

.From food deserts to wage deserts:.

Poverty policy and the power of spatial metaphors.

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12:30PM – 2:00PM

ROOM 6304.01 (Sylvia Scribner Conference Room)

CUNY Graduate Center @ 365 5th Avenue, NY NY 10016

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*Since the early 2000s in the United States, **food deserts** – “low income neighborhoods, both urban and rural, that have limited access to full-service supermarkets or grocery stores” – have become conceptually central to public health and health policy research on nutrition and obesity. This presentation traces the metaphor of the food desert to its origins in the UK and charts its translation to the American context, drawing on the literature on policy mobility, or “concepts on the move.” It also introduces a counter-concept, that of a **wage desert**, drawing on the Census Bureau’s Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) dataset to map a distinct geospatial portrait of deprivation. In proposing and elaborating the concept of a wage desert -- defined as a census tract at least 80% of whose earners are earning less than a self-sufficiency wage in their primary jobs – the paper aims not only to inform policy interventions but also to disrupt conventional conceptualizations of poverty.*