What is Food Justice? Learning about work on the ground in South L.A.

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Abstract
This microseminar will begin by asking the questions, "What is food justice?" "What is food insecurity?" and "Why should they matter to a USC student?" We will define and discuss these terms and talk about the growing problem with food insecurity on college campuses nationwide, including at USC. I will give historical background on the area around the USC campus and discuss how South L.A. came to be a food desert: an area abundant in fast-food restaurants, vacant lots and liquor stores, but lacking in grocery stores and safe parks. We'll examine how lack of access to healthy, affordable food affects South L.A. residents and the consequences on their physical and mental health, including the epidemics of obesity and diabetes, diseases that plague low-income Latino communities. In the second part of the seminar, we'll look at grassroots solutions to issues of food insecurity and lack of access to healthy food, including the work of nearby non-profit organizations to improve inequities in the local food system through school garden programs, social enterprises, and much more. We'll also learn about examples of college students struggling with food insecurity, including at USC, and we'll meet with a USC administrator who oversees initiatives such as the USC food pantry and other new programs to alleviate food insecurity for USC students. Finally, I'll discuss my involvement with local non-profit food justice organizations, explore opportunities for students to volunteer with these organizations and make a difference in the surrounding community.

Faculty Biography
Sarah Portnoy is an Associate Professor (of Teaching) in the Departments of Latin American and Iberian Cultures and American Studies and Ethnicity where she conducts research and teaches about food culture and food justice in Los Angeles’s Latino communities. She teaches four food-related courses at USC, "Food Culture in Latino Los Angeles," "Food Justice in Latino Los Angeles," "Food, Health and Culture in Latino L.A.," and a food-focused Maymester in Oaxaca, Mexico. Recently, she helped launch the new Food Studies minor. Her 2016 book, Food, Health and Culture in Latino Los Angeles (Rowman & Littlefield, Inc.) has received recognition for its contribution to furthering the field of food justice. Professor Portnoy has written about Latino
food culture for the Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Weekly, KCET, and numerous academic publications. She has been interviewed about her work on public radio stations and has been invited to speak at universities across the country, museums and community events. She was a featured panelist at the LA Times Festival of Books the past two years. Recently, she was awarded USC's Interdisciplinary Teaching Grant for 2019-2020.