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SOS: ComAlt Self Evaluation

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*“So there is my story… I walked out of my tipi into a Tesla” (LaDuke 2016: 298, 299).*

When I explored my first academic fair at Evergreen after a wonderful first quarter in *Elections and the Economy*, I was not looking to undertake the responsibility of a Student Originated Study or Independent Learning Contract, so naturally I was a little apprehensive when I realized that the SOS: Commodification Processes and Alternatives was my best option. Food insecurity is an issue on campus; a fact brought to my attention through my work with the Food Systems Working Group. I thought, why not spend some academic energy addressing it? After a quarter of traditional research paired with immersive informal investigation, I have learned much more than just how to address food insecurity at Evergreen. Such as Winona LaDuke’s personal pursuit of knowledge culminated in the final section of *Chronicles*, “From Tipi to Tesla,” I have discovered how to incorporate my personal journey and experiences to create a unique and meaningful contribution to the larger academic conversation of my studies.

Within the SOS component of the class, I found that all of the assigned readings served a different function in my overall synthesis of commodities and food studies. While Tompkins’ Racial Indigestion was able to challenge and provoke the way I view the act of eating in relation to American racial history, and appreciate food studies for its historical and social depth, Newman’s more uncomplicated history of foodstuff futures in *The Secret Financial Life of Food* grounded me in practicality. While only sections of the text were assigned, *The Winona LaDuke Chronicles* made commodification and environmental issues personal, and connected these topics with the ethos of the reader. Although they were difficult for me, my best seminar papers, such as my paper from Week 5, were the writings that incorporated the analysis of Tompkins, the straightforward diction of Newman, and the “so what” factor of LaDuke.

This mode of learning that LaDuke expresses so well - tying the academic and factual with personal connection remained a theme during our tea tastings facilitated by our classmate and comrade Kotomi. I not only learned about the chemical compounds in caffeine and the processing differences between pu-ehr and oolong, but through the ceremonious and communal nature of these tastings I was able to assign value to the elusive connecting experience of tea.

Within my ILC, my first learning objective in order to understand the complex issue of food insecurity and how to address it, was to understand the relationship between the food system, socioeconomics and class structure, and the higher education system. *Paying the Price* by Sara Goldrick-Rab was the most helpful in explaining these relationships, but sections of *Endless Appetites* by Alan Bjerga and *Alimentary Tracts* by Parama Roy gave me insight into hunger around the world, and a more well-rounded knowledge of the current global food system, whereas Thomas Piketty’s *Economics of Inequality* allowed me to better understand the complexities of western economic inequality. While *A Place at the Table* most directly explained food insecurity in America, *Thought for Food*, and *Just Eat It*, along with the additions of *SEED: The Untold Story*, and *Food Chains* allowed me to not only see the full scope of issues regarding food waste, and the supply chain, but make emotional connections with these issues. Along with these traditional methods of research, I have immersed myself in the Olympia food system, attending meetings for the South Sound Food System Network, and legislative hearings regarding food or agriculture in the educational system, as well as attending relevant events on campus, such as the Water Is Life panel, and the series of Food Policy Faculty Candidate presentations.

My Second Learning Objective was to learn what university funded programs, organizations or state and federal legislation already exist to address food insecurity for college students at public universities. I acquired this information by researching these pre-existing programs. I also attended the Washington Higher Education Sustainability Conference, at which I learned that the consensus of the what the term “sustainability” means in the context of Washington Higher Education is ecological sustainability, only cementing the importance of my focus on economic sustainability within the campus food system. Along the way I documented my learning and activities via my WordPress blog. Because I already had experience with WordPress, I was able to push myself and play with formatting and a number of features I had not worked with before such as the Zotero Bibliography, and the map plug-in. My most successful posts were the ones in which I spent the most time making them visually engaging, such as in my posts from Week One and Five.

I answered the questions of my third learning objective (What measures are being taken [to address food insecurity] on the Evergreen campus, specifically? What has been successful? What can be improved?) by collecting information from all relevant Evergreen offices, working groups, or committees, such as the Food Advisory Committee and the Human Services Workgroup. I synthesized this learning in a 17-page term paper. Writing my first draft was difficult, but after feedback from my faculty that encouraged me to add my voice, I trusted in the lesson I had been learning all quarter, and injected my personal narrative of the previous ten weeks in order to highlight the unique comprehension of my work and understanding.

Overall, this quarter I learned more about the food system and food insecurity, the complexity of sustainability, as well as “critical eating studies,” but my most valuable lessons came in learning how to incorporate traditional scholarship and research with my independent learning journey. I have learned how to learn almost truly independently, managing my time and level of self motivation, and by learning to be brave enough to put put my own voice in conversation with existing scholarship I was able to enrich mine and my readers’ experience. Moving forward, I have become inspired to continue to challenge myself, and apply these lessons to my future studies at Evergreen.

**Proposed Credit Equivalencies:**  16 Total of 16 attempted/registered

4 – Commodification Processes: Racism and Sexism in Food Systems

2 – Critical Eating Studies: Tasting Labs

6 – Individual Learning Project:  Food Insecurity On College Campuses: At Evergreen and Beyond

4 – Creative and Expository Writing: WordPress ePortfolio