Innovations in the Pedagogy of Food System Planning

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Abstract
The food system now occupies a prominent place in planning, and food systems pedagogical practice embraces virtually every planning subdiscipline, mirroring the central, and ever differentiating, role of food in society. This article tracks changes in food system pedagogical practices. We provide an analysis of prevailing themes in the pedagogical methods used in food systems classes, and why these particular strategies are suited to food planning education. Our conclusion examines other research opportunities in food system pedagogy and describes the need for research and practice on the career trajectories of food planning professionals.

Keywords
food system planning, food system pedagogy

Introduction
In planning and other professional fields, new subjects for inquiry gain traction through research, teaching, policy, and practice. These are often simultaneous and tumultuous, case in point: food systems planning. In the late 1990s Jerry Kaufman at the University of Wisconsin was teaching nascent food systems classes, delivering workshops, and assisting in the creation of food planning positions in local government. Kaufman and Pothukuchi published the seminal article “The Food System, A Stranger to the Planning Field” in 2000. In 2004, Kaufman edited a JPER special issue on the role of planning in community food systems in response to rising public interest in food systems issues and lack of attention given to the topic in planning literature. The Call for Papers on community food systems generated significant interest, especially among educators in planning programs (Kaufman 2004). As part of the special issue, Janet Hammer provided an assessment of the then current state of food systems education in U.S. planning programs.

Unsurprisingly, in her 2004 review, Hammer found that there were limited course offerings on food system planning. Upon contacting all accredited programs on the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP 2009) website, Hammer found that only 13 percent of schools with planning programs were offering a course on food systems, at one time had offered a course on food systems, or had the subject of food systems embedded in a broader planning course (Hammer 2004). Despite the inherent overlap between food systems and traditional planning areas such as land use, transportation systems, public health, economic development, and environmental concerns such as air and water quality (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 2000), little systematic attention in planning education had been given to food systems.

Food is a basic human need. The food supply chain relies on physical, political, and policy infrastructures influenced by and influencing urban and regional systems, institutions, and actors. Public awareness of food systems in the United States has continued to escalate in the last eight years. The discussion of food industry consolidation and globalization; food distribution and security; obesity and metabolic disease; the effects of different agricultural systems such as industrial (or conventional), local, and organic; and natural resource depletion have all become part of the lexicon of many academic disciplines. Thus, a decade after Hammer’s original review, the time is ripe for a reconsideration of the place of food systems in planning education.

This article recognizes the emerging work on food systems education generally and, specifically, revisits U.S. planning education programs to assess developments in food systems curricula over the last ten years. We predict an
increase in food systems education in planning programs given the enthusiasm shown by educators when the special issue was published in 2004 along with continued interest in the subject by the general public and our students. We will demonstrate this increase by paying particular attention to the growth in the number of courses offered in planning departments and how these courses are structured. While Hammer queried planning departments about current and past food system planning courses, as well as courses that embed the area of food system planning into existing courses, we use a more conservative approach to enumeration, focusing only on stand-alone courses dedicated to food systems. Even using this more conservative decision rule for identifying courses, we nonetheless note a 300 percent increase in course offerings in ten years.

Our assessment begins with a description of the methods we used to analyze the syllabi we received. The syllabi provide a survey of the current courses available, and when compared to Hammer’s 2004 findings, they track the evolution of food systems education in the past decade. The second part of this article will look at prevailing themes in the pedagogical methods used in food systems classes, and why these particular strategies may be suited to the topic of food systems planning education. We will conclude with an examination of the place of food systems in the planning field today as an emerging focus for planners, as a topic that has become embedded in many areas of the profession, and as an emerging paradigm for the planning profession.

