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Building a food studies program: On-the-ground reflections from Syracuse University

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Abstract

Syracuse University (SU) is currently building a food studies program within the newly formed Department of Public Health, Food Studies, and Nutrition. In this essay we provide an overview of our experiences working to establish this food studies program at SU. We reflect on key issues that we struggle with and believe have resonance with and implications in the development of food studies as an academic discipline at other institutions. We briefly outline the emergence of food studies as a distinct area of scholarship, discuss both the opportunities and tensions food studies creates with established disciplines, provide background on the history of food studies at SU, discuss the process of curriculum development, explore the struggles to balance a liberal arts education with professional training, and conclude with some tentative lessons learned thus far in the process.

Keywords

dietetics, food studies, nutrition, program development, public health, social-ecological theory, Syracuse University

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Introduction

In early 2011, Syracuse University (SU) created the Department of Public Health, Food Studies, and Nutrition when the three existing departments of Nutrition; Health and Wellness; and Hospitality were combined. The newly formed department recently hired its first faculty in food studies and is now in the process of creating a food studies program, with the goal of establishing a curriculum in the near future. This reflective essay provides an overview of the ongoing process to establish food studies at SU. We focus on a few of the issues we struggle with and believe have resonance with and implications for the development of food studies as an academic discipline at other institutions. In the sections that follow, we briefly outline the emergence of food studies as a distinct area of scholarship, discuss both the opportunities and tensions food studies creates with established disciplines, provide background on the history of food studies at SU, describe the process of curriculum development, explore struggles to balance a liberal arts education with professional training, and conclude with key lessons learned so far through this process.

We write this reflection piece collectively, working to bring together three distinct voices representing different vantage points on food studies at SU. Evan Weissman, the first hire for food studies proper, is a geographer by training and has begun to establish a food studies research and teaching program. Leigh Gantner is an assistant professor of nutrition and registered dietitian with a research program and professional experience in community nutrition and regional food systems. Lutchmie Narine is a scholar in public health and served as the chair of the first food studies hiring committee and as chair of the Department of Health and Wellness as it transitioned to the Department of Public Health, Food Studies, and Nutrition. All three authors are now part of the same department that is developing a yet-to-be-defined food studies program.

Food Studies Emerges

Although food and agriculture have long concerned scholars from a variety of academic disciplines, "food studies"[1] was codified as a distinct academic area when New York University (NYU) established the first food studies program in the late 1990s. Much like the other "studies" that came earlier (e.g., African-American, community, cultural, and women's and gender), food studies brings a variety of scholars from diverse backgrounds together under one field of expertise. Today food studies has become a major focus outside academia as well, with the exploding popular interest in most things related to food, which has helped in part to shape some of the scholarly work in the discipline. As an emerging discipline, food studies is considered an academic "movement" (Nestle & McIntosh, 2010) that is still working to define itself as independent of traditional disciplines. Indeed, many of the issues we struggle with at SU are entwined with efforts to define a distinct food studies. Many food scholars conduct participatory action research that is grounded in efforts to not only better understand agro-food systems, but to transform them in ways beneficial to communities as well (Allen, 2008; Constance, 2009; Cook, et al. 2006; Guthman, 2008; Koc & Dahlberg, 1999; Nestle & McIntosh, 2010).

The above description is only meant to provide the reader with a broad context for the emergence of food studies as we see it; we do not provide an exhaustive history of the food studies movement here. In fact, although there are many foundational texts for food studies (see Nestle & McIntosh, 2010), there are no comprehensive readers or detailed histories of food studies that do justice to the many streams of thought that have led to the emergence of food studies as a discipline. Readers interested in learning more about the history of food studies would do best to consult work such that of Nestle and McIntosh (2010) and Berg, Nestle, and Bentley (2003).

[1] It may be more accurate to use the term "agro-food" studies to fully account for the systems thinking and insistence by food studies scholars on studying agriculture and food as linked, from farm to fork. In this paper we follow the common practice of using "food studies" for the sake of consistency and brevity.

