of community and that people should be looking out for each other, I think that's something that can actually be really powerful (Student participant).

The Campus-scape

One final theme worth briefly summarizing here is how students thought about the campus environment. While the physical campus environment is often dismissed as simply a passive backdrop to learning, it is in fact a centrally important pedagogical tool. Magolda (2001), for example, notes how the physical campus is often framed unproblematically, and curated with official institutional narratives, within the context of campus tours. These tours are part of a broader sales pitch to students – but they are also inherently pedagogical. Alternative campus tours – those that challenge the dominant narratives of the campus-scape are often organized by student groups, but have also been integrated as assignments in courses (see Classens *et al*., 2021; Magolda, 2001; Sandberg, 2015). One student articulated the rarely acknowledged structural conditions of campus land;

> The lands that students are on are lands that are colonial, stolen from Indigenous people and continuously gentrified…[the land] never really belong to [the university] in the first place, but they continue to profit from it (Student participant).

Many other students felt that university lands ought to be used in ways that depart dramatically from the paradigmatic institutional logic. For example, carefully manicured grounds, low-cropped grass, and low-maintenance shrubbery are all hallmarks of the contemporary campus. However, in light of various concerns – the use of pesticides and non-native species, urban biodiversity loss, climate change, and food insecurity to name a few – many students feel that university grounds could be put to better use. As one student put it:

> Universities are unique in that they tend to have a lot of land and a lot of land that isn't really put to use in my mind. Like in the quad. It's very manicured but there's no way to sit there. It's a beautiful quad but there's nothing to do. It's just wasted (Student participant).

Others noted specifically that the wasted land could be used for food growing.

> I guess my ideal version of things would be that every living space would have some space that people could use communally to just grow their own food, share it together, have time to cook meals together (Student participant).

The Edible Campus

The conversations during the co-creation sessions directly informed all design aspects of the course. These are summarized in Figure 1 and briefly elaborated below. It is important to note that various institutional rules and conventions remain regulating factors. For example, the course is bound by expectations with respect to structure such as the number of hours of class time per week (3 hours) and how many weeks the class runs (12 weeks). Beyond this, and more substantively, issues such as the requirement to assign grades as a means of assessing student learning limited the extent to which the course could be pedagogically experimental. Still, the milieu of the first author's home unit, and the general institutional milieu of The University of Toronto afforded ample opportunity for creative design choices.

While there isn't space to outline the entire syllabus here, in this section we briefly provide an overview of the content and assignment structure. Following this, we provide a reflection on one of the core assignments in the course that attempts to address the three themes noted above.

With respect to content, the course situates students and campuses within the context of broader movements for more ecologically rational and socially-just food systems. Weekly topics include colonialism, land, and the campus; the political economy of campus food systems; student food (in)security and health; labour issues in campus food provision; campus food systems alternatives; campus food growing spaces; student/campus-based food movements; campus-community partnerships; and critical food systems pedagogy. In-class sessions featured unionionized food service works on campus, a PhD student conducting research on meal plans on campus, and a panel discussion with student and recently graduated activists. We spent 5 of the 12 weeks outside of the conventional classroom. We visited the UTSC Campus Farm at The University of Toronto Scarborough and did a tour of the multiple food growing spaces at the downtown campus. We also spent three weeks – the first and last weeks, and one week about halfway through the semester – cooking and eating together.

The assignments for the course included:

Action One-pagers

Working in groups of 3-5 people, students developed one-page documents meant to provide practical guidance on a variety of issues relevant to those organizing for a more just and sustainable campuses. As an example, one group developed a document designed to guide student groups in identifying and obtaining funding for their work.

Theme	Course content	Assignment
Food Access	• Cooking together in class • Content on student food insecurity • Content on meal plans and campus food services • Content on food campus food growing spaces	• Critical mapping project • Action one-pagers • Edible Campus Symposium
Time / collectivity	• Cooking together in class • Collective organizing • Content on labour organizing on campus • Content on student activism	• Collegiality and collaboration assignment • Action one-pagers • Edible Campus Symposium
The campus-scape	• Content on intersections of colonialism, food systems, and the campus • Tours of growing spaces on campus • Content on 'alternative' campus food scape	• Mapping project • Edible Campus Symposium

FIGURE 1. COURSE CONTENT AND ASSIGNMENTS

Another group, drawing directly from some of their group members' experience, produced a document to guide students strategizing sit-in actions on how to include access to food in their planning.

