



Original Research Article

The state of postsecondary food studies pedagogy in Canada: An exploration of philosophical and normative underpinnings

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Abstract

To date, there has been little empirical research on how food studies pedagogy has developed in Canada. Yet, across Canada, more and more postsecondary institutions are offering food studies in formalized programs and individual courses to undergraduate students. This paper contributes to the literature on food studies pedagogy by gathering insights from interviews with key faculty in food studies undergraduate programs at Canadian higher education institutions, and other food studies scholars in Canada. The purpose of this empirical research is to provide clarity regarding the ways that food studies programs are conceptualized and taught to better understand the evolution and future course of food studies pedagogy. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken to explore the normative commitments and philosophical underpinnings of food studies programs; various ways that scholars scope food studies; and challenges faced by food studies programs. We found that food studies programs in higher education in Canada and their associated pedagogy do not have a set of fixed attributes, but they do share common threads. Transformation is a defining characteristic of food studies and its pedagogy and puts critical thinking at the core of how food studies are taught in Canada at the undergraduate level. Interviewees also emphasized the importance of moving beyond critique towards solutions in their teaching to facilitate a transition towards more socially and ecologically just food systems.

Keywords: Food studies; food studies pedagogy; critical pedagogy

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Introduction

In the context of complex twenty-first century challenges, food studies act as a powerful point of convergence to analyze the nexus of climate change, biodiversity loss, economic inequality, hunger, malnutrition, and obesity, amongst other such wicked problems (Rittel & Weber, 1973). Recognizing their potential to address some of society's most pressing issues, twelve postsecondary institutions across Canada have developed food studies programs. To date, however, there has been little empirical research on the approaches of undergraduate food studies programs in Canada. Lack of clarity regarding the ways that food studies programs are conceptualized and taught makes the evolution of food studies pedagogies and how to adapt to the current context unclear. This paper therefore contributes to the literature on food studies pedagogy by gathering insights from key faculty in food studies undergraduate programs at Canadian higher education institutions, and other food studies scholars in Canada. This study includes interviews with two different types of participants in Canada: 1) faculty involved in formal undergraduate food studies programs or certificates (“food program faculty”) and 2) scholars who are active in advancing food studies but are not associated with a formal program (“food studies champions”).

The aim of this paper is to explore the normative commitments and philosophical underpinnings of food studies programs; examine the various ways that scholars define food studies; and describe some of the challenges faced by food studies programs. This paper focuses on pedagogical approaches in undergraduate food studies in Canada and the empirical data is scoped by the perspectives shared by instructors in food studies programs and those of scholars who teach or have taught courses concerned with food studies issues. In total, we conducted eighteen semi-structured phone interviews.

We found that food studies programs in higher education in Canada and the pedagogy associated do not have a set of fixed attributes, but they do share common threads. The interviews highlight how transformation is a key defining characteristic of food studies and its pedagogy and puts critical thinking at the core of how food studies are taught in Canada at the undergraduate level. Interviewees also highlighted the importance of moving beyond critique towards solutions in their teaching to facilitate a transition towards more socially and ecologically just food systems.

There are two contextual factors worth noting that influenced the analysis in this paper—the COVID-19 pandemic and rising calls for racial justice. These events will undoubtedly impact how food studies are taught to undergraduate students and we touch briefly on the ways these events highlight existing aspects of food studies pedagogies and where they might best adapt to the evolving context.

Evolution of food studies and defining characteristics

Many definitions of food studies have been put forward and there is not one agreed upon definition. Power and Koç define food studies as a “historically specific web of social relations, processes, structures and institutional arrangements that cover human interaction with nature and with other humans involving production, distribution, preparation and consumption of food” (2008, p. 264). *CuiZine: The Journal of Canadian Food Cultures* at McGill University, suggests that food “acts as a window” (2016), highlighting food as a focal point to bring disciplines and researchers together and investigate interrelationships. To guide our interpretation of food studies, we use Koç and colleagues’ 2012 survey of the field that revealed three overlapping and mutually constitutive characteristics of food studies that are repeated throughout the literature: 1) approaches that span disciplines; 2) a multilevel systems approach; and 3) a focus on applied or transformative work.

Interdisciplinarity in food studies is regularly cited as a defining feature (Koç et al., 2017; Anderson et al., 2016) and appears in food studies programs through multiple topical and/or paradigmatic approaches to teaching about food. Koç and colleagues’ (2017) second characteristic of food studies is that of a “multilevel systems approach”, which lines up with the “systems thinking” that is prioritized in some food studies pedagogy (Valley et al., 2018), underlining the ways that the content of food studies programs often reinforce the pedagogy, and vice versa. Centering content on systems has long been a defining feature of food studies (Black, 2013), and the prevalence of systems thinking and respect for different ways of knowing as a pedagogical value (Valley et al., 2018) also helps to explain the emphasis on active community engagement frequently present in food studies programs. Interdisciplinarity and systems are integral components to both food studies as a topic and as a priority in teaching it.

Transformation, as the third tenet of food studies suggests an underlying normative outlook. We understand this as signaling a philosophical orientation towards critical theory, alongside a normative orientation towards a socially and ecologically just food system. Much of the early scholarship of food studies used food to illuminate existing research agendas (Belasco & Scranton, 2002), many of which existed in a lineage of critical theory. The commitment to transformation arguably results from critiques of the current food system in a critical theoretical vein. This third characteristic of food studies signals the theoretical and normative underpinnings of the field itself.

Since many food studies scholars prioritize a critical lens in their scholarly work, it is perhaps unsurprising that critical pedagogies are also prominent in food studies programs and courses. Critical pedagogy is, at its core, pedagogy based on the tenets of critical theory. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire’s Marxist exploration of the colonizer and the colonized, he argues for a new pedagogy that makes the learner a co-creator of knowledge (1970). Writing on critical pedagogy has since expanded dramatically, so that “it has become a ‘sort of big tent’ for all people in education invested in social justice work” (Tarlau, 2014, p. 372). Critical pedagogy uses ideas from critical theories to “unlearn” systems of power and oppression that are baked

into modern education. We expect there will be a renewed and continued interest in critical pedagogies as food studies instructors grapple with continued calls for racial justice and equitable reform in society, as well as greater attention to settler colonialism in Canada.

