Instructor: Juliet Wittman

Office hours: MWF, 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. and by appointment at The Laughing Goat in Norlin Library. Office: Environmental Design Building (ENVD), 1850E (lower level), (303) 735-4788, jwitts@aol.com

Course description

Food is a rapidly developing and constantly changing area of study that draws from many scholarly disciplines: anthropology, psychology, economics, nutrition, geography, journalism, history, archeology. Essayists, memoirists, film makers, novelists, restaurant critics, and chef-authors have all added to the voluminous discourse on food. In addition, the topic is increasingly prominent in the civic realm, as politicians, farmers, restaurateurs, supermarket owners, seed and chemical companies, scientists, those who organize farmers’ markets and those who shop at them, as well as the public at large enter the dialogue and ponder the ways in which we produce and distribute food, and whether or not current systems are sustainable. In America, the movement toward a more organic and local diet has been growing steadily; at the same time, so has the desire—and need—of much of the public for food that is packaged, processed, convenient and cheap.

In brief, the topic of food is as intimate as the French fry you put into your mouth at lunch time, and as vast and wide-ranging as the history of our species. Ideas and beliefs about food are so ingrained and all-pervasive in most cultures that they are rarely examined and analyzed. Empires have risen and fallen because of food, economies have collapsed, and rulers been overthrown. In the 15th century, tales of spices and the connotations they carried of mystery, sensuality, intrigue, magic, and sin lured sailors into dangerous voyages of trade and discovery. In 1945, during the Russian blockade of Berlin, American bombers rescued the city by dropping food behind enemy lines, as well as candy bars tied to small parachutes. Food in this situation was more than simple sustenance. It had also become both a military tactic and a powerful symbol for sugar-starved Europe of American wealth and beneficence.

In this class, we will analyze the many ways in which the topic of food has been approached and addressed in our country, the symbolism of food and its place in the creation and transmission of culture. We will add our own words, both written and spoken, to the heated ongoing rhetorical conversation.

CCHE Criteria

Rhetorical knowledge: We will emphasize critical reading, undertaking a close analysis of assigned texts, and considering in each case the writer’s purpose, persuasive tactics, and intended audience, as well as the overall context in which he or she is writing.

Writing process: Writing is a continually recursive process. Often we discover what we think about a particular issue or topic only through the process of putting our thoughts on paper. As the ideas become clearer and more focused, it becomes necessary to re-work what has already been written.
This class follows a workshop format, and you will be expected to re-write every paper assigned at last once, and in some cases several times. Your writing will be critiqued and discussed by your fellow students as well as by me; you will give a presentation to help you shape your material and devise the best and most persuasive way of organizing and communicating your ideas. Through this presentation you will also be able to analyze the differences between written and oral communication in terms of both content and audience, and the varying strengths, weaknesses and uses of both modes.

You will be encouraged to analyze your own arguments and those in the written materials assigned for logic, coherence and persuasiveness. You will brush up on your research techniques, and will evaluate in depth the validity and relevance of your sources.

**Writing conventions:** You will learn to devise effective communication strategies for differing audiences, including readers of newspapers, scholars in the specific discipline toward which you direct your in-depth research project (economics, anthropology, etc.), civic leaders, and the general public.

We will examine the conventions and vocabulary of each genre, at all times bearing in mind the needs and expectations of your specific audience.

**Texts:**

**The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals**, by Michael Pollan. Available at Boulder Book Store, 1107 Pearl Street, where you will receive a 10 percent discount.

Pollan’s book is so far the most important and influential general text on the topic of food; it is almost impossible to join the national dialogue without understanding the facts and arguments he puts forward. The book is also a model of persuasive argument and careful reasoning. Pollan examines most of the issues he brings up from several perspectives. His research is profound, and is conducted through varying modalities—academic and journalistic, as well as through personal experience and immersion. He draws on disciplines as varied as botany, philosophy, and economics. His exegesis on how to read food labels and interpret visual symbols in a contemporary supermarket is a model of incisive rhetorical analysis in itself.

**Student papers:** Papers will be workshopped online and in class; you will need to make hard copies of your papers for distribution to your fellow students.

Various essays and papers sent electronically or posted on D2L.

**Films** (shown in class): **A Place at the Table; The Future of Food**

Both these films make strong arguments. We will discuss whether or not we find these arguments persuasive, and analyze the techniques utilized by the film makers, including use of language, editing and transitions, choice of interview subjects, visual and aural cues.

**Optional but highly recommended reading:**

**Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal**, by Eric Schlosser.

**The Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America** and **Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet**. Both by Harvey Levenstein
Recommended supplemental texts:

- The Elements of Style, Strunk and White
- On Writing Well, William Zinsser
- A first-rate dictionary and a college handbook, such as The Everyday Writer, Andrea A. Lunsford

Assignments

Writing Exercises: You will be working on exercises to increase the ease, fluidity and expressiveness of your writing throughout the semester.

One-page papers as assigned: You will be asked to comment on various topics, readings, etc. every week or two. These papers should not be dashed off. They should be clean, logical and coherent.

Personal essay, 3 to 5 pages (20% of grade)

Like all writing, a personal essay is a negotiation between private and public, the writer and the community at large, but it is a negotiation of a very particular and immediate kind. An essay can have a profound effect on the reader, or it can seem merely solipsistic and self-indulgent. We will analyze sample student essays, discuss voice and tone, consider the strengths and weaknesses of first-person narrative in general, and explore questions of audience. This exercise will also enable us to tackle issues of style, grammar, readability.

