Reflective Essay
CRD 20: Food Systems, UC Davis, Fall 2011
Ryan E. Galt

When we reflect upon our beliefs and the concepts we use, we often change them in the process: we notice and try to resolve inconsistencies and so we come to understand ourselves and the world in a new way or to discover new “levels” of meaning.
— Andrew Sayer (1992: 39)

The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is ‘knowing thyself’ as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory … [T]herefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory.

Assignment overview
This assignment requires you to write a reflective essay in which you reflect on the connections between your fieldwork experiences in lab, your theoretical and conceptual knowledge developed in lecture, reading, and writing, and your personal development. By reflect, we mean that we want you to focus on past and current experiences and learning — from the start of the quarter until now — in such a way as to examine its value, usefulness, and/or accuracy. Your reflection should be directed critically to scrutinize your own viewpoints, claims, arguments, and their premises, as well as those acting upon you. It should also delve into the realm of self-awareness by assessing what looking inward has done to you, i.e., if it has impacted your behavior or the way you view yourself, your relationship to food, other people, and any other parts of the world. Your essay should be 5-6 pages (maximum of 1,500 words), double-spaced, and in a 12-point, serif font.

Deadline and in-progress evaluations
• Lab 5 will have time for creating a free write draft of your essay.
• Lab 7 will have time for a peer review of your essay. You will share your essay with fellow students for their feedback to help improve your final version.
• Your final reflective essay is due on SmartSite no later than 2:30 p.m. on December 7 (1 hour before the Final Exam session). It will NOT be accepted after this deadline.

Course grade
This assignment is worth 15% of your total course grade.

The overarching goal: connecting fieldwork, concepts and theories, and personal development
An important goal of the class and your fieldwork is to improve your ability to link the concrete situations and practical issues experienced in the field with conceptual and theoretical knowledge developed in lectures, discussions, readings, and your writing. This is your opportunity to demonstrate such ability through personally reflecting on your learning experiences and their impacts (see figure below on connections to make).
Choose a rhetorical situation
There are three ways to write your reflective essay — choose the one from the list below that you prefer. With all of these, we want you to approach the assignment with honesty and with the goal of reflection outlined in the overview above.

1. A letter or series of blog entries to a family member or close friend
Write your reflective essay as a letter or a series of blog entries about your learning experiences in the class. Unlike in most scientific writing, you should liberally use “I” and “my,” as it is a personally reflective essay about your own learning process. Your level of explanation of your experiences should be sufficient for someone who has heard about the class from you before. A variant on this is writing it as a personal journal, in which case the audience is yourself rather than a friend or family member.

2. A narrative written about your learning experience from the third-person perspective
This rhetorical situation should be written as a short story about yourself, written from a narrator’s perspective (third person). If your name in Allison, sentences should be written such as, “Allison woke up the next morning and realized ... .” It should be a story that sets up a problem, contradiction, or paradox related to the learning process and presents a resolution of some kind.

3. Recommendations to incoming CRD 20 students
Draw on your personal learning experience in the class to provide lessons and advise for incoming students to the class next fall. Your reflections can be structured in a way that explains what you think worked well and what you should have improved now that you have gone through it. As with the first rhetorical situation, you should use “I” and “my,” but you can also use “you” and “yours” when addressing your reader. Note that these recommendations will not be shared with anyone but the professor and TA’s, although we may approach you after the class is over to use portions (with your permission, of course).

Components of your Reflective Essay
First, briefly describe the food system
Make sure to briefly explain its structure and functioning (“what” the food system is) as you understand it now, using food systems concepts such as the sections of the food system (agri-inputs, production, processing, distribution, retail, consumption, and
disposal/recycling); market segments such as organic, conventional, fair trade, local, etc.; and commodity chains, nature-society relationships, globalization, etc. This should be shorter than half a page.

Second, explain how and why you studied the food system
The process of food system analysis (“how” you studied it) should include statements and resolutions of research problems or questions. Pay particular attention to specially the goals and values involved (“why” you studied it). Goals are the desired result of an action. Research goals involve creating new knowledge or understanding, while critical social science also involves the goal of advancing change along the lines of personally or commonly held values. Values are one’s standards of personal and social behavior and the judgment of what is important. How did your goals and values inform your research? This should be at most 1 page in length.

Third, reflect on your personal experiences from your food system inquiries and what it means
You should put the majority of your effort towards reflecting on your learning and research process. How was your learning influenced by communication with food system actors (farmer, distributor, retailer, worker, etc.), the location itself, your classmates and team members, and your instructors?