The emerging field of food studies is decidedly interdisciplinary, and scholars from many different traditional disciplines employ a variety of methods and analyses to investigate food as a window into social, cultural, political, and economic processes. This scholarly movement is slowly solidifying into an intellectual community that combines world-views of the social sciences, natural sciences, and humanities in building a unique perspective that examines agriculture and food through a systems approach by focusing on the network of socio-political relationships that extend "from farm to fork" (and beyond). The food system is defined as "the set of activities and relationships that interact to determine what [and] by what methods and for whom food is produced and distributed" (Fine, 1998, p. 3). Sarah Whatmore (1995) outlines the food system and identifies points of analysis by linking knowledge, production, and consumption through four sectors: (1) the agri-technology industry, (2) the farming industry, (3) the food industry, and (4) food consumption. Although much previous academic research focused predominately on the intricacies of a particular sector, some scholars and departments (e.g., in nutrition, agriculture, and the social sciences) have long considered food as a *system* or *process,* including the social, political, and economic contexts of food from production through consumption. Historically, these efforts were scattered; food studies finally brings them together. The faculty in our newly formed department at SU includes scholars from nutrition and public health, and we are now developing a systems approach by connecting distinct perspectives, adding additional disciplinary approaches, and centering these efforts on food.

Placing the analytic focus on food in a more holistic perspective provides coherence and, as Whatmore (2000) explains, facilitates better understandings of farming not as a discrete activity, but as connected to a longer "agro-food chain" that stretches well beyond the farm gate. This broader understanding also seeks to include the social, psychological, and public health context within which both the academic and lay public now consider food.

From this broader perspective, three critical issues have emerged as foci of food studies: questions of nature, food consumption, and the body. Agricultural production is uniquely tied to nature, and the industrialization of agriculture has prompted questions regarding its environmental impacts; consumption of food is intricately tied to social constructions and cultural meanings; and the body (of humans and animals) is a scale intricately woven into agro-food systems through processes such as the bio-engineering, poisoning, and/or nourishing of bodies (Freidberg, 2003; Watts, 2000; Whatmore, 1995, 2000).

In his presidential address to the 2008 annual joint meetings of the Agriculture, Food, and Human Values Society and the Association for the Study of Food in Society, the two most prominent food studies professional organizations in the United States, Doug Constance (2009) traced the emergence of food studies by linking four sequential but overlapping questions that drive current food research: (1) agrarian, (2) environmental, (3) food, and (4) emancipatory. The "agrarian question"[2] focuses on the relationship between capitalism and agriculture, and explores the uniqueness of agricultural production.[3] Building on Rachel Carson's (1962) public critique of widespread post-war pesticide use, the environmental question explores the environmental impacts of the food system in general, and agricultural production in particular. The food question critically examines human health impacts of agro-food — the scholarly focus on "quality"[4] — and alternative food systems (or "alternative food networks") as a response to poor food quality. Finally, the emancipatory question builds on the previous three, which all identify barriers to true alternatives to industrialized agriculture, by focusing on the development of sustainable and just food systems. "More specifically," Constance (2009, p. 9) explains, the

[2] We follow the literature in referring to "the agrarian question" in the singular, even though there are really multiple and interrelated agrarian question*s* regarding the uniqueness of agricultural production.

[3] Indeed, Karl Kautsky first posed the agrarian question in 1899, illustrating in part the long history of agro-food scholarship.

[4] The focus on "quality" refers to consumer concerns over health and safety in the industrial food system and the effort to improve the "quality" – defined in multiple ways – of food.

emancipatory question is about "what kind of agrifood system might decrease injustice and inequality?" The emancipatory question is a crucial one, especially as food studies embodies a normative research agenda that aims not only to build better knowledge of food systems, but to improve them as well. This drive to develop more equitable and just food systems connects food studies to the legal and public policy fields in order to understand, develop, and advocate for improved food policies.

Opportunities and Challenges for Interdisciplinary Collaboration

The discussion above shows the potential for food studies to create many opportunities for collaboration between and across disciplines. However, the emergence of the field is also inherently threatening to many of these same disciplines, as it encroaches on areas of inquiry that are already firmly established. Some of the threats may reflect micropolitics or struggles over resource allocations at specific institutions, but they are ultimately tied to disciplinary boundaries and struggles over who gets regarded as the food authority (in public life as well as in the academy).[5]

Disciplinary tensions, of course, represent a challenge to any institution seeking to establish a food studies program. In our university and college, nutritional science is the authority on food, and its emerging relationship with food studies is currently being explored.[6] This relationship with nutrition is exemplary of the emergence of food studies elsewhere. Across the country, many food studies programs are developed in relation to existing nutrition programs[7] (e.g., NYU, George Washington University). Critical reflections on nutritional science (e.g., as too focused on micronutrients or too closely related to industry) in many ways helped spark the emergence of food studies. Moreover, food studies overlaps with many areas of nutritional science, raising the question can it (and should it) exist as a separate field. Certainly some of the methods, approaches, and fields of inquiry are very similar. In many universities, as well as in practice, the field of nutritional science is very multidisciplinary in its own right, spanning molecular science, and clinical and behavioral aspects of human nutrition, as well as a growing array of social sciences, including anthropology, sociology, and economics. There are currently many examples of nutritionists working to improve food- and nutrition-related public policy, develop healthier food systems, and advance food justice for low-income populations (Clancy & Ruhf, 2010; Nestle, 2002; Wilkins, Lapp, Tagtow, & Roberts, 2010).