Food studies programs in higher education are informed then by both critical theory and critical pedagogy. The defining characteristics of food studies—interdisciplinarity, systems thinking, and transformation—use and reinforce critical theory and critical pedagogy alike. A critical approach to food asserts its materiality and emphasizes the difference between “a food from nowhere” (McMichael, 2003, 2009)—a construct of a flawed industrial food system—and a “food from somewhere” (Levkoe et al., 2020)—the product of a transformed, resilient, and just food system. Tools that help students interrogate re-spatialization (e.g., through social movements and power relations in the food system) are based in critical theory approaches. They are not necessarily, but are often, taught in critical pedagogical ways as well—that is, they aim to transform both inside the classroom through teaching and outside by transforming the food system. Food studies values food literacy as a way to ‘read the world’ through food, aiming for these skills to help learners engage with power relations (Sumner, 2013). Instructors in food studies programs often use teaching methods they see as achieving both ends—preparing students to be leaders in food systems change while at the same time unlearning the systems of oppression acting within the education system itself.

Food studies programs themselves only began to appear in the mid-1990s. In the United States, Nestle and McIntosh (2010) recognized the establishment of an academically focused undergraduate Food Studies program in 1996 at New York University (NYU)—just after a Julia Child-inspired gastronomic Master’s program at Boston University was developed—as the beginning of this field of academic study. Nearly two decades later, Black (2013) suggested a continued lack of doctoral programs indicated a lingering immaturity of the field. The NYU program later grew to investigate “critical social questions about food production and consumption” (Nestle & MacIntosh, 2010, p. 161). Black (2013) traced the development of food studies programs, describing them as uniquely North American and evolving out of the same tradition as gender or areas studies.

Scholars of food studies therefore often see themselves as part of multiple communities—they may primarily see themselves as historians or sociologists of food, political scientists, or ecologists. As such, we interpret programs of food studies quite broadly and our study focuses on Canadian food studies programs by considering these overlapping communities. While the label of food studies may be a North American invention, many higher education institutions in other countries provide education that would likely fit into the food studies tent: The University of Gastronomic Sciences (UNSIG) in northern Italy offers both undergraduate and Masters degrees; the Open University of Catalonia has a Master’s degree in Food Systems, Culture and Society, and City University of London’s Centre for Food Policy offers postgraduate courses (City University, 2021; Open University of Catalonia, 2021; University of Gastronomic Sciences, 2021). Officially labeled undergraduate “food studies” programs are also growing, including at the Marylhurst University in Oregon, Syracuse University in New York, the University of Texas

(Black, 2013) and the very recent programs at George Brown College in Canada and the William Angliss Institute in Australia (George Brown College, 2021; William Angliss Institute, 2021). Wageningen University in the Netherlands offers a European Master's of Food Studies in cooperation with universities in Ireland, Sweden, and France (Wageningen University, 2021).

In Canada, significant interdisciplinary approaches to food systems research have existed from the mid-1970s onwards, but it was not until 2005 that the Canadian Association for Food Studies (CAFS) coalesced around some of the earliest scholars embracing food studies (Koç et al., 2017). Like elsewhere, those identifying as food studies scholars have various academic identities, and so “Canadian”¹ food studies scholarship includes an array of disciplinary perspectives. For example, scholars may use social work to understand the ongoing impacts of settler colonialism's “helping policies” on Indigenous populations (Robin (Martens) et al., 2020); others have used social movements to explain Canadian alternative food initiatives (Levkoe, 2014), while still others investigate municipal policy to explore the potential for food systems transformation (Valley & Wittman, 2019).

There is a growing literature on broad conceptions of food pedagogies (Flowers & Swan, 2012a; Swan & Flowers, 2015), but there is room for more research on the pedagogies specific to formal food studies programs and courses in higher education. Relevant works include Valley et al. (2018) and Hilimire et al. (2014) that focus on a subset of food studies prioritizing sustainability and systems thinking. In a different vein, Flowers and Swan (2012a, 2015) consider pedagogies around food more broadly, discussing pedagogy as it is used by chefs, politicians, and educators. More recently, and particularly salient in the COVID-19 climate, Levkoe et al. (2020) explore online food studies pedagogies. Black's (2013) chapter in the *Routledge International Handbook of Food Studies* is, to our knowledge, the only overview of food studies programs in higher education, but while it focuses on North America there is sparse coverage of Canada and no focus on pedagogical approaches. This paper aims to contribute to this literature.

Food Studies: A hands-on guide by Zhen (2019), represents a coherent and very recent approach to teaching methods in food studies that may become a useful tool for instructors in the future. Other recent scholarship has highlighted methods that food studies programs are using in the two-pronged goal of transformation both inside and outside the classroom. For example, student projects that focus on co-creating knowledge with community partners demonstrate the interdisciplinarity characteristic of the core of food studies—respecting multiple forms of knowledge—while using experiential learning in collective action projects that value systems thinking (Valley et al., 2018). Critical reflection based on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle then helps students integrate theory and action (Valley et al., 2018).

¹We recognize that “Canada” represents a history of settler colonialism but use it throughout the paper to both distinguish it from other “national” contexts of higher education and to keep in line with our common reference points of the Canadian Association of Food Studies (CAFS) and the journal, *Canadian Food Studies*.