Consider who you are as a human being, and what about you changed (if anything) and/or was reinforced during your study of the food system. Relevant questions include: What have I learned in terms of my ability to understand and act on complex, real-life situations? Have I improved my abilities to link concrete situations and theory? Am I better able now to communicate, cooperate, and to learn? How did I contribute to systems thinking and synthesis across perspectives in the Off-Campus Team Project? Can I better evaluate my reasoning as it progresses, and recognize where it is strong and where it is weak? What are the implications of my learning experiences in this class for my future activities? Have I developed my self-awareness, and, if so, what are its consequences?

Also consider “next steps.” Will you look at food differently? Will you get involved with activities on campus? Will you change your diet? Will you remain the same? Why or why not?

In addition to considering these questions, you should keep your assignments from the class so that you can ponder the learning process facilitated by them and reference some of these experiences in your reflective essay. Your Competency Self-Assessment and Learning Styles activity can be useful practical starting points for reflecting on your personal learning.

This suggested approach to the reflective essay should be used as a starting point. It may be considered a guide to dealing with the challenge of the whole process of analyzing the food system with which we live, learn, and work daily. You should feel free to emphasize the areas you consider most important and to move in a direction that you find most meaningful and personally fulfilling. As always, approach your TA or professor to help clarify your understanding of our expectations.
List of assignments to consider in your reflections

Electronic files:
1. SmartSite Profile for Discovering Our Class Community
2. Reading Responses
3. Food Diary
4. Two Midterm Exam Outlines (with or without comments)
5. Midterm Exam Essay
6. Off-Campus Team Project presentations and 3-page essay, Theorizing the Food System
7. Two Final Exam Outlines (with or without comments)
8. Final Exam Essay

Hard copy:
1. Food System Mind Maps (beginning and end)
2. Competency Self-Assessment (with data from beginning, middle, and end)
3. On-Campus Team Project Report (from outline in Lab Manual)
4. Free write and draft of Reflective Essay (with or without peer review)
5. Lab Manual

References
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Excellent (1 x pts)</th>
<th>Adequate (0.8 x pts)</th>
<th>Marginal (0.5 x pts)</th>
<th>No credit (0 x pts)</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WHAT, HOW, AND WHY OF FOOD SYSTEM INQUIRY (3 pts)</td>
<td>The following are done well: (1) use of food systems terminology, (2) discussion of food systems process as related to student's fieldwork, (3) discussion of goals and values explored.</td>
<td>At least two of the following are done fairly well: (1) use of food systems terminology, (2) discussion of food systems process as related to student's fieldwork, (3) discussion of goals and values explored.</td>
<td>Marginal use of food systems terminology, discussion of food systems processes, and values explored</td>
<td>No use of food systems terminology, food systems process, or goals and values.</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFLECTION ON YOUR LEARNING AND RESEARCH PROCESS (8 pts)</td>
<td>Demonstrates reflective thinking through excellence in all of the following: (1) a description of the personal learning process including reading, writing, field trips, class attendance, discussion, making connections, etc., (2) a description of the research process involved in the team projects, (3) an explanation of the communication that occurred with interviewees and between peers and how this affected the learning and research process.</td>
<td>Demonstrates reflective thinking through a modest effort at the following: (1) a description of the personal learning process including reading, writing, field trips, class attendance, discussion, making connections, etc., (2) a description of the research process involved in the team projects, (3) an explanation of the communication that occurred with interviewees and between peers and how this affected the learning and research process.</td>
<td>Demonstrates reflective thinking through a minimal effort at the following: (1) a description of the personal learning process including reading, writing, field trips, class attendance, discussion, making connections, etc., (2) a description of the research process involved in the team projects, (3) an explanation of the communication that occurred with interviewees and between peers and how this affected the learning and research process.</td>
<td>No reflective thinking present; the essay is a compendium of facts gleaned from other sources (whether cited or not).</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORGANIZATION (2 pts)</td>
<td>The following are done very well and are appropriate to the rhetorical situation: (1) the organization of the paper is logical and develops ideas and arguments throughout, (2) the conclusion goes beyond summary to explore implications or specific needs for further knowledge, and (3) thesis is explicit and thoughtful and goes beyond summary to analyze, explore, and connect ideas.</td>
<td>The following are done fairly well and are appropriate to the rhetorical situation: (1) the organization of the paper is logical and develops ideas and arguments throughout, (2) the conclusion goes beyond summary to explore implications or specific needs for further knowledge, and (3) thesis is explicit and thoughtful and goes beyond summary to analyze, explore, and connect ideas.</td>
<td>At least one of the following are adequate and are appropriate to the rhetorical situation: (1) the organization of the paper is logical and develops ideas and arguments throughout, (2) the conclusion goes beyond summary to explore implications or specific needs for further knowledge, and (3) thesis is explicit and thoughtful and goes beyond summary to analyze, explore, and connect ideas.</td>
<td>None of the following are adequate: (1) the organization of the paper is logical and develops ideas and arguments throughout, (2) the conclusion goes beyond summary to explore implications or specific needs for further knowledge, and (3) thesis is explicit and thoughtful and goes beyond summary to analyze, explore, and connect ideas.</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUALITY AND MECHANICS OF WRITING (2 pts)</td>
<td>Demonstrates correct grammar, punctuation, word choice, and spelling.</td>
<td>Demonstrates mostly correct grammar, punctuation, word choice, and spelling.</td>
<td>Grammar, punctuation, word choice, and spelling are generally poor.</td>
<td>Grammar, punctuation, word choice, and spelling are very poor.</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total (of 15): ___
Very brief examples for main sections of the rubric
NOTE: More examples can be found in my office upon request during office hours.