Food studies has an opportunity to build from work in nutritional science and other disciplines in order to create its own theoretical worldview and methodology to more fully examine systems or ecological thinking about food, including more direct explorations of food justice issues. However, the emergence of food studies in these critical areas must be done respectfully, so as not to undermine the important need for scholarly collaboration between fields. For instance, in his best-selling book *In Defense of Food*, Michael Pollan (2008) pans "nutritionism" that reduces foods to "the sum of their nutrient parts" (p. 28). Michael Pollan, one of the most publically recognized food writers, is often associated with food studies, especially by the public and scholars not directly working in the area. Although Pollan (2008) attempts to distinguish between nutrition*ism* as an ideology and nutrition as a science, his work can easily be interpreted as an affront to nutrition science, potentially undermining the building of alliances. We recognize the importance of Pollan's (2006, 2008) work for engaging the public in food issues, but we are also weary of his ahistorical treatment of nutrition science.

The relationship between food studies and dietetics also represents some unique challenges as food studies emerges not only at the scholarly level, but also as an undergraduate major, with implications for job opportunities after graduation.

[5] We recognize the need for a gendered analysis of agriculture and food scholarship, but do not cover this ground herein.
[6] SU does not have a history of agricultural scholarship, and thus the nutritional science program has largely had food as a scholarly focus to itself.
[7] Of course there are other food-related programs emerging, most notably related to environmental studies, sustainable agriculture, and even across entire institutions (e.g., University of Vermont).

Registered Dietitians are increasingly regarded as food and nutrition experts in their communities, and it has yet to be sorted out how individuals educated in dietetics and food studies will share this professional space in their communities, if at all. In addition, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is currently pursuing a legislative agenda to promote the licensing of dietitians and nutritionists in the U.S. The academy asserts that licensing is necessary to "protect the public health by establishing minimum educational and experience criteria for those individuals who hold themselves out to be experts in food and nutrition" (Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 2011). The academy encourages licensure to prevent harmful nutrition information and advice from being delivered to the public by untrained persons and to provide recourse to those who have been harmed by advice received from nondietitians, which is obviously good for public health. But what will be the impact of licensure on students emerging from food studies programs? Clearly food studies students would not be trained to do medical nutrition therapy and thus would not hold clinically oriented jobs (indeed, students trained in food studies might be critical of this model), but in community-based programs the potential overlap in interests and responsibilities for a dietitian and a person trained in food studies is much greater.

A Brief History of Food Studies at Syracuse University

Syracuse University has offered nutrition and food courses since 1917, and it currently graduates about 40 students per year. About half the students currently enrolled in the nutrition program fulfill the didactic requirements to become a Registered Dietitian (RD). The stringent program requirements of the didactic program, coupled with a relatively small faculty, have meant that much of the pedagogical emphasis in the Nutrition Department within the last several years has been on dietetics education with a rigorous curriculum and many strong students who apply and hone their skills in the community. Faculty research, however, is much broader and includes, for example, research on the influence of the built environment on health, and the role of traditional foods in disease prevention. Dietetics education has a strong emphasis on clinical and management aspects of the dietetics profession and is based in large part on the medical model, although cultural and community aspects of food and nutrition are also significant parts of the curriculum. While the importance of dietetics will continue into the future, collaboration with a food studies program creates an opportunity to broaden the curriculum and scholarly opportunities, and in particular to explore the political, economic, and agricultural aspects of food in greater depth.