Levkoe et al. (2020) similarly use critical reflection to engage learners with different backgrounds to integrate concepts into their lives. Critical reflection after experiential learning helps strengthen critical pedagogies as it is “useful for unveiling worldviews and frames of reference” (Valley et al., p. 471) (See also Galt et al., 2013b; Mezirow, 1991) that are necessary in unlearning the systems of oppression in both the food and education system. The experiential learning in collective action projects in sustainable food systems education (Valley et al., 2018) or service learning where students help build community advocacy capacity (Wadsworth et al., 2012) serve as both pedagogical and transformative tools for the food system. “Collective action projects” aim to achieve dual purposes of developing agency and civic engagement in sustainable food system education (SFSE) (Valley et al., 2018), suggesting a strong normative commitment to transformation. Another similar approach is the way that Chatham University’s Master of Food Studies program uses both field trips as experiential learning and reflection (Seidel, 2020).

Methods

This study, which sought to gather empirical insights from those involved in teaching food studies, includes interviews with two different types of participants in Canada: 1) faculty involved in formal undergraduate food studies programs or certificates (“food program faculty”) and 2) scholars who are active in advancing food studies but are not associated with a formal program (“food studies champions”). Interviews took place between May 11 and 28, 2020. Table 1 lays out the criteria that was used, based on the literature, to determine which Canadian programs should be included in the study as they do not all self-identify as food studies programs. In this study, formal food studies programs offered at the college/university level included certificates, minors, and bachelor’s degrees. Some programs are embedded in cultural or historical studies, while others lean more towards natural sciences. In determining which programs could be considered food studies, we applied a broad definition that included food systems, sustainable agriculture, nutrition, food security, and food policy studies. Programs, certificates, and minors were largely self-identified as fitting into food studies by the scholars who taught or managed them. In the spirit of widening the lens of what can and should be considered food studies, we included programs that provide a critical perspective on the “ways in which humans, food, and the natural and built environments construct one another” (CFS, 2020). This aligns with our perspective that a narrow conceptualization of food studies keeps the discipline small and limits opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration and real-world applications. Food centres are not considered food studies programs because they do not officially offer courses. However, faculty members associated with food centres that taught food studies courses in their respective faculties were interviewed and grouped under food studies champions.

Table 1: Selection criteria for food studies programs

Institution	Program Type	Interdisciplinary	Systems thinking	Experiential Learning	Available to Undergraduate Students	Interview(s) secured
University of British Columbia	Core curriculum offered through the Faculty of Land and Food Systems as part of four possible BSc in Food and Resource Economics; Global Resource Systems; Food, Nutrition and Health; and Applied Biology and Minor in Sustainable Food Systems	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
George Brown College	BA Honours in Food Studies	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kwantlen Polytechnic University	BSc In Sustainable Agriculture	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Memorial University	Certificate in Food Studies	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ryerson University	Certificate in Food Security Studies	✓	✓	✓	On a case-by-case basis	✓
University of Toronto	Minor in Food Studies	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Trent University	Honours BSc in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Science and Honours BA in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Studies.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
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Food studies champions were determined initially as those with a high degree of involvement in CAFS, and its associated journal, *Canadian Food Studies*. From this small group, other relevant food studies champions were identified through snowball sampling. We included champions to round out our understandings of the state of food studies in Canada. The food studies champions that we interviewed are affiliated with the following institutions: Carleton University, Concordia University, University of Guelph, Lakehead University, Sir Wilfred Laurier University, Memorial University of Newfoundland, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, and York University.

We interviewed food studies program faculty to understand the evolution, pedagogical approaches, and normative and philosophical underpinnings of undergraduate food studies programs. Food studies program faculty also shared their definitions of food studies and described the coherence of their programs. Champions also defined food studies, discussed the evolution and growth of food studies, and offered opinions regarding formalization of undergraduate food studies. A total of eighteen semi-structured phone interviews were conducted for this study, with eleven food studies program faculty and eight food studies champions. Table 2 provides details on the formal programs that are included in the study.

Table 2: Undergraduate food studies programs and certificates in Canada

Institution	Description	Degree/Certificate Awarded	Program Start Date	Number of Students	Types of Students
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<p>George Brown College</p>	<p>The Honours Bachelor of Food Studies will offer a broader pathway for foodservice professionals beyond their current culinary education. The program will provide Canada’s evolving food sector with thought leaders who can thrive in both for-profit and non-profit work environments, as well as in graduate school. Graduates will be positioned to succeed in a wide range of food-related occupations including culinary arts, education, tourism, recreation, health, food security, sustainability, economic development, agriculture, public policy, and research (Bonar, 2020).</p>	<p>Honours Bachelor of Food Studies</p>	<p>Fall 2021</p>	<p>Twenty-four students will be accepted in the first year</p>	<p>Anticipating it will be people who are interested in culinary training that want a bachelor’s degree or those who are interested in broader issues of the food system.</p>
<p>Kwantlan Polytechnic University (KPU)</p>	<p>KPU is home to the only agriculture program in Canada to have its four year degree curriculum focussed on organic production. Students explore the fundamentals, such as math, biology, chemistry, and geography as well as concepts in sustainable agriculture and food systems (KPU, 2020).</p>	<p>Bachelor of Applied Science in Sustainable Agriculture</p>	<p>2013</p>	<p>Approximately forty to fifty students.</p>	<p>Typically, older students, with some life and professional work experience. Often, they already have degrees in political science, biology, or geography for instance and see sustainable agriculture as a way to pursue a meaningful career and contribute to the advancement of society.</p>

