

Feeding the billions: Challenges and Innovation in Food and Water Security



SYLLABUS

VU Amsterdam Summer School

7 – 18 July 2025

Any general questions for the Summer
School support team? Contact
amsterdamsummerschool@vu.nl.



Course Details

Title	Feeding the billions: Challenges and Innovation in Food and Water Security
Coordinator(s)	Dr Denyse Snelder (Centre for International Cooperation, CIS-VU) d.snelder@vu.nl
Other lecturers	- Ms Sabina Di Prima (CIS-VU) sabina.diprima@vu.nl - Dr Lia van Wesenbeeck (SBE – VU) - Dr Wilma van Staden (Rhodes University, South Africa)
Form(s) of tuition	On campus, lectures, debate, group work, and, during the first course week, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) with Rhodes University
Approximate contact hours	45
Approximate self-study hours	39

Teaching staff

The Summer School on Food and Water Security is organised by the Centre for International Cooperation (CIS), in collaboration with Rhodes University in South Africa and the Amsterdam Centre for World Food Studies (ACWFS), a joint initiative of the School of Business and Economics (SBE) and the Faculty of Science, VU Amsterdam. CIS is active in acquisition and implementation of externally funded international research, education and capacity building projects in particularly Africa and Southeast Asia; in developing trans- and interdisciplinary education; and in promoting communication between researchers at the VU by organising seminars, workshops and conferences.

Dr Denyse Snelder is Acting Head of the Centre for International Cooperation (CIS) at VU Amsterdam and has expertise in sustainable land and water management and climate smart agriculture.

Sabina Di Prima also works at CIS and conducted her PhD research in food and nutrition security and sustainable food systems.

Both, Denyse Snelder and Sabina Di Prima, manage and implement research and capacity building projects in Africa and Southeast Asia.

Dr Lia van Wesenbeeck is Associate Professor Development Economics and Director of the Amsterdam Centre for World Food Studies. Her expertise is in the field of economics and food security, general equilibrium theory and applications, and the modelling of the water-energy-food nexus.

Dr Wilma van Staden has expertise in environmental management and climate-smart agriculture and is e-learning specialist and lecturer at Rhodes University in South Africa.

Course description

There are 8.0 billion people to feed today, and this number is expected to increase to about 10 billion by 2050. More food is needed, and more food means more water for crops and livestock to grow.

This course is evidence-based and addresses food and water challenges and innovative interventions from various disciplinary perspectives and socio-cultural contexts, using real-life examples. This year, students will collaborate with students from Rhodes University in South Africa on a joint assignment and presentation through Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL). Interactive theoretical lecture sessions (partly online) are alternated with discussions, group work, and a field visit. Students will benefit from discussions with their peers from different disciplinary backgrounds and countries of origin.

In this course you examine a range of approaches towards food and water security, from food systems to international policy agreements to community-based activities. At least four to five of the following topics will be covered:

- Food systems, Food and Nutrition Security and Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture
- Water management, water security and Climate-Smart Agriculture
- Extension services, Policies & challenges
- International food markets and economic factors that affect food security
- Innovative interventions along the value chain (from farm to fork)

We bring practice to the classroom by using real-life examples from the Netherlands and from South Africa.

Learning objectives

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- **Demonstrate** a comprehensive understanding of key concepts related to food systems, food markets, food and nutrition security, nutrition-sensitive agriculture, water security, and climate-smart agriculture.
- **Develop and apply** transversal skills, including communication, debating, digital literacy, presentation, team collaboration, in an intercultural setting.
- **Design and implement** data collection tools.
- **Conduct** a comparative analysis of stakeholders' perspective on the future of food (systems).
- **Reflect critically** on food security, nutrition and climate change challenges across diverse socio-ecological contexts.