The Hospitality Management (HM) program has offered courses relevant to food studies since 1985. Six hospitality courses are cross-listed and included in the accredited didactic curriculum. In addition, the hospitality program offers culinary courses that seek to incorporate food systems thinking, examine a variety of food system sectors, and introduce students to diverse food cultures. In 2010 the decision was made to close the hospitality management program with the expectation that the courses currently cross listed with the Nutrition Department would continue to be offered and there would be an evolution into a food studies program. This decision was not without controversy, but every effort is being made to see that the transition to food studies is done with as little disruption to hospitality management students, staff, and faculty as possible. The closing of the HM program has provided an opportunity to think about possibilities for utilizing the skills of HM faculty and the course content from the HM program within the emerging food studies program. In particular, attention is being paid to how food studies students could be trained in food science and culinary arts, and how hospitality management methods and ways of analysis might inform, for example, the study of new food-related businesses. Indeed, early discussions about the food studies program explored creating areas of specialization students could pursue that retained important aspects of the hospitality management program, such as culinary arts, cross-cultural cuisine, and food service operations. The areas of culinary arts and cross-cultural cuisine would relate to the food consumption component of the food system as outlined by Whatmore (1995) and food

service operations would link to the food industry component of Whatmore's typology.

The Public Health (PH) program at SU emerged from the closing of the nursing school. The program is seven years old and offers degrees at both the bachelor's and master's levels. In keeping with developments in the broader public health field, the program has sought to bring more focus to nutrition issues, including many emerging health issues produced by the conventional food system, and also in the context of exploring inequalities in access to nutritious foods along lines of class, race, and gender. The clearest manifestation of these inequalities is the existence of food deserts. Indeed, a faculty member from the public health program produced one of the earliest published studies on food deserts in Syracuse, which attracted national attention for linking low birth weight to disparities in access to healthy food (Lane et al., 2008). The commitment of the public health program to focusing on food and nutrition issues resulted in that program making the initial investment in hiring the first specifically designated food studies faculty member on our campus.

These three relatively small programs have now been merged into one department of Public Health, Food Studies, and Nutrition (PFN). All three programs clearly emphasize health promotion, and all three have the capacity to examine health issues from a social-ecological worldview. Social-Ecological Theory describes the interaction between individual-level factors (e.g., biology, genetics, knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs) and environmental-level influences (e.g., cultural contexts, public health policies, and the built environment) on health. These multiple layers interact with each other dialectically, such that the environment influences individual behaviors, but individual behaviors likewise (re)produce the environment (McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, & Glanz, 1988; Stokols, 1996). Table 1 shows how the four sectors of the food system articulated by Whatmore (1995) are embedded within this broader socio-ecological framework, which examines food from multiple disciplinary paradigms.

Notably, the emerging food studies program at SU does not yet specifically include a focus on agricultural production and questions of the natural environment. We are cognizant of this gap in our faculty expertise and are working to fill this. Our first food studies faculty member is an environmental geographer who researches urban food production, and we are in the process of hiring a senior faculty member to fill this gap. We are also working with colleagues at our neighboring institution — the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF) — and in other disciplines across the campus on systems research that includes questions of the natural environment.

Developing a Food Studies Curriculum

Food Studies, by its very nature, is an interdisciplinary curriculum pulling scholarly approaches, methods, and topics of inquiry from both the social and natural sciences. Preliminary explorations at Syracuse University have found an ever-widening swath of disciplines with overlapping interests in food. In addition to public health, nutrition, hospitality, and other usual suspects such as geography, anthropology, and biology, food scholarship is found within disciplines such as architecture, communications, journalism, literature, management, public administration, visual arts, and the law. For food studies to be a successful scholarly field, it must strike a balance between extracting needed expertise from these disparate fields, while also distinguishing itself sufficiently from closely related disciplines (e.g., nutrition, anthropology), so as to stand on its own academically. In effect, food is an essential part of daily human existence, and for this reason it touches on nearly every aspect of human life. With so many potential connections, the question in developing a food studies curriculum is not so much who ought to collaborate, as how to focus collaborations in a way that creates a cohesive and manageable curriculum.

Developing this curriculum first requires the development of a specific vision of food studies at SU. Initial work on this vision sought to align any programs on our campus with the major forces affecting food studies nationally and globally. In particular, the program would focus on food as part of a social ecological system that links its

production and distribution to changing social constructions and cultural meanings of food, which ultimately affect the body, including health. Our approach does not seek to duplicate the work already done in other disciplines, but rather seeks to complement and in other ways supplement these efforts to bring about a better understanding of the nature of food and its meaning for our continued existence. Syracuse University in many ways is uniquely positioned to advance this perspective on food studies. We have the opportunity to collaborate in complementary ways with established departments within SU (e.g., geography, sociology, anthropology, architecture) and at SUNY ESF (e.g., forestry, landscape architecture). Future collaborators could include other schools in the area such as Cornell University and SUNY Morrisville, both of which have extensive expertise in food and agriculture. On the other hand, not having agricultural sciences on our campus pro vides us the freedom to think in new ways about food and in particular to blend social science and humanities worldviews into a more comprehensive social ecological conception of food studies as articulated in table 1. We believe the work of the professional food studies associations such as the Agriculture, Food, and Human Values Society (AFHVS) and the Association for the Study of

