

# teaching note

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## *Food Safety Inspections and Storefront Grade Posting: The case of NYC and LA*

### Introduction/Summary

This case study examines the history of mandatory storefront posting of sanitation inspection scores in certain locations across the United States, with a concentration on Los Angeles and New York City. As this case study utilizes both primary and secondary research, students should gain knowledge from interested stakeholders both advocating and denigrating storefront posting laws.

### *Suitability for Use*

Specifically examining urban sanitation public inspection procedures, this case study investigates a small niche of governing bodies that require posting storefront inspection grades. While geared for people interested in restaurant management and health and safety protocol, the article is presented in such a way that a layman can understand the problem presented. Undergraduate students should handle this material with aplomb. However, this study also could be presented in a graduate studies class, as the discussion and criticism could be taken beyond the undergraduate level.

### Teaching and Learning Objectives

1. Teaching Objective: Students should be able to compare the range and variation in safety inspection procedures.  
Learning Objective: The case meets this objective by:
  - Providing a thorough history of food inspection processes in NYC and LA
  - Highlighting the differences between inspection locations
  - Shows the challenges involving using disparate systems
2. Teaching Objective: Students will be able to critically evaluate safety inspection procedures.  
Learning Objective: The case meets this objective by:
  - Showing both sides of the food inspection argument
  - Highlights the challenges presented by a variety of food inspection programs
3. Teaching Objective: Students will be able to identify trends and themes of food safety inspection processes.  
Learning Objective: The case meets this objective by:
  - Observing recent trends and challenges in locations across the United States
  - Finding applicability and similarities in other US locations
  - Challenging students to look to the future to foresee what lies next

### Methodology

The article incorporates a benchmark study by Simon, Leslie, Run, Jin, Reporter, Aguirre, and Fielding (2005), which examined hospitalizations in Los Angeles caused by food borne illnesses both before and after public postings were mandated. It is revealed that the law enactment was successful in terms of improving health and wellness. A wide array of newspaper articles are also used, which are complemented by interviews from professionals in Los Angeles, New York City, and Florida.

### Teaching Approach

The article highlights that the concerns of implementing a program 15 years ago and the changes between then and now. The topic is complex and multifaceted as the programs are unique to each location. As a result, locations are important to consider, although these programs have shared popularity in large cities. Generating class discussion is important in facilitating a case study that raises more questions than it answers. Ten years after Los Angeles launched its program, New York City launched one similar and met significant pushback. Again, opposing views are highlighted, captured by both primary and secondary sources. Many media sources are used, including popular periodicals such as the New York Times and the New York Post. While these add a unique voice to the case study, an interesting teaching point may challenge students to consider author bias and motivating factors of publication, as the New York Post may very well have a different reason for reporting as compared to the New York Times.

The article, besides generating an in-class discussion exercise, could provide a springboard for additional work, including:

- A research assignment on food inspections procedures in other locations
- A short answer essay on an exam
- An term project on food safety inspections

### Questions to Generate Interest

- What are safety food inspection processes?
- What are does a public posting mandate entail?
- Why have these programs been particularly prevalent for urban environments?
- How does technology affect food safety inspection processes?
- Has a food inspection score ever swayed you to visit or not visit a food service establishment?
- What are the benefits of food safety inspections?
- What are the detractions of food safety inspections?

## ***Topics and Questions for Discussion***

### **How is the operation affected around the time of the inspection?**

Inspection programs cause food service establishments to modify their operation around the time of their yearly inspection in anticipation of it. As operations will be modified once a year in preparation of inspections, this should raise a larger question regarding how does an operation function during the rest of the year when it is not at risk of being inspected.

### **Why did New York City receive so much pushback when their program was launched?**

The case shows that more discourse came from New York City's implementation of the program as compared to Los Angeles. Students should be asked why this may be the case. Powerful restaurant lobbyists should be considered as well as concerns of population density. Can the geographic makeup of Los Angeles, which is spread out, generate different opinions from that of New York City, which is built skyward, causing many restaurants to exist side-by-side?

### **Would generating a nationwide policy regarding food inspection procedures benefit or obstruct restaurants?**

Differences between the Los Angeles and New York City inspection procedures should be evaluated to reveal weaknesses in the respective systems. These include variations in the point distribution, inspector personalities, and grade ranges. A nationwide policy would fix a lot of these variances, and allow for easier comparison between data sets. However, students should also mention that different locations would have different needs. Where competition is healthy, food safety becomes important not only to public health, but also as an economic advantage.

## **Concluding Remarks**

Meaningful discussion can be generated through a suggested in-class debate activity that would split student groups between proponents and opponents of the New York City system. By isolating some concerns in the article that both support and refute the public posting of these procedures, students can debate the benefits and weaknesses of the program. Critical thinking skills can be used here to rebut assertions made by the opposing side. As the recommended teaching style should be in an open forum with the article read beforehand, significant class discussion could be led and generated from these previously mentioned points.

Finally, while there is ample research on food safety and sanitation, very little publication exists on the subject presented in this case study. A small, suggested references collection is below. Material gathered spans between a few published academic works, several

newspaper articles tracking the discourse, and personal interviews. Researching newspaper articles may yield the best results for this particular area of food sanitation reporting, but there are many articles available on food safety in countless academic journals should research require casting a larger net.