Assignments and Assessment

The course includes the following assignments:

- Group presentation on Farmers' perspective on the future of our food
- Gamification and debate on urban agriculture

- Individual essay (based on the group presentation)

Group presentation

This assignment consists of two parts:

- a. Conduct of Interviews (and analysis of the interviews): Students in Netherlands and in South Africa will interview a few farmers to gather info on "Farmers' perspective on the future of our food", e.g., 3 different type of farmers: biological farmers, large scale farmer (e.g., livestock) and small-scale / intermediate farmer (mixed farming, crop farming); videos on interviews can be shared.
- b. Joint group presentation: presenting the outputs of the interviews and sharing perceptions from the interviews taken at both sides (Netherlands and Sout Africa). The presentations will end with a plenary discussion.

Note: Groups will be composed of students from both the Netherlands and South Africa, providing an opportunity to learn from diverse perspectives and contexts.

Individual essay

Individual write-up reflecting on "The Future of Our Food," incorporating insights gained from interviews, group discussions, and presentations. The write-up should integrate supporting evidence from relevant literature, including recent sources. Be sure to include well-reasoned arguments and a comprehensive reference list. More details will be provided in class.

Gamification and debate on urban agriculture

In pairs or small groups, you will be assigned a specific stakeholder group and participate in a game related to urban agriculture. Throughout the game, you will encounter various situations and interact with different stakeholder groups, making decisions that best represent the interests of the group you have been assigned.

The game will conclude with a debate, where evolving scenarios will be presented, and negotiations will take place to achieve the best possible outcome for all stakeholders involved.

All preparation for the game and debate will be completed in class.

Final assessment / Grading

The table below outlines the overall assessment process. To receive the certificate, you must maintain full attendance and achieve a minimum score of 5.5 ("mediocre") on each assignment. The rubrics for these assignments are provided in the Annex, detailing the specific criteria and performance levels expected for each. These rubrics describe the characteristics of each achievement level, ranging from excellent to poor. Reviewing them will help you better prepare for the assignment.

Course item	% of final score	Assessment (pass/ fail or grade*)
Attendance in 8 lectures and workshop / discussion sessions, 1 excursion, if any)	0	Pass / fail Note: Attendance in <u>all</u> lectures, workshops, excursion and game is mandatory; missing one class = one extra assignment (essay on missed lecture)
Group presentation based on interviews with farmers	25	Excellent / Very good (10 – 9) (Very) good (8.9 – 7.5) (More than) Satisfying / (just) sufficient (7.4 – 5.5) Unsatisfactory / Fail (< 5.5)
Individual essay on topic related to the group presentation	60	Excellent / Very good (100 - 90) (Very) good (89 - 75) (More than) satisfying / (just) sufficient (74 – 55) Fail (< 55)
In-class Debate and role play	15	Excellent / Very good (10 – 9) (Very) good (8.9 – 7.5) (More than) Satisfying / (just) sufficient (7.4 – 5.5) Unsatisfactory / Fail (< 5.5)
TOTAL:	100	
To receive the certificate: complete attendance (pass) and grade of 5.5 or higher for the assignments. *: In the Netherlands, grades from 1.0 up to 10.0 are used, with 1 being worst and 10 being best; see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grading_systems_by_country#Netherlands		

Provisional reading list

1. Bouma, J., Hegde, S.E., Lasage, R. (2016). Assessing the returns to water harvesting: A meta-analysis. *Agricultural Water Management* 163, 100-109. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0378377415300780?via%3Dihub>
2. Bowman A. 2025. Supermarketisation, Agro-Industrial Concentration and the Food System's Shrinking Interstices: Insights From South African Agro-Processing - Global Networks - Wiley Online Library <https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12521>
3. Debuschewitz, E., Sanders, J. Environmental impacts of organic agriculture and the controversial scientific debates. *Org. Agr.* 12, 1–15 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13165-021-00381-z>
4. Etana D, Snelder D., van Wesenbeeck C A, de Cock Buning T. (2023) Understanding the Contexts of Effectiveness of Adaptation to Climate Change and Variability: A Qualitative Study of Smallholder Farmers in Central Ethiopia. *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability* Volume 21 (1): 2253648
5. Etana, D., Snelder, D.J.R.M., van Wesenbeeck, C.F.A. and de Cock Buning, T. (2021). The Impact of Climate Change and variability on the Livelihoods of Smallholder farmers in Central Ethiopia. *Sustainability* 13(12), 6790, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13126790>
6. Fanzo, J., Haddad, L., Schneider, K. R., Béné, C., Covic, N. M., Guarin, A., ... & Moncayo, J. R. (2021). Rigorous monitoring is necessary to guide food system transformation in the