Table 1. Food Studies Viewed Through the Socio-Ecological Model

Socio-Ecological Construct	Potential Food Studies Topic Areas[a]
Individual/Intrapersonal *Food Consumption*[b]	• Health status • Physiological nutrient needs • Food knowledge • Food production and preparation skills • Food beliefs • Financial resources • Taste and food preferences • Eating behaviors
Interpersonal *Food Consumption* *The Food Industry*	• Food norms (e.g., in families, neighborhoods, and other communities of identity) • Systems of information exchange (e.g., social networks, media)
Organizational/Institutional *The Food Industry* *The Farm Industry* *The Agri-Food Industry*	• School and workplace food environments • Institutional food policies • Structure and management of food processors, distributors, and retailers • Farm management
Community *Food Consumption* *The Food Industry* *The Farm Industry* *The Agri-Food Industry*	• Social inequities in food access and affordability • Community organizations and social movements around food issues • Building local food system infrastructure and connections • Farmland protection • Development and dissemination of alternative agricultural production practices • Community economic development • Alternative food networks
Public Policy *Food Consumption* *The Food Industry* *The Farm Industry* *The Agri-Food Industry*	• Local, state, federal, and international policies related to agricultural production, trade, consumption, and food assistance • Food labeling • Food policy councils • Zoning and planning regulations • Environmental protection policy

[a] Each of these topic areas can be viewed through the lens of multiple academic paradigms, including history, public health, nutrition, political economy, anthropology, sociology, and the law.
[b] See Whatmore (1995).

Food and Society (ASFS) also will be very useful in helping us structure our curriculum in new and innovative ways. For example, ASFS maintains lists of food studies programs and syllabi, and the American Planning Association (APA) has gathered relevant curricula, both of which are good places to start. Also, various listservs house vibrant discussions about food studies and provide a valuable resource for curriculum development. In addition, it will be important for our faculty to be actively involved with these professional associations as they provide a window on cutting-edge developments in the field that can be brought back into the classroom and also serve as the professional base from which standards of professional conduct and research excellence can be developed to guide the advancement of current and future food studies faculty as they advance within our academic community.

Another unique feature of our campus that might make it more conducive to the development of a rigorous food studies program is our institutional emphasis on engaged scholarship, or what our chancellor calls "scholarship in action." Our university has purposefully focused on and devoted resources to ensuring that scholarship on our campus is informed by the realities on the ground in our surrounding community, and in turn that our scholarship works to transform collaborating communities at local, national, or global levels. Thus while we may not have on our campus the far-reaching extension service infrastructure that exists at land-grant institutions, we have considerable history and institutional support for working with communities, a feature that promises to be a distinctive feature in our food studies scholarship and teaching.

Consistent with this emerging vision for food studies on the SU campus, a concept paper outlining the broad features for a food studies curriculum for an undergraduate degree was developed and circulated in the latter half of 2010 to faculty in what is now the Department of Public Health, Food Studies, and Nutrition. In addition, the concept paper outlined potential core courses of the proposed degree and various options for tracks or areas of concentration within the degree. The concept paper was met with tentative approval at a meeting of the faculty, but it was clear further work was needed to flesh out the curriculum's details. A committee was formed consisting of faculty from each of the areas represented at that time in the department (i.e., public health, nutrition, and hospitality management). The committee reported back to the college faculty, and in consultation with senior administration within the college, the committee's focus changed toward the development of a minor in food studies constituted by existing courses offered in the department. Faculty concerns with this development included (1) the belief that minors flow out of majors and not the other way around (we need to envision what the larger program would look like before knowing what a minor might look like); and (2) the appreciation that a minor consisting primarily of existing courses would not be credible to potential students and scholars in the field in general. During this discussion, a search for the first faculty hire in food studies was underway. Faculty thought the way out of the impasse would be to defer further development of the curriculum until the new faculty was hired, so as to benefit from the specific expertise of the new faculty and also to further ascertain what type of academic programming would be acceptable to senior administration in the college. In hindsight, this experience clearly demonstrates the need to develop a comprehensive and inclusive process for developing food studies from the ground up, and we are now moving toward engaging faculty directly in a deliberative process.