Data Collection and Methods

To determine how offerings in food systems courses have changed since Hammer’s 2004 article “Community Food Systems and Planning Curricula,” we sent an e-mail inquiry to all 110 U.S. planning programs listed on the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP) website. Program contacts were asked if their program, or another allied department, offered any courses on food systems for planning students; if so, we requested a copy of the course syllabus. The 44 syllabi we received constitute our data set. All 44 were uploaded to the ACSP webpage.¹

Our analysis builds on categorizations used by planning educators to analyze courses. Hammer (2004) uses three categories in her analysis of food systems planning courses: content, approaches, and objectives. Krizek and Levinson (2005), in their review of course syllabi for teaching integrated land use and transportation, used the three dimensions of content, readings, and skills to be developed. Frank’s (2006) annotated bibliography covers over thirty years of thought on planning education. In this review, Frank usefully divides pedagogical approaches into six categories, which can be understood as the “how” for delivering planning content. In contrast to Hammer and Krizek and Levinson, for Frank content includes domain knowledge, skills and methods, values, and practice. According to Frank, the pedagogical elements of “how” include workshops and studios; work-based learning and service learning; role-play and simulation; multimedia; online and e-learning; and a sixth catch-all category of “other” that includes problem-based, experiential, writing as discovery, and field work and site visits. Klosterman’s (2011) review of planning theory syllabi identifies content areas, required readings, required textbooks, required authors, and course assignments.

Specifically, we executed what some call an interpretive content analysis (Baxter 1993), taking an inductive approach. Content analysis has a long history (Weber 1990) and uses multiple coders and recoding to produce an interpretation of the data (Lofland and Lofland 2006; Strauss 1987). Our particular approach utilized the methodology of analytic induction (Bulmer 1979). The approach prescribes no specific technique or procedure. Instead, the approach begins with tentative codes based on experience or literature; in our case, the initial codes were informed by other research on planning pedagogy, our experience with food systems work, and the general problem of syllabus construction. We tested and refined our coding categories in a sample of data (syllabi provided to us) and then refined and retested those categories in the larger data set and through the dialog with reviewers and readers. In effect, the process in general and specific to our case is to develop working hypotheses that are then revised to fit the reality of the data. We made between three and five “passes” through our data. Additionally, we provide information on the gender of the instructor, whether the course is a graduate or undergraduate course, and the whether the course is interdisciplinary.

Our coding categories for the syllabi included both course content (Hammer 2004; Krizek and Levinson 2005; Frank 2006) and topics (Klosterman 2011). Developed from this inductive approach, the coding scheme included geographic scope, the human–ecological relationship, whether the course has a comprehensive or specific perspective, and whether the course has an urban or rural focus. To evaluate the syllabi for course content (Hammer 2004; Krizek and Levinson 2005; Frank 2006) or topics (Klosterman 2011), we use geographic scope, the human–ecological relationship, whether the course has a comprehensive or specific perspective, and whether the course has an urban or rural focus. To evaluate the syllabi for approach (Hammer 2004) we identify course structure, and to evaluate content delivery method (Frank 2006) we identify teaching method, student assessment tools, and methods of student engagement. In addition, we looked at the assigned readings. Generally, the structure of the course and graded assessments were clearly stated in the syllabus. For more subjective categories, such as geographic scope or human–ecological relationship, ² we looked to the instructors’ written course objectives and reading list for guidance. If the focus of the course was still unclear, the course was coded into a general classification.

We recognize that there are food systems courses available to planning students not addressed in this article as we
did not have a 100 percent response rate, and we only reviewed syllabi of courses that specifically focused on food systems, omitting courses with food systems embedded into the curriculum. In addition, relevant classes for planning students are likely offered in a number of other departments.

Our assessment was also limited by the level of detail included in syllabi received, which ranged in length from one to twenty-three pages. Longer syllabi typically included a reading list and likely gave a more accurate understanding of what the course entailed; however, specific instructor goals and student experiences were not discernible from the syllabi alone. Despite these limitations, we are confident our findings represent actionable knowledge for planning educators as they consider how to organize food system courses.

**Current Course Offerings**

We received syllabi from 39 percent (44) of the 110 ACSP programs; 24 percent (26) responses were from programs accredited by the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB 2013). Twenty-seven of the 44 programs (61 percent), offered at least one course in food systems for planning students. We received syllabi from every region of the ACSP (see Figure 1). In short, we found that the number of ACSP schools that include food systems in their curriculum tripled from 2004 to 2012. In 2004, nine schools offered a food systems course or a course that included the topic, in 2012, 27 schools offered stand-alone food systems courses. Given that the 2004 survey count included courses that included food systems content as a module and the current survey included only stand-alone courses, our more conservative decision rule for inclusion in the study understates the threefold increase in food systems course offerings.