- countdown to the 2030 global goals. *Food Policy*, 104, 102163. [Viewpoint: Rigorous monitoring is necessary to guide food system transformation in the countdown to the 2030 global goals - ScienceDirect](#)
7. Houessou Mawuna D., Ben G.J.S. Sonneveld, Augustin K.N. Aoudji, Fréjus S. Thoto, Denyse J.R.M. Snelder, Anselme A. Adegbidi, and Tjard De Cock Buning. The urban poor: profile and constraint affecting their participation in allotment gardens. *Development in Practice* (2023). *Development in Practice* Volume 33(3): 301 - 316
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2022.2066066>
 8. Milieudefensie - Friends of the Earth Netherlands 2018. Van erf tot Erf: interviews met boeren. 84pp. E-Book. <https://milieudefensie.nl/actueel/van-erf-tot-erf-verhalenbundel-nu-online> ; English version on VU Canvas; see documentary <https://youtu.be/F-SWLgYMQGU>
 9. Ruel, M. T., & Brouwer, I. D. (2024). Diets and nutrition: The potential of a food systems approach. *IFPRI book chapters*, 18-24. [Chapter 2: Diets and Nutrition: The Potential of a Food Systems Approach](#)
 10. Schneider, K. R., Fanzo, J., Haddad, L., Herrero, M., Moncayo, J. R., Herforth, A., ... & Wiebe, K. (2023). The state of food systems worldwide in the countdown to 2030. *Nature Food*, 4(12), 1090-1110. [The state of food systems worldwide in the countdown to 2030 | Nature Food](#)
 11. Schneider, K. R., Remans, R., Bekele, T. H., Aytekin, D., Conforti, P., Dasgupta, S., ... & Fanzo, J. (2025). Governance and resilience as entry points for transforming food systems in the countdown to 2030. *Nature Food*, 1-12. [Governance and resilience as entry points for transforming food systems in the countdown to 2030 | Nature Food](#)
 12. Van Loon (2015) Hydrological drought explained. WIREs. (22 pages excluding references) <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/wat2.1085/epdf> (accessed online 15 July 2019)
 13. UNDRR GAR SR on drought (2021) (Summary for policymakers) <https://www.undrr.org/publication/gar-special-report-drought-2021>
 14. Bouma, J., Hegde, S.E., Lasage, R. (2016). Assessing the returns to water harvesting: A meta-analysis. *Agricultural Water Management* 163, 100-109. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0378377415300780?via%3Dihub>

Course Schedule

WEEK 1: Lectures sessions, famers' interviews and group presentation		
Date	What	FORMAT
Monday 07 July	• Introduction of lecturers and students • Introduction to course • Introduction to Food Systems and Food and Nutrition Security	10:00 – 13:00 2 hours Online with Rhodes University 1 hour In-classroom at VU
Tuesday 08 July	• Introduction to assignment with Rhodes University students (interviews with farmers & group presentation) • Introduction to individual essay • Concept of Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture (NSA) • NSA related practices in Africa and Asia: ○ Agroecological farming ○ Mulching ○ Nutrient-rich crops / forgotten crops (link to Indigenous Knowledge Systems)	09:00 – 13:00 2 hours Online with Rhodes University 2 hours In-classroom at VU
Wednesday 09 July	• Water security and water cycle concepts • Effects of Climate Change on Agriculture • Concept of Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) • CSA related practices in Africa and Asia: ○ Drip irrigation / precision irrigation ○ Rainwater / Dew harvesting ○ Drought-resistant/Forgotten crops (IKS)	09:00 – 13:00 2 hours Online with Rhodes University 2 hours In-classroom at VU
Thursday 10 July	Extension services and Policies & challenges • Challenges of extension services ○ Costs, lack of officers ○ Reaching vulnerable groups ○ Role of AI and Youth • Policies in South Africa and Netherlands • Farmers' challenges with policies: ○ biodiversity conservation on farms ○ GHG emission targets, water availability	09:00 – 13:00 2 hours Online with Rhodes University 2 hours In-classroom at VU
Friday 11 July	• Student group discussions and preparation of group presentations next Monday	09:00 – 13:00 Online with Rhodes University / In-classroom at VU

The first week is composed of the key elements described below.