Mapping the Campus Food Scape

Following Fanshel and Iles' (2020/2022) mapping pedagogy, the undergraduate students working in small groups were asked to co-create maps documenting various elements of our own campus foodscape. The outputs included, for example, a map of food growing spaces on campus and a map of food services across campus and whether the workers at each establishment were unionized.

Collegiality and Collaboration

To challenge the individualism held in such high esteem in many academic spaces, and to create a collegial and collaborative co-learning environment, all students were asked to keep a list of brief reflections summarizing their own acts of support, mutual aid, and gratitude within the class over the course of the semester.

Learning Reflection

All students were asked to write a brief learning reflection on their experience in the course.

The Edible Campus Symposium

The graduate students in the course were asked to organize an event to bring together a diversity of campus food systems actors, stakeholders, activists, and allied community partners. This provided students an opportunity to engage explicitly in praxis – to work toward organizing a more just and sustainable campus foodscape while building solidarity with allied groups on campus. We reflect on this assignment immediately below.

The Edible Campus Symposium

The inaugural Tri-Campus Food Symposium was held December 1 and 2, 2023. This event was planned by a group of four graduate students (last four authors) in The Edible Campus in collaboration with the Hart House Farm Committee, a student group focused on food justice on campus, and beyond. The summer before the course began, the first author applied for a small grant ($4,600) and had preliminary discussions with members of the Hart House Farm Committee about collaborating on organizing the symposium. Additional funding was provided by The Hart House Farm Committee and the University of Toronto Environmental Resource Network (UTERN), a student-run environmental justice organization on campus. The assignment was framed as an action-learning opportunity that would provide students with real-world organizing experience. The assignment was also an exercise in praxis - theories and concepts from the course informed the material planning of the event, which the students refined through reflection and further action.

The symposium included two keynote presentations, four discussion panels (one on growing food on campus; one featuring unionized food service workers in the lead-up to bargaining; one, an interdisciplinary discussion focused on defining the 'edible campus'; and one on decolonizing food systems on camps) a seed saving workshop, a tea making workshop, a Black & Indigenous Food Sovereignties workshop, a lunch drop-in discussion, a series of student socials, and plenty of free food, including two communal lunches. Roughly 100 people – students, staff, community members, and faculty – attended the two-day event.

The symposium began with opening remarks from Bonnie Jane Maracle, Wolf Clan, Mohawk Nation at Tyendinaga Territory, who is the Traditional Teacher in Residence at First Nations House at The University of Toronto. In her remarks, Bonnie Jane asked attendees to consider, what is the duty of the human being? How are we obligated to our relations? The authors understood this as an invitation to consider how we might contribute to the improvement of our own campus food systems. The symposium provided the opportunity for many students and allied groups across all three campuses, as well as community members from neighboring institutions, to think deeply about this question, and to build and strengthen networks.

Closing reflection

We live in dire times dominated by intersecting and compounding socio-ecological and geo-political crises - times that desperately require us to imagine the world - and the campus - otherwise. One could argue that we need what (some) universities aspire to be now more than ever. We don't want to romanticize a halcyon period within the academy - we recognize the various and intersectional regressive structural forces that are inherent to the historical and contemporary fabric of the campus. However, we remain optimistic about the potential for the campus to be a crucible of socio-ecological change.

Collaborative course design is one intervention, however modest, that may support the realization of a more radical food studies pedagogy. We return to our motivating question, inspired by Sears (2003) - what might a class that prepares students to take power look like? The answer, at least in part, is by empowering them with increased control over their education. This isn't to suggest that the creativity and expertise of course instructors be banished all together from the process of curriculum design. Instead, we argue for a Freirian re-calibration of sorts, that moves closer to the teacher-student, student-teacher paradigm. This approach would equally bring the creativity and expertise of students to bear on course design while providing a pedagogically enriching experience for students.