The new faculty in food studies was hired and has developed the first two food studies courses at SU. The first is a survey course exploring key issues of the contemporary agro-food system, with a focus on issues of concern; the second course examines food movements and grassroots efforts to improve the food system. Thus current momentum for food studies in our department is driven "on the ground" by the new faculty hire. In addition, there is only one faculty member in food studies at this time, and he is at the assistant professor level. It is anticipated the momentum for food studies will continue as the department is now engaged in the search for a second faculty hire. Even so, there is currently no sense of what type of program would be acceptable within our college

structure (i.e., a food studies major, a standalone minor, or perhaps a graduate certificate in food studies).

What is clear is that there is a strong commitment in our department and college to the development of food studies as an area of scholarship on our campus. Testament to this is the considerable resources we have devoted to food studies in the form of two tenure-track faculty positions and the taking of a leap of faith by including "food studies" as part of the name of our new department. But those with an interest in developing food studies must work to further advance the vision of the program by gathering input from potential collaborators. We are currently exploring ways to gather deeper and broader input on what our food studies curriculum could look like. This includes developing a process to solicit ideas for food studies curricula from outside our institution, including greater consultation with successful food studies programs elsewhere. Other ideas to further the development of program curricula include surveying existing faculty working on food-related research and teaching at SU and SUNY ESF. We are also considering developing a research center or faculty cluster around food studies. In short, all options are on the table and we are currently focused on building a broader consensus.

Finally, some faculty are concerned about the jobs food studies students will be qualified for after graduation and would like to see this question figure prominently in any further discussion of curriculum development. This debate in particular draws attention to the tensions between professional training and liberal arts education. At SU, food studies is being developed in an applied college, including programs such as Social Work, Child and Family Studies, and Sport Management, among others. Perhaps we are giving more attention to the issue of practical skill development than we would if food studies were being developed in the College of Arts and Sciences. Other food studies programs have been developed within professional programs (e.g., nutrition, dietetics, agriculture, hospitality, and culinary arts) that take pride in postgraduation student placement. In many ways, food studies (like the other "studies") emerged out of a critique of the professional training model of education and is more often driven by a belief in liberal arts education. For example, didactic and internship programs in nutrition turn out very good students for certain kinds of work. However, this type of training does not focus as strongly on broader food system and food justice issues. This is simply to suggest that any one pedagogical approach cannot and does not cover the gamut of food consumption issues, so food studies has an opportunity to approach the study of food from a more heavily liberal arts curriculum. The development of a food studies program can both complement existing disciplines examining food issues as well as contribute to a broadening of the perspective from which food is viewed, potentially contributing to shifts in thinking and curriculum in other fields. This being said, there is still the need to balance the development of well-educated citizens and the real need for practical placements and jobs.

Conclusion

The development of a food studies program at Syracuse University is still in its infancy, but tensions about its vision, direction, and place within the academy have and continue to confound its development. Differentiating food studies from other current academic disciplines that study food, while also adopting and adapting methods, approaches, and topics of inquiry from those related disciplines, requires an ongoing conversation among interested faculty about the vision and expectations for the program. The emphasis within SU to be an engaged university actively working with communities to study and solve problems of mutual interest, situates our university well to adopt participatory research approaches that engage both our students and community members to actively transform community food systems. Ongoing challenges include consolidating a core group of university faculty who can engage in a broad scholarly examination of food studies, developing a student curriculum that can stand on its own as a college major (or potentially as a graduate field), and ensuring that students who eventually graduate from this program have a well-balanced education that has prepared them to think broadly and deeply, while also imparting practical skills.

The work to be done as described above perhaps suggests a lesson for those seeking to develop food studies programs at other institutions: the importance of building consensus on the ground with faculty and other stakeholders about the path for food studies early in the process of program development. In our case at SU, while there had been faculty discussions about food studies, the decision to move forward with the development of an area of study in our college was not made by the faculty. In retrospect there could have been more consultation with faculty and community members about the needs and direction of a potential food studies program. As well, the proper path to take with respect to the hiring of faculty in food studies remains an open question. There seems to be merit in both hiring food studies faculty who can provide expertise and leadership in developing curricula and in hiring faculty after developing consensus and a more concrete plan for the trajectory of the program. Another concern, which is commonly shared across institutions of higher education, is the extent to which senior administration should be involved with curriculum issues that are often thought to be the preserve of faculty and faculty governance. Certainly strong partnerships across disciplines and between faculty and senior leaders in the development of interdisciplinary academic programs can lead to a stronger vision from the outset. This, of course, is the struggle at hand. 

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