Course Introduction and Key Themes

The course will begin with an introduction to the lecturers and students, fostering a collaborative learning environment. This session will provide an opportunity for students to get acquainted, setting the stage for active engagement throughout the course. Following this, an overview of the course will be presented, outlining its structure, objectives, and expected outcomes. This introduction will explain the food systems concept, highlight the importance of food systems and their role in ensuring food and nutrition security globally.

Introduction to the assignment for week 1 and the essay

Students will be introduced to their assignment in collaboration with Rhodes University, which involves conducting interviews with farmers and preparing a group presentation. This activity will encourage practical engagement with real-world agricultural challenges and solutions (See section on assignments and assessments above). Students will also receive an explanation of the individual essay, which will be connected to group presentation and encourage critical thinking and engagement with key issues in food security and the future of food.

Understanding Food Systems and Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture (NSA)

The course will delve into the fundamentals of food systems and food and nutrition security, exploring how different components—from production and distribution to consumption—interact to shape food availability, accessibility, and utilization. This session will set the foundation for discussions on sustainable agricultural practices that contribute to food security.

A critical concept introduced in this course is Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture (NSA)—a framework that integrates nutritional goals into agricultural practices to enhance food security and health outcomes. The session will also explore NSA-related practices in Africa and Asia, including:

- Agroecological farming, which promotes sustainable farming methods that maintain soil health and biodiversity.
- Mulching, a technique used to retain soil moisture, suppress weeds, and improve fertility.
- Nutrient-rich and forgotten crops, linking the discussion to Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and their role in diversifying diets and improving nutrition.

Water Security, Climate Change and Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA)

The course will then explore water security and water cycle concepts, emphasizing the critical role of water in agriculture and food production. This will provide context for the discussions on climate change and its impact on agricultural practices.

A key focus of the course is the effects of climate change on agriculture. Students will examine how rising temperatures, shifting rainfall patterns, and extreme weather events affect food production, water availability, and rural livelihoods.

To address these challenges, the course will introduce the concept of Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA)—an approach that aims to increase agricultural productivity while adapting to climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Students will explore CSA-related practices in Africa and Asia, such as:

- Drip irrigation / precision irrigation, which optimizes water use for crop production.
- Rainwater and dew harvesting, an essential technique for water conservation in dry regions.

- Drought-resistant and forgotten crops, incorporating Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) to highlight traditional resilience strategies.

The course will also discuss extension services and policies related to CSA, addressing the challenges of implementing these strategies at scale.

Challenges of Extension Services and Agricultural Policies

A discussion on the challenges of agricultural extension services will highlight key issues such as:

- High costs and shortage of extension officers, limiting farmers' access to information and support.
- Difficulties in reaching vulnerable groups, including smallholder farmers and women.
- The role of AI and youth in extension services, exploring how technology and innovation can improve agricultural advisory systems.

The course will also examine agricultural policies in South Africa and the Netherlands, comparing different approaches to supporting farmers and ensuring sustainable food production. This will lead into a discussion on farmers' challenges with policies, such as:

- Biodiversity conservation on farms, balancing environmental protection with productivity.
- Greenhouse gas (GHG) emission targets and water availability, examining the constraints that policies place on agricultural practices.

Student Discussions and Group Presentation Preparation

To conclude, students will engage in group discussions and preparation for their group presentations, which will take place the following Monday. This session will allow students to reflect on what they have learned, exchange ideas, and collaborate on their group assignment.