Females taught 30 percent of food systems courses; four other courses were co-taught by a male and female professor, for a total of 40 percent female-taught courses. This is not meaningfully different from the number of females in the North American planning academy, which is about 31 percent (Slotterback 2010). Course offerings were concentrated in East Coast states, which have 39 percent of ACSP schools.

Similar to Hammer, we found food systems education largely concentrated at the graduate level. Only 7 (17 percent) of the syllabi received were taught for undergraduate students; however, 11 (27 percent) permitted upper-level undergraduate students to take the graduate-level course. The remaining 26 (59 percent) were taught for graduate students only. This trend reflects the distribution of planning programs, with many more available at the graduate level. Of the 110 member planning programs of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, only 14 (12 percent) are exclusively undergraduate programs, 21 (19 percent) offer undergraduate and graduate programs, and 75 (68 percent) offer only graduate curricula.

Course structure was identified as studio, seminar, or lecture. Thirty (68 percent) of the courses were solely seminars that included student-led sections. Eight courses (18 percent) were seminars with lectures to provide greater understanding of unfamiliar topics. Five courses (11 percent) were studios, and three courses (7 percent) were primarily lecture based. This represents a shift in the primary teaching method from Hammer’s assessment, in which two of the six courses were studios focused on food systems, two courses focused on a single semester-long participatory community research report, and two devoted a day to a guest speaker or field trip focused on food systems as part of a larger planning course. Interestingly, the food systems planning course that Hammer
carefully detailed mirrors the pedagogical developments we found.

**Current Course Assessment**

**Assigned Readings**

Thirty-seven of the 44 syllabi we received included a reading list. From these syllabi, more than 1,200 readings were compiled, including 909 unique readings. The most prevalent readings were peer-reviewed academic articles, comprising 516 (57 percent) of the assigned readings. These were followed in occurrence by professional reports, which made up 23 percent of the readings, and journalistic pieces (19 percent). Eighty-one percent of the reading lists included a professional report, about one-quarter (23 percent) of which were specific to a city or region while most (77 percent) were provided for national audiences. We further separated the journalism category into books, which comprised 8 percent of the readings, and popular articles, blogs, or essays, which comprised 11 percent of the total readings. Insufficient information was available to categorize nine (1 percent) of the readings.

However, some readings appeared more frequently than others across all the reviewed syllabi. Table 1 shows the 21 readings that were assigned in more than 10 percent of the courses. Of these most commonly assigned readings, 11 (52 percent) were academic articles, 8 (38 percent) were journalistic pieces, and 2 (10 percent) were professional reports. The most commonly assigned reading, appearing in 34 percent of the syllabi, was Mark Winne’s journalistic book *Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty*. Eighty-one percent of the assigned readings were published in the past decade.

Figure 2 shows the most commonly assigned reading in each ACSP region. Michael Pollan’s *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* and Mark Winne’s *Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the...*
Land of Plenty, both pieces of popular literature, were the most commonly assigned readings in both the northeastern and midwestern regions. In Region 4, no reading appeared in more than one syllabus, so it was excluded from the figure.

### Teaching Method and Student Assessment

The syllabi were examined to determine how educators chose to present material to the students and how student learning was assessed. Primary teaching methods identified were assigned readings or films with discussion, lectures, guest speakers, and field trips or site visits (see Table 2). Student learning was assessed using writing assignments, presentations, personal reflection journals, participatory projects, and in-class debates.

Assigned reading accompanied by discussion was the foundation of most courses (86 percent), while lectures, guest speakers, and field trips were incorporated into about a quarter of the courses. Projects, professor- or student-selected, were assigned in 29 (66 percent) of the courses. Writing—excluding final project reports—was incorporated into 22 (50 percent) of the courses, with 14 courses (32 percent) requiring journals or food diaries. Student presentations were incorporated into ten (23 percent) courses while other teaching methods included films (11 percent), debates (7 percent), conference attendance (2 percent), and quizzes (2 percent).

### Interdisciplinary

Whether a planning course is interdisciplinary can be difficult to determine, as the planning profession is itself interdisciplinary. For this assessment, we looked for cross-listing with another department or obvious influence from another discipline based on title, description, or objectives. Seventeen courses (39 percent) met these criteria for an interdisciplinary course through cross-listing or heavy influence by another discipline. The most commonly affiliated disciplines were environmental studies, design, and public health. We acknowledge limitations to this indicator, such as university structure, which can influence a professor’s ability to cross-list a course.