Example: WHAT, HOW, AND WHY OF FOOD SYSTEM INQUIRY
The dominant North–South trade relations dating back to colonialism have shaped current day plantation production of bananas, and Latin American and Caribbean agricultural export economies generally (Shreck 2008). Given my interest in bananas and social justice, and as a regular consumer of bananas, I wanted to know more about the trade relations and the labor-owner relations that operate to produce the bananas sold at the Davis Food Co-op. Are the banana farmers and farm workers that grow the bananas sold at the Co-op compensated fairly for their work? Are there differences between the fair trade labels used at the Co-op, in terms of the production practices and fair trade integrity?

To answer these questions my team visited the Co-op to examine the bananas sold. We also interviewed the managers responsible for ordering the bananas to better understand the issues that contributed to management decisions. Talking with the Co-op management was very helpful in getting an initial picture of what food retailers deal with when serving customers that are both interested and disinterested in fair-trade products. However, we discovered that we needed to follow the leads provided in the interview with internet searches for background on the fair-trade certifiers and to eventually contact certifiers and possibly farmers directly, before we could accurately assess the integrity of the labels. Reflecting on our original research questions, we realized that in order to approach answering our question, we would need significantly more time and effort to track down and question the many people involved in the growing, processing, shipping, and marketing of the bananas.

Example: REFLECTION ON YOUR LEARNING & RESEARCH PROCESS
Having the chance to see behind the scenes where the bananas were prepped for display, how much waste occurred, and the volume of consumption was valuable in getting a better sense for the magnitude of the banana trade. I just thought about all the perishable produce being shipped overseas 365 days a year, a race against the bananas’ color turning yellow and brown. Talking with the prep workers and management convinced me of the huge importance that the consumers of today place on cosmetics, and how this in turn places a huge burden on retailers, distributors and growers to fill narrow consumer qualifications. How did we develop such narrow preferences?

Endnotes
1 This assignment was inspired by G. Lieblein, T.A. Breland, and N. Sriskandarajah’s “Analysis of a Farming System and Conversion Planning: Guidelines for the project work in Agroecology and Farming Systems (PAE302),” NOVA Agroecology M.Sc. Program, Norway, 2005. Adaptation done with Damian Farr, numerous CRD 20 TAs and tutors, and supported by a 2008 Undergraduate Instructional Improvement Program grant from the Teaching Resources Center at UC Davis.

2 Structure here refers to the material and social arrangements that constrain and shape food production, distribution, and consumption. Material structure refers to the biological and physical components of ecosystems. Social structure includes roles that individuals fill, the relationships between different groups (including social differentiation along the lines of gender, race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, disability, etc.) and cultural and institutionalized norms that shape the actions of social agents.

3 Functioning refers to the ways in which people go about feeding themselves and others, and the ways in which various social units (households, companies, governments, non-governmental organizations) are involved in the food system. This involves individuals and social units (1) using and influencing material components (soil, fossil fuels, packaging, environmental consequences, food itself, etc.) and (2) assigning symbolic components (purposes, meanings, motivations, values, etc.) to their and others’ activities.