WEEK 2: Active learning through role play, field visit, gamification and debate		
Date	What	FORMAT
Monday 14 July	• Student group presentations on the outputs of farmers' interviews • Q& A / student debate • Final comments and Closure	2 hours Online with Rhodes University 1 hours In-classroom at VU
Tuesday 15 July	• Evolution of international food markets and their impact on national and household food security • Role play on the topic	4 hours In-classroom at VU
Wednesday 16 July	• Field visit to urban agriculture setting (e.g., Cityplot https://www.cityplot.org/amsterdam)	4 hours in field
Thursday 17 July	• Introduction to gamification and debate assignment	4 hours In-classroom at VU
Friday 18 July	• Gamification and debate on urban agriculture • In-class evaluation, final remarks and closure	4 hours In-classroom at VU

The second week will emphasize active learning, covering various topics related to urban agriculture and the evolution of international food markets, and including the activities described below.

Evolution of International Food Markets and Their Impact on National and Household Food Security

Over the course of the last 150 years, the trade in food has increased dramatically. More food than ever is now shipped from production areas to consumers. This is not the only change, however. Concentration of power in the hands of a few large companies characterizes the world market for the major grains, while supermarket chains increasingly play their role. This leads to increasing dependency of food and nutrition security on a few large (private) players, and begs the question of how this affects poorer households and potentially threatens traditions and norms surrounding food everywhere in the world.

Background information: The Impact of Globalisation on Food Culture: Your 101 Guide!

see: <https://amazingfoodanddrink.com/impact-of-globalisation-on-food-culture/>

Role Play on the Topic

To deepen understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding international food markets and food security, students will engage in a role play. In this exercise, participants will assume the roles of various stakeholders such as government officials, farmers, multinational corporations, and NGOs. By simulating negotiations, policy-making processes, and decision-making, students will gain a firsthand understanding of the challenges involved in ensuring food security at different levels—from the global market to the individual household.

Field Visit to Urban Agriculture Setting (e.g., Cityplot, Amsterdam)

The learning experience will be enriched by a field visit to an urban agriculture setting such as Cityplot in Amsterdam. Cityplot is an innovative urban farming project that integrates sustainable agricultural practices in urban environments. Students will see how local food production is adapted to city life, promoting food security through community-based initiatives. The visit will provide insight into how urban agriculture can play a crucial role in increasing access to fresh, nutritious food while contributing to environmental sustainability.

Introduction to Gamification and Debate Assignment

Students will be introduced to the interactive learning experience planned for the following day. The concept of gamification—integrating game-like elements into non-game contexts—will be explored. By structuring the gamification activity to finish with in a competitive debate, students will enhance their argumentation, critical thinking, and teamwork skills. The gamification approach will make the assignment both engaging and impactful, reinforcing key concepts while fostering deeper participation.

Gamification and Debate on Urban Agriculture

The game and debate will center on the role of urban agriculture in addressing food security challenges. Students will be divided into pairs or small groups and assigned different perspectives, such as those advocating for urban farming as a solution to food insecurity versus those highlighting

its limitations. The game & debate format will encourage students to think critically about the topic, collaborate with peers, and present well-reasoned arguments supported by evidence. The dynamic nature of the debate will also enhance students' public speaking and persuasion skills, making it an exciting and educational experience.

In-Class Evaluation, Final Remarks, and Closure

At the conclusion of the session, there will be an in-class evaluation to assess the students' understanding of the material covered. This evaluation will serve as a reflection of their learning, allowing them to articulate insights gained from the lectures, farmers' interviews, group presentation, role play, field visit, and debate. Following the evaluation, the teaching staff will provide final remarks, offering reflections on the key takeaways from the course activities. The session will then conclude with a closure discussion, allowing students to share their thoughts on the learning process and how they can apply the knowledge gained to real-world situations.