<p>Memorial University</p>	<p>The Certificate in Food studies involves the interdisciplinary study of food issues at local, regional, national, and global scales. The objective of the program is to provide foundational knowledge about the various dimensions of food systems and about the barriers to local and global food security (Memorial University, 2020).</p>	<p>Certificate in Food Studies within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences</p>	<p>2017</p>	<p>Information not available</p>	<p>Information not available</p>
<p>Ryerson University</p>	<p>This fully online, leading edge program explores food-related health and education issues, food policy, environmental sustainability, human rights, and alleviation of food insecurity (Ryerson University, 2020).</p>	<p>Certificate in Food Security through the Chang School of Continuing Education</p>	<p>2003</p>	<p>Enrolment varies, but the introductory course, which is taught three times a year, usually has approximately 100 students enrolled.</p>	<p>Undergraduates at Ryerson and graduates from other universities, particularly students taking environmental studies that want to specialize in food and food security. Many students from social work, but also those from nursing, engineering, and journalism.</p>
<p>Trent University</p>	<p>The Honours BSc is an integrated and interdisciplinary program of study that focuses on the science of agricultural production and food consumption.</p> <p>The Honours BA is an integrated and interdisciplinary program that focuses on the social, political, and cultural dimensions of agriculture and food. It presents global, Canadian,</p>	<p>Honours BSc Degree in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems</p> <p>Honours BA in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems</p>	<p>2012</p>	<p>Approximately sixty full-time majors and 150 full-time equivalents taking the courses.</p>	<p>About half of the students have a farming background, while the other half come from a non-farming background.</p>

	and local perspectives, building on a foundation of concepts and techniques of environmental studies and their application to agriculture and food systems (Trent University, 2020).				
University of British Columbia (UBC)	The Faculty of Land and Food Systems is a world leader in integrated research, education, and service to address critical global issues around human health and a sustainable food supply. The UBC Faculty of Land and Food Systems uses student centred learning to educate new generations of scientists equipped to solve the most fundamental issues faced by society—those focussed around human health, a sustainable food supply and the responsible use of finite land and water resources. To that end, Faculty initiatives foster and support research excellence, innovative action learning environments, strong community connections, and global and local collaborations (UBC, 2020).	The Faculty of Land and Food Systems offers four BSc programs including Applied Biology; Food Nutrition and Health, Global Resource Systems, and Food and Resource Economics. The development of a minor certificate in Sustainable Food Systems is also underway.	Around 2000	First year core course has approximately 100 students enrolled.	The majority of students are drawn from a nutrition perspective.

University of Toronto	Students in this program draw on a number of disciplinary methodologies, including anthropology, ecology, gender studies, geography, history, nutrition, and sociology. Courses span all of human history, from our foraging ancestors to the contemporary industrial food system, and around the world, examining diverse cultural traditions of farming, cooking, and eating. Students will learn the importance of food in religion, society, the family, gender roles, the environment, urbanization, immigration, colonialism, race, and ethnicity. The program also leverages the university's urban location to use Scarborough as a classroom to understand the rich traditions and special challenges involved in feeding diasporic communities. (University of Toronto, 2020)	Minor Program in Food Studies through the Department of Historical and Cultural Studies	2016	Approximately sixty	A diversity of students, many from psychology, biology, and business.
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In keeping with the interdisciplinary nature of food studies and acknowledging that knowledge itself is socially constructed, we would like to situate our own positionality and lens. We are two white settler women who conducted this research on land promised to Six Nations in the Haldimand Tract and the traditional territories of the Attawandaron (Neutral), Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples. We recognize that our analysis is undoubtedly shaped by the power of our privilege and the things we do not and cannot see. We are also mindful that our findings and discussion come through the lens of junior scholars who interviewed established scholars in our field.

This is an exploratory study and follows the principles of grounded theory (Saldaña, 2009). The interview transcripts were coded using NVivo software. This study involved two rounds of coding, the first was broad and descriptive while the second was more streamlined. In the first round sixteen codes were identified, which were then further refined into twenty-seven codes (Huberman & Miles, 1994). The analysis of the interview data, in addition to some textual review of publicly available information on programs, generated the empirical results that are discussed in the following section.

Findings and discussion

Food studies and its pedagogy: Not unique or fixed

As the definition of food studies is fluid in the literature, we were interested in hearing how food studies scholars in Canadian higher education make sense of food studies, which can inform the orientation of the programs. Some view food studies broadly and put transformation at the centre of the field: “I think of it as a very expansive thing because food is so huge and runs through everything and everything runs through food. The big dilemma of food studies is how to think of it as wide as its reality without making yourself cuckoo by not having any boundaries.... Basically any endeavor that's about driving us towards a more sustainable health promoting and equitable food system, that's food studies to me” (Participant 1, 05/13/2020).

Others had a narrower conceptualization of food studies, for example by making a clear distinction between food studies and food politics, “I don't like food studies very much. I find most food studies is highly normative without being political. So, I find a lot of the work is intellectually flabby...one thing I think about being normative is I think, when you're normative, to be a good intellectual, you need to understand your own positionality...one way to express that in an academic fashion is through theory. And I find a lot of food studies lacks a theoretical backbone and lacks a clear standing around positionality. And I find that can be a problem with food studies as opposed to food politics” (Participant 2, 05/14/2020).

The ambiguity of food studies was problematic for some, and according to one interviewee, the discipline does not lend itself well to formal programming. Rather, they saw the development of food studies programs as the act of picking a topic and building an interdisciplinary degree program around it in response to trends. According to this interviewee, the interest in food studies programs can be explained by the fact that students are drawn to food as an entry point to focus on things that they are actually interested in, such as sustainability, nutrition, or agriculture.

However, food as an anchor or a window from which to study other topics was also mentioned by several interviewees as a strength rather than a weakness,

“I really see food studies...as a vehicle for talking about other important things. People might not want to talk about globalization or gender issues or sustainability issues. But if you can get them there through food, then they see it, and it opens doors into these bigger issues or issues that are just as big as food...that we need to talk about” (Participant 3, 05/21/2020).

The imprecise nature of the discipline means scholars have diverse views on what constitutes food studies and whether there is value in formal programs for undergraduate students in Canada.

Just as the definition of food studies is not fixed, there is no canon on how to teach food studies.² However, significant and common threads, such as interdisciplinarity, experiential learning and community engagement, have emerged as food studies pedagogies become established. These common elements reflect Valley and colleagues' (2018) findings in sustainable food systems education (SFSE), but participants noted that these threads are not uniform in food studies: "I don't think we have one specific way of doing it. To me, and I think, because it is interdisciplinary, maybe what we hope is that different approaches will contribute to that knowledge and that building. I don't think we have a specific one [way] to say to characterize it" (Participant 4, 05/15/2020).