Implicit in the conception of this project is the notion that critical food studies can benefit from the rich history of critical pedagogical scholarship. Galt, Clark and Parr (2021, 43) have made clear that the increasing cross-pollination between food studies and critical pedagogy has resulted in important changes in the content and approach to teaching food studies. Our work builds on this intersection to insist that critical food scholars ought to consider other ways that critical pedagogical scholarship

can inform and develop critical food studies. If we take seriously the provocation from Meek and Tarlau (2016) to consider how we might use food studies education to inspire and equip students to transform the food system, experimenting with how we develop curriculum seems necessary. Empowering students as co-creators is a move toward democratizing food studies education while furthering embedding some of the principles of critical pedagogy within food studies. We do not mean to suggest that all critical food studies courses must necessarily adopt the practices and principles of critical pedagogy. However, we do note that the intermingling between critical pedagogy and critical food studies enabled the development of an essential, trenchant critique of existing approaches to teaching about food and agriculture. This work has exposed the ways in which conventional approaches to food studies pedagogy simply reproduce the social and ecological harm wrought by the capital-intensive industrial food system. At the same time, the emergent hybrid of critical food pedagogy informs ways of teaching (and ways of designing what and how we teach) that aspire to imagine, enact, and realize more just and sustainable food systems.

We'd be remiss to omit the limitations of our particular approach. First, while students informed the design of the course, it wasn't the cohort of students who took the course. In other words, co-creation *of* the curriculum, as we undertook it, presents a number of practical challenges with respect to (mis)alignment of timelines. The process to co-design this course - which took about 6 months all told - occurred before the course was even approved through university governance. By the time the course is officially on the books, it's too late to engage in co-creation of the curriculum with the students enrolled in the course. One possible solution would be to use a sufficiently flexible special topics course shell, common at most institutions, to avoid the process of having a new course approved through institutional governance.

The co-creation processes as we undertook it afforded the time and space to engage in generative, exploratory discussions unincumbered by the conventional trappings of a course. For example, the teacher-student power dynamics inherent to the classroom were subverted both by orienting the co-creation process outside of a course, and by having Nadia as the lead facilitator. Within our approach, grade dynamics were completely eliminated. The participants were co-creators of the course, not students taking the course for credit. We suspect this allowed for discussions that were candid, free-flowing and authentic.

Interestingly, many of the participants noted that they'd like the course to not be graded in the traditional sense. This highlights a limitation of our approach – the inability to implement specific suggestions due to structural limitations. There is a rich body of literature demonstrating the benefits of 'ungrading', which include deeper learning experiences, stronger sense of collectivity in the classroom, and encouraging students to take risks, among others (Gorichanaz, 2022; Hasinoff et al., 2024; Spurlock, 2023). However, ungrading remains a relatively uncommon, and somewhat controversial pedagogical approach, for which there is little precedent in the first author's academic unit. Regrettably the first author didn't have the time to navigate the complex institutional milieu to propose that the course be ungraded. However, this remains a possibility for future iterations of the course.

Relatedly, the co-creation sessions generated far more ideas than could be incorporated into a single course, even where structural limitations are not an issue. The rich dialogue and diverse perspectives shared during the sessions demonstrated that students do indeed have much to say about both food systems and pedagogy. While much from the co-creation sessions were not incorporated into the inaugural syllabus, the first author has returned to the transcripts and analysis as he revises the syllabus for future years.

Ultimately the collaborative co-creation process afforded an opportunity for pedagogical experimentation towards the ends of engaging and empowering students in curriculum development. Neither our process nor the results were perfect - but this was never the point. As we struggle with the existential crisis of higher ed within the compounding context of global polycrisis, collaborative experimentation that centres social and environmental justice seems nevertheless a promising tactical intervention.

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Michael Classens is Assistant Professor - Teaching Stream and Associate Undergraduate Director in the School of the Environment at The University of Toronto.

Nadia Gericke (they/them) is a recent graduate of the University of Toronto working various jobs in urban agriculture and helping out with a local Food Not Bombs distro group. When they're not working, the love to cook and do hobbies with their friends, like play sports and board games.

Aden Fisher has a Master's degree in Environment & Sustainability and a Bachelor of Science from the University of Toronto. He is currently a research and teaching assistant at the university studying food system sustainability, social justice activism, and food-climate policy at the School of the Environment.

Christina Wong is a graduate of the Master of Health Science in Translational Research program in the Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathobiology at the University of Toronto.

Amara Digout is a Métis graduate student in the department of Social Justice Education at OISE and is interested in topics of Indigenous food sovereignty, urban agriculture, land-based pedagogies, and decolonization. She is originally from Victoria B.C. and currently pursuing a thesis on Indigenous community experiences with campus growing spaces.

Madeleine Frechette is white settler youth from Toronto, Ontario. She recently completed her Master of Environment & Sustainability (MES) at the University of Toronto and is currently working full-time as an Outdoor Educator for the Pine Project, Ontario's leading nature connection organization.