Annex

Rubric for group presentation

Grade Criteria	10 - 9 excellent	8.9 - 7.5 (very) good	7.4 – 5.5 (more than) satisfying	<5.5 unsatisfactory / fail
Content of presentation (30%)	The content meets the assessment criteria of the lower grade (good), but stands out in its execution.	More than replication of available information; new knowledge is presented and links are made to various information sources (<u>at least 5 references to peer-reviewed scientific publications</u>)	New knowledge is presented and links are made to mainly <u>one study or publication</u>	The presented content is insufficient: it does not meet the expected level of a 3 rd year student; mostly replication of available information and the content provides no new, and too little in-depth, knowledge;
	The content meets the assessment criteria of the lower grade (good), but stands out in its execution.	The research / study steps and methods are sound, well-defined and are clearly presented; the findings and conclusions are logical and clear-cut (e.g., the content is coherent, and well structured)	The research / study steps and methods are sound, moderately well-defined and moderately well-presented; not all findings and conclusions are logical and clear-cut (e.g., the content is somewhat incoherent, has a somewhat unclear structure)	The research / study steps and methods are not sound, poorly defined and presented; one or more serious problems in substance; findings and conclusions are not logical and clear-cut (e.g., the content is incoherent, has an unclear structure)
	The content meets the assessment criteria of the lower grade (good), but stands out in its execution.	Motivation/ justification for study topic is well presented and relevant; overall content is correct	Motivation / justification for study topic is incomplete, moderately well-presented and/ or there are minor errors (relating to poster content)	Motivation / justification for study topic is missing and there are major errors (related to poster content)
Presentation (25%)	The presentation meets the assessment criteria of the lower grade (good), but stands out in its execution.	The information provided is clear and comprehensible for advanced Bachelor students. It is presented in an attractive and convincing way.	The information provided is for the most part clear and comprehensible for advanced Bachelor students. <u>However</u> , it contains one or more critiques: too much jargon, slang or small talk; information is presented in a rather complex or rather simple way and/or	The information provided is not clear, incomprehensible or too difficult or complex to understand or too simple for advanced Bachelor students. It is not attractive and / or not convincing.

			<i>not so attractive and convincing way.</i>	
Clarity and attractiveness of slides (20%)	The text and figures meet the assessment criteria of the lower grade (good), but stands out in its design, creativity and content	All text and figures on the slides can be read (font size is good)	Most text and figures on the slides can be read (font size is on most slides is o.k.)	Most text and figures on the slides cannot be read (font size too small)
		All figures, maps and table are clear and self-standing	Most figures, maps and table are clear and self-standing	Most figures, maps and table are not clear and self-standing
		Slides undoubtedly capture your attention through their title, layout, and visuals, with the text being well-proportioned (i.e., not excessive).	To some extent, slides capture your attention through their title, layout, and visuals (such as figures and photos). Some slides contain excessive text.	Slides do not capture your attention by its title, layout and visuals (figures, photos); multiple slides contain excessive text.
Time management (10%)	The presentation was delivered within the allocated time slot , making it 'on time' or 'punctual.' The pace remained steady throughout, with no attempt to speed up towards the end to stay within the time limit	The presentation was delivered within the allocated time slot , making it 'on time' or 'punctual.' However, towards the end, it was presented more quickly in order to stay within the time limit.	The presentation extended slightly beyond the allocated time slot, running 1-2 minutes over, so it was not considered 'on time' or 'punctual.'	The presentation significantly exceeded the allocated time slot, running over by more than 2 minutes, and therefore was not considered 'on time' or 'punctual.'
Responses to questions (15%)	Questions were well understood and fully addressed and answers were excellent and clear-cut.	Questions were well understood and mostly addressed and answers were good and clear-cut.	Most questions were well understood, but the answers were only partially addressed and sometimes lacked clarity or were somewhat lengthy.	Questions were not well understood and/or partially or not addressed; answers were lengthy, incomprehensible or not given.