However, several interviewees discussed critical pedagogical approaches to student-led learning as important, where students are just as much part of the knowledge generation process as the instructor and are encouraged to challenge power dynamics in the classroom, "A normative thing around teaching is that classrooms are fundamentally hierarchical and unjust...And how we build relationships within the classroom...are a trial run or a practice for building a better world, whether it's through food or it's through thinking differently about international politics or environmental politics" (Participant 2, 5/14/2020). Interviewees were often interested in emancipatory educational work, suggesting an implicit Freirean outlook in food studies pedagogy—which aligns with the history of critical theory in food studies as a discipline.

Critical thinking in food studies pedagogy

Food studies is built on critical theory which promotes resistance and change. Critical theory has been described as covering "a wide variety of theoretical projects and agendas" (Allen, 2016, p. xi). As this paper does not have the scope to discuss critical theory in depth, here we employ the broadest conception (or, as Allen suggests, the "capacious usage" where it "refers to any politically inflected form of cultural, social, or political theory that has critical, progressive, or emancipatory aims" (p. xi)). Certainly, other food disciplines, such as nutrition or agriculture, are also built on normative commitments. However, these normative commitments are operationalized through a positivist lens and are often perceived as "technical" or "objective" and "value free".

Our findings highlight the interlinkage of critical theoretical approaches and commitment to transformation and suggest that these are the potentially *the* defining features of food studies and foundational to its pedagogy. This is partly because food-related disciplines that did not have critical theory underpinnings, such as agriculture and nutrition (which instead have more positivist lineages), were not considered part of food studies by study participants. For instance, the University of Guelph is Canada's leading agricultural university but does not have what

²Though Zhen's (2019) *Hands-on guide* offers a starting point to build a teaching canon through its guidance on teaching methods and activities in food studies.

might be considered recognizable food studies programming. All participants agreed that interdisciplinarity, systems thinking, and experiential learning were necessary characteristics of a food studies pedagogy, but some scholars also emphasized transdisciplinarity, systems of systems, political ecology, social justice, and power relations. Critical thinking stood out as an important learning outcome that was integral to food studies pedagogy, aligning with Dewey's pedagogy of realizing students' full potential and commitment to the greater good (Dewey, 2001). Equipping students to think critically was highlighted as one of food studies' key learning outcomes. For example, one champion explained, "So, I don't want you leaving necessarily saying, 'I'll never eat another box of Kraft Dinner.' But I want you leaving with an understanding of how that fits into larger social, economic, political systems and how you can look at this critically, but how you can also look critically at people who will judge you for not giving up Kraft Dinner" (Participant 6, 5/11/2020).

Another champion explained how critical thinking is key for achieving transformation both inside and outside the classroom: "I try to bring it to my teaching that, you know, the food system as we know it today is basically predicated on structures of white supremacy. You know, class exploitation, etc. So, I think if we're talking about sustainability, we have to address those things and address those things critically" (Participant 5, 5/13/2020).

Democratizing knowledge generation was raised repeatedly, as one participant noted they aimed "to deconstruct power and privilege in the classroom so that [students] can deconstruct power and privilege outside of it" (Participant 7, 5/18/2020). This underlines the inseparability of critical pedagogies in food studies, critical theoretical approaches to the scholarship, and the normative commitment to transformation and justice both inside and outside the classroom. Relatedly, another participant explained that Dewey's pragmatism informs their teaching philosophy: the idea of education for a civic community (Participant 16, 5/12/2020). Civic engagement and development of agency are key components of the "collective action" that Valley and colleagues (2018) found common amongst SFSE programs. These teaching strategies impart training for transformation internally and externally. Critical approaches to pedagogy are therefore often intertwined with the critical theoretical approaches of a lot of curriculum content. While they are distinct features—and it remains possible to teach a critical course where no critical pedagogy is used—interviewees repeatedly highlighted the ways that these concepts are largely integrated in their programs.

Dismantling white supremacy was identified as a program goal that can be achieved through critical and interdisciplinary pedagogical approaches. While this has been a core component of some conceptions of food studies pedagogy for years, it will likely hold even more weight given the growing awareness of systemic racism in light of rising calls for racial justice: "For me, interdisciplinarity is like the first crack into the white supremacy system of beliefs, because it acknowledges that one way of knowing, and I think of the hierarchy of sciences like physics, chemistry, biology, and everyone else, that interdisciplinarity is a crack to say that objective positivist ways of knowing are powerful, but insufficient or limited. And without that,

it makes it really hard and then once that crack is there, then you can start talking about and creating spaces for all the other ways” (Participant 7, 5/18/2020).

Another interviewee mentioned how their course on the performance of food allows for displacing a singular authority figure as the centre of agency. In their view, this approach,

“helps connect to things like Indigenous research paradigms, helps to de-masculinize knowledge frameworks...helps to take the individual researcher out of the position of authority and expertise, it tends to be good for local action-oriented research” (Participant 8, 5/18/2020).

Several interviewees noted Indigenous food sovereignty as an area of growing importance and recognition in Canadian food studies. Students are eager to learn more about the topic, as one participant shared, “a lot of our students are interested in the Indigenous studies, like Indigenous food systems” (Participant 9, 5/21/2020). Another interviewee mentioned how the lens of food can be a helpful tool in understanding unique dynamics in these communities: “the relationship between Indigenous peoples and food systems and there's a whole range of dynamics that you can really get do a deep dive into through the lens of food” (Participant 10, 5/20/2020). As an example of a response to this interest, Ryerson is now offering a course specific to Indigenous food studies in Canada.