### Student Engagement

We evaluated how students were asked to engage with the material on a personal or applied level based on the incorporation of current events (food news sites, blogs, reporting from food organizations, or policies in the news), personal reflection (writing about or discussing their own involvement in the food system or personal connections to coursework), or participatory projects (working at a local farm or...
food organization) (Table 3). Research projects and papers were not considered participatory community engagement unless students were required to interact with community members.

Eleven courses (25 percent) asked students to follow food news or other current events related to food systems. Eighteen courses (41 percent) incorporated personal reflection on readings or a student’s role in the food system through writing and discussion. Most students were asked to engage the larger community, with twenty-three courses (57 percent) involving a participatory community project.

**Geographic Scope**

We identified four categories of geographic focus: Global; Global / Developed Countries; Regional; and Broad. Courses identified as “Global” discussed a range of food systems topics applicable to the global food system as a whole, or explicitly looked at the global impact of U.S. food system practices; those identified as “Global / Developed Countries” focused explicitly on developed regions; “Regional” courses addressed food systems for a specific city or region; and “Broad” courses discussed a variety of global food systems topics, but also examined the local food system (Table 4).

Most courses considered the global influence and organization of the food system; however, the distribution is fairly even across our categories.

**Human–Ecological Relationship**

Four categories were identified to characterize the human–ecological relationship: Social, Cultural, Ecological, or Mixed. Courses identified as “Social” focused on social issues related to the food system such as public health, economics, food security, food justice, and community planning. In “Social” courses, any mention of ecological science was peripheral in the context of a social issue. “Cultural” courses were similar to “Social” courses, but added a strong focus on history of food traditions, cultural food identity, and cultural implications of global food policy. “Ecological” courses focused primarily on the environmental impacts of the food system. “Mixed” courses gave equal focus to social and ecological approaches.

Seventeen courses (39 percent) focused primarily on the social impacts, while five courses (11 percent) specifically identified the cultural impacts of the food system. No course was strictly ecological in its discussion of the food system, but nearly half of the courses (48 percent) considered both social and environmental impacts of the food system.

**Perspective**

We identified the course perspective to be “Comprehensive” or “Specific.” “Comprehensive” courses considered the food system through many lenses, such as food access and security, rural and/or urban community development, planning, landscape design, public health, and agroecology. “Specific” courses focused on one of the aforementioned categories.

Most courses took a comprehensive view of food systems, with 28 (64 percent) classified as comprehensive. However, there were 16 courses that focused on specific aspects of food systems, including topics such as food policy, food security, public health, sustainable communities, urban agriculture, food business, food culture, agroecology, food systems design, social issues, and street vending. The most common foci were urban agriculture and food systems policy.

**Urban versus Rural Gradient**

We categorized course focus as “Urban,” “Rural,” or “General” (Table 6). “Urban” courses focused on urban agriculture or the distribution of food in urban communities, with little mention of the role of or impacts on rural areas. “Rural” courses looked specifically at how the food system, agricultural practices, and policies affect rural communities, development, and land use. “General” courses discussed

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food systems as a whole, in a way that could be applied to both urban and rural communities.

Only one course explored food systems through a strictly rural lens. Twenty courses (45 percent) focused on food systems in urban areas. Most courses (52 percent) addressed the linkages between rural and urban communities in reference to food, or discussed issues in a broad way that could be applied to either a rural or urban community.

Objectives

We analyzed course objectives to determine whether the course had a normative or descriptive tone. Alternatively, this distinction can be seen in viewing the planner as a change agent versus the planner as a technocrat. This portion of the assessment was the most subjective and difficult to glean from short descriptions provided in the syllabi. We identified a course as “Normative” if it focused on the current food system being flawed and how planners can improve the system. “Descriptive” courses focused on objective assessments of the current food system or comparisons between different approaches to altering the food system. The five studio classes were excluded from this part of the analysis as the course objective was specific and defined by the partnering community organizations.

Twenty-six (65 percent) of the syllabi embraced normative concerns.