Rubric for debate

Grade Criteria	10 - 9 (excellent)	8.5 - 7.5 (good)	7.0 – 5.5 (satisfying)	<5.5 (unsatisfactory)
Cognitive skills 1: Ability to apply knowledge (30%)	Consistently incorporates relevant facts, data, and sources to support arguments in a clear and concise manner. Demonstrates a strong ability to apply knowledge effectively, consistently backing up claims with well-researched evidence.	Frequently incorporates relevant facts, data, and sources to support arguments in a concise manner. Demonstrates a solid ability to apply knowledge, supporting claims in a clear and persuasive manner, though occasionally lacking some depth or precision.	Regularly forgets to incorporate relevant facts, data, and sources or provides arguments in a somewhat lengthy or unclear manner. Demonstrates a moderate ability to apply knowledge, but the backing for claims is inconsistent or not fully effective.	Fails to incorporate relevant facts, data, and sources to support arguments or provides arguments in a lengthy, unclear, or disorganized manner. Demonstrates a limited ability to apply knowledge and support claims effectively, often lacking necessary evidence.
Cognitive skills 2: Sound argumentation (30%)	Consistently applies in-depth knowledge to present highly relevant arguments on the topic. Stays consistently focused on the subject throughout the debate, using knowledge effectively to advance the conversation Skillfully countering or weakening the opposing side's claims with strong, well-supported counterpoints. Adds significant depth to the debate, enriching the overall discussion.	Presents generally relevant arguments on the topic. Maintains focus on the subject matter most of the time and uses knowledge to drive the debate forward Offers effective counterpoints that challenge the other side's claims, though with less depth or impact than excellent contributions. Contributes to the debate with some depth, though not as extensively as in the excellent category.	Presents occasionally relevant arguments to the topic. Frequently loses focus on the subject matter, with some effort to use knowledge to advance the discussion and counter or weaken the opposing side's claims, though the counterpoints may not be fully supported or as effective. Adds limited depth to the debate, with some contributions lacking substance.	Presents arguments that are not directly relevant to the topic. Frequently out of focus on the subject matter, with little to no effort to use knowledge to advance the debate or counter the other side's claims effectively, leading to unsupported or weak counterpoints. No meaningful contribution to the debate.
Communication skills 1. Active engagement (and connecting) (20%)	Asks insightful, thought-provoking questions and consistently seeks clarification to deepen the understanding of the topic or effectively challenging the opposition's points.	Asks relevant and effective questions and regularly seeks clarification to explore the topic further or challenging the opposition's points. Avoids purely isolated points by building on	Asks occasionally relevant questions and sporadically seeks clarification to explore the topic further or challenging the opposition's points.	Asks poor or irrelevant questions, and makes no attempt to seek clarification or engage deeply with the opposition's points.

	<i>Avoids isolated or disconnected points by skillfully building on or thoughtfully challenging the ideas presented by others.</i>	<i>or challenging the ideas presented by others.</i>	<i>Often resorts to isolated points but occasionally building on or challenging the ideas presented by others.</i>	<i>Shows little or no effort in building on or challenging the ideas presented by others, merely offering isolated points with no meaningful contribution to the debate.</i>
<i>Communication / behaviour skills</i> <i>2. Active listening to others</i> <i>(20%)</i>	<i>Responds very well and directly to specific points made by the opposing side.</i> <i>Demonstrates deep understanding and critical engagement with the argument presented.</i> <i>Uses active listening techniques like paraphrasing, summarizing, or referencing specific examples from the opponent's argument.</i> <i>Responses are well thought out and show real-time processing.</i> <i>Maintains a respectful balance by allowing others to contribute; refrains from monopolizing the conversation, ensuring all voices are heard.</i>	<i>Responds well to the main points made by the opposing side.</i> <i>Acknowledges opposing arguments, but now and then responses occasionally seem generic or not fully address the nuance of the opponent's point.</i> <i>Demonstrates effort to engage with the opponent's arguments, but may rely on pre-prepared responses at times.</i> <i>Effectively counters opposing arguments, but occasionally takes the floor too much, limiting opportunities for others to speak.</i>	<i>Responds vaguely or in general terms without directly addressing specific points.</i> <i>Over-reliance on pre-prepared arguments, with some or little attempt to adapt responses to the opposing argument.</i> <i>Moderate to limited reflection of the opponent's ideas, possibly missing key points or details.</i> <i>Asserts his/her/their points and counters arguments, but regularly tends to dominate the conversation, preventing others from fully engaging.</i>	<i>Responses are irrelevant or completely disconnected from the opposing argument.</i> <i>Heavy reliance on pre-prepared arguments with no adjustment based on the ongoing discussion.</i> <i>Little to no effort to reflect or address what the other side has said.</i> <i>Frequently dominates the discussion, often monopolizing the floor at the expense of others' opportunities to contribute. The focus is on asserting own points without engaging with or allowing space for the opposition, limiting the overall balance and flow of the debate.</i>