Philosophical and normative underpinnings are intertwined

Many programs were established when a critical mass of faculty were interested in, or already teaching, food studies related courses. As a result, each program has a unique flavour based on the original faculty members or broader communities the programs are affiliated with. For example, the University of Toronto’s minor in food studies was started by relatively senior faculty members from the history department. Given its location in Scarborough, it largely focuses on challenges faced in an urban environment and by migrant communities, and emphasizes cross-cultural understandings. The Ryerson Certificate in Food Security originated in the School of Nutrition, while the Certificate in Food Studies at Memorial University is housed within the Department of Anthropology. These different disciplinary homes are reflective of original program architects, and then create legacies of their own.

Food studies programs often grew organically from the spearheading of champions within university departments, rather than designed at the request of university administrations to meet a perceived need for food studies programs. Therefore, many programs that we have considered part of food studies in Canada were described as having been “cobbled together” (Participant 8, 5/18/2020). In other words, they have been designed based on available offerings driven by academic interests of faculty members. Sometimes, though not always, faculty are limited to offering courses they *can* teach—rather than having a fully conceptualized curriculum from the outset. As such, these programs are subject to the different topical and pedagogical

approaches of individual instructors, versus a strategic design process that may produce a coherent whole-of-program pedagogical approach. George Brown College and Kwantlen Polytechnic University stand out in this regard as their programs were developed from scratch in response to a perceived increase in demand and interest in food studies programs and courses.

Each food studies program in Canada has its own flavour, stemming in part from the philosophical and normative underpinnings of the scholars who established it. For instance, the normative underpinnings for some lean heavily towards social justice and less on environmental justice. Moreover, some programs very strongly support the transformation of food systems away from conventional agriculture towards an alternative agroecological model. In terms of normative foundations, or program values, one program is guided by the belief that, “all people should be able to be food secure, food production cannot destroy the earth, our food system should build community and facilitate human and household wellbeing” (Participant 11, 5/27/2020). One very common philosophical underpinning describes food studies pedagogy as one that creates engaged citizens: “Food is powerful, and we all have power as individuals, and...we all need to work in community. And part of why you would go to university is to learn to equip yourself to act in the world. So, it is very much oriented towards engaging as a citizen in the world. I would say that's a big underpinning. It's not just sort of learning for the sake of learning. We're teaching people a specific way of being in the world” (Participant 12, 5/22/2020). A champion mentioned how, if they were to design their ideal food program, its philosophical underpinnings would be “pluralist knowledges. And I think that's kind of the...critical epistemological centre of food studies is pluralism, holism, ecology, continuity, flow assemblage” (Participant 8, 5/18/2020). Some of the founding characteristics of food studies then, systems and interdisciplinary lenses, are mapped directly onto the approaches to teaching food studies in Canada today.

In some cases, individuals had a strong sense of their own philosophical and normative underpinnings and those of specific courses they taught, but struggled to describe the underlying programmatic values in concrete and coherent ways. In effect, instructors were uncomfortable describing the philosophical and normative underpinnings of an entire curriculum, suggesting a potential difference between “cobbled together” and “designed” programs. It became clear that some of these goals were informal because there was a lack of cohesion about philosophical commitments and normative transformational goals within faculties. Some interviewees noted they had to be cautious about what terms they used in front of particular faculty members who prefer programs remain more positivist than normative in orientation.

Transformation: Moving from critiques to solutions

While effective critical thinking emerged as a core learning outcome in food studies programs, there were some calls to move beyond critique and towards concrete solutions and problem

solving that would be applied by graduates to produce the desired transformation in the food system. The following quote illustrates this perspective:

I find the big tension is the critique versus the solution. Like a lot of people don't really want to do solutions. The thing that most commonly happens which really, I find really irritating now as you know, the classic thing is the fourteen-chapter book where the first thirteen chapters give a brilliant dissection of what the problem is. The last chapter is this vague, general overview of solutions that you can't do anything with. the tragedy of it is that the students are desperate for it, because they really want to get out there and make a difference (Participant 1, 5/13/2020).

One program participant was highly committed to moving beyond critical reflection to exploring solutions, “students are led to understand the structural formation of food systems and then levers for changing them towards sustainability. So yeah, it's not a study of what is but a study of what is...to inform what could be” (Participant 13, 5/27/2020). Covering solutions may be difficult because many scholars are expected to be apolitical in their teaching even as some food studies scholars suggest the field itself is unapologetically values-based (Galt et al., 2013a). In describing a potential canon of food studies, Nestle and McIntosh identified an entire section of books dedicated to social movements inside the field (2008). In Anderson and colleagues' 2016 collection, the foreword describes food studies as “characterized by its interdisciplinary focus, systemic perspective, and *dedicated commitment to change*” (Koç, 2016, p. viii; emphasis added).

Relatedly, participants also expressed a desire to incorporate more design thinking, future studies, and problem-based learning as teaching activities into food studies programs and courses. The assertion that food studies is too focussed on critique and problems over solutions may be an indication of the underlying tensions between more positivist and critical normative commitments in the scholarship and pedagogy of food studies.

Tension between positivist and critical normative commitments in scholarship and pedagogy

One of the missing pieces identified that limits solutions in food studies by respondents is the divide between agriculturists and food studies scholars. We see this as a reflection of a broader tension between positivist and critical normative commitments. When asked to describe their ideal program, one champion explained that it would not be “anti-scientist, but anti-rigid-scientist—positivist is probably the best encapsulation of that” (Participant 8, 5/18/2020). One of the defining features of food studies is its critical normative orientation—making it difficult to incorporate positivist disciplines such as agricultural sciences, nutrition, or dietetics, that have

often lacked a critical theoretical foundation. Indeed, faculties that have brought these disciplines into closer interaction appear to experience clashes. However, for food studies to move beyond critique towards solutions, participants suggested it might need to interact with and draw on more traditionally positivist disciplines that are seen as more pragmatic and practically solutions-based. The need to bridge this gap was identified by several interviewees, “One of the sad things in a way is that, you know, Canada has eight agricultural faculty and has had them for a long time, and the people in the agriculture faculties generally don't participate in food studies” (Participant 1, 5/13/2020).