Pedagogical Assessment

We found the robust development of food system pedagogy through our examination. Current food systems courses embrace professional practice, distinct scales, and integrate many planning subdisciplines. Two of the authors of this paper were enrolled in the class URPL 711 in the fall of 2012, taught by Prof. Morales. The course was structured as a seminar and relied primarily on assigned readings, following current events in food systems, and discussion for the presentation of material, and student learning was assessed through a number of projects throughout the semester. The authors will compare findings from their academic experience as a part of the pedagogical assessment.

Food systems education is a new and quickly developing field, which is reflected in the use of relatively recent readings. In a similar survey of planning theory education performed by Klosterman in 2011, 60 percent of the most commonly assigned readings were more than twenty years old as compared to 5 percent of the assigned readings in food systems planning courses; none of these two-decade-old readings were among the most commonly assigned readings. The emergent nature of food systems education could also explain the reliance on current food news sources in 25 percent of reviewed courses. Often, rapidly evolving fields follow popular news sources, current events, and activists’ websites in addition to scholarly papers to overcome the lag between interest and progress in a field and the publication of peer-reviewed literature. The inclusion of local news sources can also make the topic more locally relevant when the existing scholarly literature stems from a relatively small number of academic foci. Whether this reliance indicates the maturation of the field is unclear, as the utility of integrating food news relies on classroom-level pedagogical practice.

Our review of the reading lists revealed the large number of plans, policy reports, and other professional publications currently used in food systems education. Eighty-one percent of the reading lists required the reading of a plan or policy report on the food system, such as that produced by the American Planning Association (APA). Thus, instructors frequently included readings relevant to planning in surrounding jurisdictions or regions. However, 77 percent included APA reports or the work of related organizations such as the National Association of Counties. The inclusion of these materials illustrates one vehicle that the planning academy uses to support students in learning to construct food system–relevant plans. Perhaps more important, the proliferation of such plans and policies also indicates the importance of informal education for professional planners. When faced with job demands that require innovation, practicing planners may be translating planning expertise from other subdisciplines. Such innovation indicates the value for peer-to-peer learning and communities of practice. Though this article remains focused on college and university pedagogical practice, our assessment indicates that practitioners are likely engaged in significant informal education that professors are relying on for classroom teaching.

The URPL 711 course required students, both undergraduates and graduates, from a diversity of majors to present current food news relevant to their area of expertise during each class meeting. This activity mirrors the concern in most syllabi associated with a comprehensive perspective (64 percent) that embraces the concerns of other disciplines as well as the distinct interests of planning subdisciplines. Further, the activity, along with class presentations (discussed below), offered the opportunity to explore the range of disciplines involved in food systems planning complemented, from public health to agroecology and landscape architecture. It also encouraged students to become familiar with the people and organizations currently engaging in food systems work in Madison, Wisconsin, and the surrounding area, strengthening students’ awareness of their community’s concerns and opening the door to continued academic and professional collaboration beyond the course. In recognition of the fledgling nature of food systems education, students were also asked to contribute to a public wiki designed to build and provide some common understanding of the rapidly expanding food systems lexicon.

Given the PAB’s suggestion that “planners integrate knowledge, skills, and values to anticipate the future and improve the quality of decision making affecting people and places,” it is unsurprising that food systems courses in
planning departments have a strong social focus, with nearly 80 percent including social, cultural, and mixed social and ecological considerations. Additional ethical criteria of professional practice reviewed in the PAB’s accreditation process, such as social justice and international ethics, appeared as recurrent themes in the food systems syllabi.

During the first week of URPL 711, students were encouraged to attend the Growing Food and Justice for All conference in Milwaukee, the focus of which, in 2012, was food justice. The conference provided students with the opportunity to be inspired by leaders of the national food systems movement. Participation in the conference provided a touchstone for the use of a social justice lens in class discussions throughout the semester.

A focus on developing practical skills in engaging people and place was noted through the use of participatory community projects in more than half of the food systems planning courses. Furthermore, taken together, community service projects, site visits, and other experiential learning strategies are indicators of an emerging stance in planning education, and the value of this pedagogical approach is recognized at the institutional level as the PAB encourages student engagement in community-based planning activities.

Each student in the URPL 711 course was required to give a presentation on the topic of food systems to a local community group of their choice. Again, this encouraged students to explore food systems activities in Madison while receiving feedback from community members on how the university can support their endeavors. Finally, each student collaborated with the professor or professionals from other disciplines or from the community to practice research skills through experience with other disciplinary or professional perspectives.