Rubric for individual essay

Grade	90 - 100	75 - 89	55 - 74	0 - 54
Criteria	(excellent)	(good)	(more than) satisfying / (just) sufficient	(unsatisfactory / fail)
Thesis* and Argument** (25%)	• Excellent (21-25): The thesis is clear, concise, and well-defined. The argument is original, insightful, and strongly supported throughout the essay. • Good (16-20): The thesis is clear, but may be somewhat broad or lacking in depth. The argument is generally well-supported, but may lack some clarity or sophistication. • Moderate (11-15): The thesis is present but weak, unclear, or underdeveloped. The argument is partially supported but lacks depth or coherence. • Unsatisfactory (0-10): The thesis is unclear or missing. The argument is poorly developed, unsupported, or irrelevant.			
Evidence and Support (15%)	• Excellent (13-15): The essay incorporates relevant, strong evidence (facts, data, and at least 5 sources/ references) to support the thesis and arguments. The evidence is seamlessly integrated and thoroughly analyzed, directly contributing to the argument's validity. • Good (10-12): Relevant evidence is provided, but it may not always be fully analyzed or integrated into the argument. Some evidence may be more general or less compelling. • Moderate (6-9): The essay uses limited or inconsistent evidence. The evidence is either insufficient, underdeveloped, or not clearly connected to the argument. • Unsatisfactory (0-5): Little or no evidence is provided. The evidence is irrelevant, poorly integrated, or unsupported.			
Organization and Structure (20%)	• Excellent (16-20): The essay is logically organized, with a clear, well-structured progression of ideas. Each paragraph is focused and clearly supports the central argument. Transitions between paragraphs are smooth and help maintain the essay's flow. • Good (11-15): The essay is generally well-organized, but some paragraphs may lack focus or transitions could be stronger. The structure supports the argument, but some parts may feel disconnected. • Moderate (6-10): The organization is unclear in places, making the essay difficult to follow. Some paragraphs may lack cohesion or fail to support the main argument effectively. • Unsatisfactory (0-5): The essay is poorly organized, with unclear or missing transitions. Ideas are scattered, and the structure does not effectively support the argument.			
Clarity and Writing Style (20%)	• Excellent (16-20): Writing is clear, concise, and engaging. Sentences are well-constructed, and ideas are communicated effectively. There are no significant grammatical or spelling errors. • Good (11-15): Writing is generally clear, with only occasional awkward phrasing or minor errors in grammar or spelling. Ideas are communicated clearly, though the writing style could be more polished. • Moderate (6-10): Writing lacks clarity in places, with awkward phrasing, unclear sentences, or frequent grammatical/spelling errors that detract from understanding. • Unsatisfactory (0-5): Writing is unclear or difficult to follow. Frequent grammar and spelling errors make it hard to understand the ideas being presented.			
Conclusion (10%)	• Excellent (9-10): The conclusion effectively summarizes the main points, reinforces the thesis, and offers broader insights or implications. It leaves a lasting impression and closes the essay in a meaningful way. • Good (6-8): The conclusion summarizes the main points and reinforces the thesis but may lack deeper insight or broader implications. It doesn't leave a strong final impact. • Moderate (3-5): The conclusion restates points but lacks depth or meaningful closure. It may feel abrupt or disconnected from the rest of the essay. • Unsatisfactory (0-2): The conclusion is missing or ineffective, failing to summarize key points or provide closure.			
Originality and Insight (10%)	• Excellent (9-10): Original ideas with deep insights and critical thinking. • Good (6-8): Some original thinking, but ideas may not be fully developed or new. • Moderate (3-5): Limited originality, with basic or predictable ideas. • Unsatisfactory (0-2): Lacks originality, with recycled or shallow ideas.			
<i>*Thesis: central claim or main idea of essay that expresses the essay's primary focus or position on a particular topic; usually captured in one or two sentences; **Argument: refers to how the essay writer supports the thesis through reasoning, evidence, and analysis.</i>				