According to interviewees, the divide is partly explained by how often agriculture is intellectually and physically isolated from academia and other parts of society. This was a point of frustration for food studies program faculty who see the divide between food studies and agriculture as a deficiency, highlighting again the challenges of university structures, “I do find that it is dominated by social scientists and geographers and it needs to, and I talk about this a lot with my colleagues across the country, it needs to have agriculturist in there.... My point is that production agriculture ought to be part of food studies and food studies ought to see itself, fully related to agriculture, but we don't” (Participant 11, 5/27/2020). These tensions may be the key to explaining why food studies scholars—based on systems-thinking and transformation—might be reluctant to teach about solutions. While scholars might engage in research aimed at food systems transformation, institutions where value is placed on “objectivity” or apolitical content might inherently restrict teaching transformative solutions. For food studies programs to more effectively embrace a solutions-orientation, some participants suggested the need to extend invitations to include more traditional disciplines, particularly those that emphasize mainstream, industrial approaches to agricultural production. Trent University may be at the forefront of this endeavour as it already offers a science and an arts stream in their sustainable agriculture program, where students not only learn about agroecological production methods, but also have the opportunity to hone critical thinking by taking courses that explore food studies through a political ecology lens. The UBC also offers streams that recognize the interdisciplinary nature of food studies.

Prospects for growth and challenges faced by food studies programs

Some higher education institutions do clearly value formalized food studies, tailoring programs to this end. George Brown College will offer an Honours Bachelor's Degree in Food Studies in Canada starting in September 2021 (George Brown College, 2021). It is uniquely positioned to do so given its ability to provide both practical culinary training and administer a formal degree. Similarly, UBC is developing a minor in sustainable food systems, and the University of Toronto is working towards offering a major in food studies. The Université du Québec à Montréal announced two new program offerings in October 2020 that will begin in the Fall of 2021. The first is on contemporary issues in nutrition studies, and the second caters to those hoping to work

in gastronomy and takes a multidisciplinary approach to sociocultural issues related to the field. These developments are in response to perceived growing demand for and interest in food studies. However, there is debate regarding the degree to which food studies is growing and whether there is a need for more formal academic programs in this area.

There was no consensus about the trajectory of food studies, with some participants described food studies programs as booming while others described them as plateauing. Scholars who did not see rapid expansion in the field consequently did not see a need for an official program at their institution. Beyond growth and demand, they pointed out that programs can have unintended and undesirable consequences. For instance, some feared that formalizing food studies programs could end up siloing them.

One champion noted: “I have reservations about this idea of you know, every school, every university should have a food studies department. Because once you start putting boundaries and walls around things, I think it actually limits what it can become” (Participant 5, 5/13/2020). Other champions welcomed the idea of more formal programs as long as they could fill niches that do not already exist elsewhere in Canada. Finally, one champion summarized the advantages and disadvantages:

So, I have my two answers to your question. Absolutely food studies should remain fluid and, across faculties students should be able to take it and we should be able to create these minors or these concentrations or these foci...without formalizing in a program. As soon as you formalize it, you'll screw it up because the institution, the university institution will tend to mess it up, will tend to control it...[it] will try to box it in and put it in a formal space. And that's a problem because food extends beyond its boundaries all the time. So that's answer one.

Answer two is we've got to create formalized food studies programs, because it's such an important subject. And because, yes, you know, you can create formalized programs on anything but to draw attention to its importance, develop expertise, develop funding, you know, the funding is the big thing (Participant 8, 5/18/2020).

Questions as to whether food studies programs are expanding Canada or not and the desirability of formalized food studies programs remain. These are only the first of several challenges faced by food studies programs in Canada.

Challenges faced by food studies programs

Food studies programs in Canada face relatively consistent challenges, though the scale varies across institutions. Program participants emphasized a lack of resources, in some cases stating that their programs are “chronically underfunded” (Participant 14, 5/14/2020). The structure of universities was also raised by several participants, suggesting that organizing by department

does not lend itself well to inter- or transdisciplinary work nor is it well set up for solutions-oriented or transformative normative work that is inherent in food studies. For instance, one program participant lamented that, “A lot of solutions work requires normative research approaches, rather than [positivist] research approaches. And most people are trained in positivist research and the system rewards that kind of research. So, you know, the research grant process, the journals, the structure of the journals, all these things really are about positive inquiry, not normative inquiry. And when you do normative inquiry, you're usually penalized” (Participant 1, 5/13/2020).

Evidently, scholars run up against challenges when presenting solutions-based work that may be viewed as politically normative versus positivist and value free. Another participant explained how achieving true interdisciplinarity, which is a cornerstone of food studies, continues to be a struggle at their institution often because of dominant positivist orientations: “The challenges are rooted in beliefs about knowledge. So, ontological, epistemological, and methodological challenges. Anything that's not a natural science objective ‘truth’ is considered not worthy of being in the curriculum. Yeah, and it's not widely held, but it's enough that it gets airtime. There are those who believe it and talk about it, and then there are those who are silent and believe it and then those who are kind of on the fence. And so, I'd say that those three groups are pretty prevalent and powerful in my faculty” (Participant 7, 5/18/2020).

Setting up programs that achieve the normative commitment to critical transformation then is difficult in Canadian universities. Other, more concrete challenges to traditional teaching strategies also exist. Experiential learning, important to most food studies program faculty and champions, as a teaching method that integrates the main characteristics of food studies, also presents unique logistical and financial challenges.

Classes where experiential learning is a priority tend to be smaller and require more tailored experiences to achieve learning outcomes. In short, programs tend to have a low return on investment, a clear challenge as universities become increasingly neoliberal (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2000). The commercialization of higher education generally pushes universities to promote more industrially relevant activities, which food studies do not immediately lend themselves to (Rigas & Kuchapski, 2016).