The trend of most courses addressing the rural–urban linkage likely reflects the regional reality of many food system activities, with the majority of food production occurring in rural areas while marketing and consumption is concentrated in urban centers. This finding may also reflect an increasing interest in regional planning and regional equity movements (Briggs 2008; Pastor, Benner, and Matsuoka 2009).

To explore the complicated interaction between the rural and the urban as well as the food supply chain, the students in the course spent part of each meeting brainstorming solutions to barriers encountered in our classmates’ farm-to-institution projects. Students explored issues of scale (e.g., the mismatch between local farm production and institutional demand), logistical problems (e.g., transporting and storing fresh produce), institutional regulations (e.g., serving size requirements for school children), and the effects of existing contractual agreements between institutions and distributors.

We found a relatively even consideration of rural and urban food systems concerns reflected in the syllabi. We believe this reflects the growing interest in food and food systems in urban communities and the changing nature of that concern in rural communities. In addition, there is growing interest in the effects of production by consumers and forging relationships with consumers by producers. Finally, food activists are responding to the industrial nature of production and corporate control of the entire food system with expanding alternative distribution capacity and solidifying links between producers and consumers. This may reflect the fact that food systems are related through interwoven systems, ideas, and behavior. For instance, the country’s largest producer-only farmers’ market, the Dane County farmers’ market, is held within the state-owned Capitol Square, and governed by state law, while across the street, vendors operate under laws from the City of Madison. This invisible legal infrastructure organizes expectations of vendors and customers, even if customers are unaware of it, and even if it does not organize the actual location vendors take at the market or across the street. These many perspectives organize the study and teaching of food systems and that is what makes food system research and teaching of great intellectual and practical interest.

As we previously noted, our assessment found little reliance on didactic teaching, with less than 10 percent of courses centered on lectures, and preponderance for engaging students’ own experiences through in-class debates, personal reflection, and student-chosen projects and presentations. We hypothesize that this is partially accounted for by the fact that food is a subject that personally affects all students. In the URPL 711 course, each student prepared a written reflection to class readings, which was submitted to the professor prior to class and used as the basis for class discussion. In addition, each student gave a presentation to the class on the interaction between his or her field of study and the study of food systems, overall.

Finally, perhaps our most striking finding is that 65 percent of reviewed courses embraced normative concerns and framed the planner as a change agent. We are not surprised by this, and in fact believe that future courses should embrace these normative concerns through an engagement with other planning subfields and with other disciplines, as appropriate. Doing so will further capacitate students to work within the field and with allied professionals to assist communities in identifying and achieving broad goals that integrate multiple interests. This argument structures our following discussion of a new food systems planning paradigm.

The Seeds of a New Planning Paradigm in the Food System

Our examination of food system planning would be incomplete without some reflection on its fit to planning generally. Kuhn incorporated the notion of a “paradigm,” an accepted set of methods and problems, and Pothukuchi and Kaufman made food a planning problem by incorporating food, especially community developed and led food practices, into planning. That is, food systems planning is the marriage of
planning methods to the human ecology problem of growing, harvesting, and distributing food to communities that serve the people (the food is healthy and affordable and the farmers earn a family wage), the community (the producers and the consumers are in reciprocal relationships), and the planet (natural resources are used sustainably). In this paradigm, planners are not serving the state or private interests. Neither are they speaking on behalf of the disenfranchised.

Prior to Pothukuchi and Kaufman, many disciplines found food systems something to study, but food systems had been embraced by relatively few scholars. Over the last decade, significant scholarship has legitimized this rapidly developing field. Furthermore, this embrace by planning and other disciplines has increased the importance of scholarly research on food and is remodeling the pedagogical practice in planning and other disciplines. It has been fifteen years since Pothukuchi and Kaufman (2000) reported that no extant planning texts addressed food systems and that their survey of city planning agencies found very little involvement in local food systems by professional planners. In contrast, our survey reflects a different academic, scholarly, and professional landscape. According to Pothukuchi and Kaufman’s survey data, there were seven major reasons that practicing planners gave for not being more involved in food systems planning. From a vantage point of fifteen years later, these reasons reflect a view of the domain of planning practice that is far narrower in scope (e.g., “it’s not our turf”; “it’s not an urban issue,” ibid., 116) than the one held by professionals in many planning agencies today. In addition, after years of devolution, local planners expect to work in multisector collaborations, so that reasons for noninvolvement in the food system such as the food system is a private market problem (ibid., 116), or there’s no one with whom we can work (ibid., 117) seem far less compelling in a networked world that is characterized by diminished resources across all sectors that compels civic leaders into multisector collaborations. Furthermore, with pervasive recognition of the economic, ecological, and health impacts of the conventional food system, practicing planners are far less likely to say of our food system, “If it ain’t broke, why fix it?” (ibid., 116).

In contrast, our review of food systems syllabi suggests that food system planning is becoming a subfield of professional practice today. Many syllabi rely on plans, policies, and other professional documents produced by cities, counties, MPO, and states that are engaged in food planning activities. Furthermore, we find a small, but growing number of jobs advertised for food planning, and we find academic research and professional practice prominent in various publications and at national, regional, and state-level professional planning meetings.

Today when community advocates or business people cocreate nuanced food distribution systems (Farnsworth and Morales 2011), or clusters of food-related activities (such as colocating a food processing hub, community garden, and a coop), or practice food justice (Morales 2011), or fight for new food regulations (Covert and Morales 2013), or even reconstruct zoning ordinances (Morales and Mukherji 2010; Morales and Kettles 2009), they are more frequently acting in concert with planners who have been shaped by new research and pedagogical practice (Caton-Campbell 2004). These community members are now working more frequently with professionals who acknowledge the systemic interconnections in the food system, and who are fostering food-related planning in many planning subdisciplines.

A second way in which food system planning implicitly challenges a long-standing planning position is in the role of the planner as technical expert or as change agent contributing to changing power relations (Campbell and Fainstein 2003). In less than 35 percent of the syllabi we reviewed did professors present material that supported the claim that planners’ contribution to food system planning was entirely technical. In the remaining 65 percent of the syllabi, the planner was being trained as an agent of change contributing to bringing about an alternative to the prevailing industrialized food system. We wonder if this value-driven change agenda is mimicked among housing planners or transportation planners.

Perhaps a partial reason for the difference in the stance between food system planners versus more traditional areas of planning, such as housing or transportation, lies in pedagogy. In 22 percent of the course syllabi we analyzed, examining the student’s own relationship with the industrialized food system was an explicit goal. The majority of these courses (six out of eight) included an experiential learning aspect (such as service learning, site visits, or food preparation and serving) to the students’ classroom experience, which is reflected in our finding that 63 percent of all reviewed courses were either studio classes or included some community-based practice. In these cases, students were challenged to not be simply consumers or observers but to be participants in the process of transforming the local food system. These two aspects—the capabilities approach and the students’ participation in cocreating a local food system as an alternative to the industrialized food system—may be the seeds of a new planning paradigm.

Planning, unlike many social sciences, is a normative discipline, concerned with improving the human condition through incorporating substantive concerns into plans and policy. In this, our pedagogical review instructs planning professionals about efficacy in food planning practice. First, as we have discussed, normative concerns are explicitly incorporated into 65 percent of the syllabi, and the top 10 readings in the syllabi analyzed all have explicit normative positions. Perhaps more important for student learning is the discussion of reflection pieces and exposure to the salience—indeed the centrality of community normative concerns—as evinced by the inclusion of community learning activities and local news sources. While this may represent the relative paucity of empirical research, our expectation is that this
trend will continue, reflecting as it does an understanding of what community concerns exist, and how those are incorporated into plans and policies. Finally, and most important for practice, is the fact that most courses (57 percent) incorporate work in the community and with it direct exposure to community activities and concerns. With an intent on service to people, communities, and planet and a practice that includes cocreation with activists and community members, the food systems planning paradigm is one that puts social justice center stage.

Conclusion

In the short span of a decade, the food system now occupies a prominent place in planning, and food systems pedagogical practice embraces virtually every planning subdiscipline, mirroring the central, and ever differentiating, role of food in society. Pedagogical practice is not restricted to university classrooms and state extension programs. Additional learning opportunities are found in cities, counties, and nonprofit organizations around the country. Conferences and listservs are likewise proliferating and providing opportunities for learning and supporting a community of practice. However, our concluding thoughts are focused on additional research we believe will best serve professional practice, the PAB, and curriculum committees as they make important decisions from their various perspectives.