The challenges and opportunities specific to COVID-19

COVID-19 will significantly impact experiential learning in food studies programs, if not eliminate it entirely. One interviewee described the changes as a result of the pandemic as a “tectonic shift in pedagogy” (Participant 15, 5/27/2020). Almost all participants mentioned the shift to online teaching and some expressed concern about how this would hinder learning experiences. While many acknowledged that universities were moving to increased online learning prior to the pandemic, some noted that the acceleration due to the crisis meant the transition might not be done in the required thoughtful way. Bringing an entire set of programs

online over the summer would be a “Herculean task” (Participant 10, 5/20/2020). Concerns were also raised regarding equity and accessibility in online learning environments. One participant worried, “I honestly don't know how we're going to pull this one off. And, and I mean, we're just going to have to figure it out. And so, I'm teaching, you know, very basic kinds of things, actually, the classes that I was teaching when I started years ago” (Participant 16, 5/12/2020). While many admitted that COVID-19 will hurt the experiential learning that so many food studies programs use to encourage interdisciplinary, systems thinking and community engagement, some programs are better equipped to shift to online learning than others. Although COVID-19 will present challenges to fostering meaningful experiences and synchronous class discussions for students, it is also seen as a positive development by some interviewees, as it validated food studies as a field, and consequently food studies programs. It also serves to heighten concepts of exploitation and inequality that have always been central to food studies as a field. For instance, one interviewee claimed that, “From a food studies perspective, I can say the chickens have come home to roost. That so much of what we've been arguing over the last decade or more, is so very true. And you can't ignore it. The whole system rested on so much exploitation that in a pandemic time becomes frightfully clear” (Participant 3, 5/21/2020). The advantages of greater recognition were expressed by a champion who stated that:

I think this is a boon for us. Yeah, I wish it wasn't.... People are starting to, you know, from journalists who are actually making an effort to write more about this to people who are actually apparently spending more time reading about these things now, and recognizing some of these issues that they maybe weren't paying attention to before, not only have been considered by scholars but have been thought through quite carefully. And so, I do feel that it is it is validating our work. And when I say our work, I mean in terms of understanding the supply chains in terms of understanding the relationship between food production and distribution of the environment, and I think the social justice part is like a major, major part of the conversation, right now (Participant 6, 5/11/2020).

It appears that this attention on food systems resilience is already leading to greater recognition and support for food studies programs. The pandemic highlighted certain vulnerabilities in Canada's food supply chain that may also be raising awareness of the value of food studies and its pedagogy. Notably, the outbreaks experienced at meat processing facilities and in the fields amongst migrant workers exposed some harsh realities of Canada's industrialized food system (Ayres, 2020; Patrice & Lamboni, 2020). Moreover, as food service establishments were forced to close, consumers had to adapt quickly and some began to support smaller scale local supply chains (Holland, 2020). Financial impact from job loss or reduced work hours as a result of Covid-19 has been devastating for some households and increased food insecurity amongst those Canadians (Polsky & Gilmour, 2020). The pandemic is still in full force and it is impossible to ascertain its the full ramifications on Canada's food systems. However, it is clear that it has had

an impact and this is being reflected in support for food studies programming. As one interviewee noted, “So it's an interesting time. And, and I think at our university, there's been a push for [funding]. Like, all of a sudden, the university has woken up to the importance of the program” (Participant 9, 5/21/2020).

Conclusion

This paper sought to take stock of undergraduate food studies programs and courses in Canada. Through a review of the literature on food studies and food studies pedagogy, it demonstrated how theoretical concepts of critical pedagogy and food systems transformation are translating to food studies programs across the country. By doing interviews with eighteen food studies faculty and scholars who are acting as champions of the field, we have gathered a range of perspectives and stances on curricular and pedagogical approaches that define the field at this point in time. The degree of cohesion varies considerably across programs, so it is difficult to make broad claims.

As many food studies programs are cobbled together, there is not always a clear through line in terms of the underlying values and pedagogical commitments. This is reflected in the lack of clarity around commitments and vision of certain food studies programs. However, other programs have a much stronger sense of cohesiveness. In these cases, ensuring shared values (or a shared normative outlook) was seen as vital to the success of the programs.

In sum, the critical approach to food in food studies drives the emphasis on transformation of the food system, pointing to its underlying philosophies and normativity. This critical element of food studies was repeatedly emphasized and is unsurprisingly a key feature of the way food studies are taught in Canada and the varying pedagogies of food studies scholars. Critique should be kept in high regard among those teaching food studies or involved in adapting and developing food studies programs, particularly in the current context of COVID-19 and the rising demands for racial justice, where critical consciousness must be prioritized in scholarship and in developing students. However, interviewees also highlighted a potential weakness in food studies in that it shies away from exploring solutions to the problematic systems that it often critiques. Other disciplines that have not traditionally been integrated as part of food studies may be helpful in this endeavor. If, as Marx suggested (2002/1924), the point is to cause change, the challenge will be to calibrate the scope of food studies to enable functionalizing its hallmark—a normative commitment to food systems transformation.

As food studies scholarship globally is underdeveloped, Canada can make some important contributions to the field relative to its size. The existence of CAFS provides an opportunity to carve out a particular Canadian food studies identity. CAFS is exploring ways of making food studies more inclusive and reflective of diverse perspectives in Canada. They have made public statements on specific issues such as the Sipekne'katik Mi'kmaw Moderate Livelihood Fishery and on racialized policy violence and systemic racism. The open and honest

reflection about what perspectives that are missing in food studies scholarship and the desire to create a more inclusive community is a positive contribution that can be made to the broader field of food studies. Domestically, the mainstream approach to agricultural production in Canada tends to take an industrial, positivist orientation. However, the Canadian government is beginning to consider alternative viewpoints as evidenced by the 2019 Food Policy for Canada and the recent establishment of the Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council (Government of Canada, 2020). Canadian food studies scholars now have a unique opportunity to engage with practitioners and encourage a more critical stance on the future course of food and agriculture in Canadian classrooms.

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