First, it is clear that we need further research on the place of food systems courses in higher education, especially at the graduate level. Are such classes becoming central to degree requirements or are they at least consistently on the menus to fulfill nonelective requirements? We should also take the opportunity to examine the place of food system education in introductory survey planning classes. Many syllabi currently work at revealing student assumptions about food through reflective assignments. Examining food also provides an opportunity to experience and understand systems more generally and one’s place within those systems. Furthermore, the tangible nature of food activities can help students more clearly comprehend and apply the ideas of methods and theory to other subjects. In this way, as such introductory courses target all students training in the field of planning or are directed to student bodies at large, teaching about food systems may foster new interests in students not predisposed to food systems work or to planning.

Second, we clearly need an assessment of food systems discussions occurring in other fields that potentially will influence or be synergistic with the work of food systems planners. The disciplines that are candidates for these collaborations include history, public health, nutrition, landscape architecture, community and environmental sociology, and agroecology, to name a few. Planning academics are advancing food systems curriculum as an element of applied research and public practice; however, they are doing so in the absence of contemporary work on the subject (Hilchey 2012; Pothukuchi 2012; Pothukuchi and Molnar, forthcoming). Clearly, our work supports such efforts by revealing the intimate relationship educators have to policy and practice. Thus, ours is a timely contribution in support of interdisciplinary dialog and community-based research and practice. Still, we believe planners can learn from the discussion in other fields, and thus advancing dialog will benefit from considering the pedagogical work on the food system in other fields.

Third, we hope scholars will engage an assessment of the career prospects and trajectories of planning students post graduation. This work would begin by understanding whether or not, and how, taking a food system class or having a class with food system materials influences career choices, approaches to planning practice, or further education in food systems. Besides this learning outcomes perspective, we have the very real PAB-driven concern with career opportunities. There have always been jobs in the food system, but now there are a number of jobs specifically associated with various “alternative” food system activities, and these jobs seem to be growing rapidly. Undertaking a longitudinal assessment of these jobs, concatenating publically available data from a variety of sources, with job analyses and employee surveys, will all be important lenses into the structure of food system careers.

We take great inspiration from colleagues, academics, professionals, and students who have committed to creating paths where few existed just a decade ago. We see these pedagogical efforts as central to charting learning opportunities, advancing professional prospects, and engaging new research activities. We will follow these developments with great interest.

Authors’ Note

The authors would like to dedicate this article to the memory of Jerry Kaufman, exemplary practitioner of food system education.

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Notes

1. The syllabi for the research are now collected at: (http://www.acsp.org/resources/multimedia/syllabi), last accessed September 12, 2013.
2. The categories of geographic scope and human–ecological relationship are included because the instructors’ choice in these area results in very different courses (e.g., different literature or different balance with respect to depth vs. breadth.)
3. A reviewer asked why we did not sort the syllabi into six categories. We selected three categories because the subject of our research, the contents of syllabi, were easily sorted into the three categories we selected.

4. Further research on the labor market for food systems planning is warranted, but not the purview of this article. However, the American Planning Association (APA) and other organizations have begun discussing food planning for professionals. For instance, for Private Practice Perspectives, Raja and Wooten wrote “Food Systems Planning—An Opportunity for Planners in Private Practice,” found at http://www.planning.org/resources/ontheradar/food/pdf/PPPrivatepractice.pdf (accessed August 22, 2013). An example of a state initiative is from North Carolina where the Center for Environmental Farming Systems hosts the “Local Food Action Plans” list server. From a city, the Boston Food System Listserv addresses local needs. Other list servers include those hosted by Tufts, the Incubator farms, which “facilitates discussion of farmers, service providers, and staff operating land-based incubator farm projects across the US” (incubatorfarms@elist.tufts.edu), the Refugee Agriculture Partnership Program (rapp@elist.tufts.edu), and the Community food security list (comfood@elist.tufts.edu). Academics and practitioners benefit from regular offerings at the ACSP and APA meetings and the food planning list server. In sum, planners and planning are playing a role in food systems practice around the country.

References


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