Book review: 2-3 pages (15 percent)

You will write a review of The Omnivore’s Dilemma, analyzing content, the author’s voice and approach and the overall impact. As always, you should be aware of your audience. The model is the kind of review you might find in the New York Times—which means the writing must be both intelligent and inviting to read.

Persuasive research paper, 10-12 pages (30 percent), subdivided as follows:

1. Class presentation, 20 minutes. You will determine the primary claim you intend to make in your research paper, and present it to the class with supporting evidence. This should enable you to sharpen your focus, think ahead of time about the most persuasive way in which to present your data on paper, figure out, with the help of your classmates’ questions and overall response, your areas of strength and those where more thought and research are needed.

2. Research paper. Based on our discussion about the essay, you will determine which works best for your topic: the first person or a more formal academic style. The goal is to arrive at a complex and sustainable thesis and to convince your reader of its validity. Like everything you write for this class, the research paper will be critiqued both by the instructor and your peers, and re-written at least once.

Editorial, 2 pages (20 percent): You have already written a well-researched persuasive paper. Now distill your argument into two concise, tightly-written and convincing pages.
(Class participation counts for the final 15% of your grade)

Methods of delivery and evaluation

Class time will be taken up with lectures, discussion, analysis of reading material, in-class writing, both full-class and small-group workshops, and an occasional speaker. We will utilize e-mail, D2L, library databases and various food and writing websites. You will be encouraged to use all relevant technological processes for your research and to aid communication both inside and outside the classroom.

You will be graded on your comprehension of course subject matter, your ability to conduct serious, in-depth research, the skill with which you use the information you’ve acquired in argument and to persuade, your ability to speak—both verbally and in writing—in different genres and to differing audiences.

Schedule of readings, assignments, exercises

Module One: Our personal relationship to food

Week One: Aug. 26-Aug. 30: Intro. to class. In-class exercise in writing and revision.


Assignment: personal essay, 3-5 pages, due Sept. 9 (graded)

Week Four: Sept. 16- Sept. 20: In-class critique of essays Essay rewrite due: Sept. 23
Read Michael Pollan. Take notes.

Module Two: Food in America


Assignment: Visit the farmers’ market (Wednesday 4-8 p.m.; Saturday 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. 13th Street between Arapahoe and Canyon). Write a one-page description of your visit. Due: Sept. 30

Week Six: Sept. 30-Oct. 4: Michael Pollan, debate, analysis, discussion.


Assignment: Review of The Omnivore’s Dilemma, 2-3 pages, due Oct. 14 (graded)

Module Three: Hunger in America

Week Eight: Oct. 14-Oct. 18: A Place at the Table

Assignment: 1-page response to A Place at the Table. Due Oct. 21

Module Four: Research projects

Week Ten: Oct. 28-Nov. 1: In-class writing on topics of interest; discussion in groups. Thesis statements.

Week Eleven: Nov. 4-Nov. 8: What makes a good research paper? How to do research.

Week Twelve: Nov. 11-Nov.15: Student presentations.

Research papers, 10 pages, due: Nov. 18 (graded)

Week Thirteen: Nov. 18-Nov. 22: Exercises. In-class critique of research papers.

Week Fourteen: Nov. 25-Nov.29—Fall break and Thanksgiving

Week Fifteen: Dec. 2-Dec. 6: How to write an editorial. Argument exercises: slant this story; analyze articles for bias, etc.

Using your research, write an editorial arguing a strong point of view. Due Dec. 9 (graded)


Class Policies

Grades: Your work will be held to high standards, according to the following criteria:

A: Excellent in content, form, and style—original, substantive, insightful, persuasive, clear, and free from mechanical errors.

B: Good, with no major flaws—interesting, with above-average thought and expression.

C: Adequate or reasonably competent. May have a mixture of strengths and weaknesses.

D: Poor in content, form, or style—disorganized, illogical, confusing, unfocused, or containing pervasive errors that impair readability.

F: Incoherent or disastrously flawed, never handed in, plagiarized.

Attendance and participation: Since this is a workshop class, participation counts for 15 percent of your final grade. More than three unexcused absences can result in your final grade falling by one fraction of a letter (from A to A-, etc.); six absences may earn you an F. Failure to attend an individual conference counts as an absence.

Participation involves more than your physical presence. It encompasses your coming to class prepared, participating fully in discussions, and the generosity and intelligence you show in critiquing the work of others.

If your class time is spent texting or focusing on your laptop and ignoring class discussion, I will count that as an absence. You will also accrue absences if you make a habit of walking in and out of the classroom while class is in session.
Late papers will not be accepted unless you have consulted with me and secured my agreement beforehand.

Writing Center: Individual tutoring is available for students at every writing level. You can make an appointment at http://www.colorado.edu/pwr/writingcenter.html

Plagiarism is presenting the work or ideas of someone else as your own. It includes failing to use quotation marks for directly quoted work, failing to document paraphrased ideas, and false documentation. It is also plagiarism to submit someone else’s work as your own. An assignment containing plagiarized material will receive an automatic “F” and will be reported to the Dean. (See “Honor Code” in “University Policies” below.)

University Policies:

Students with disabilities:

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities (303-492-8671, Willard 322, www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices).

Religious holidays:

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to reasonably and fairly deal with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. See full details at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html

Classroom behavior:

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Students who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Faculty have the professional responsibility to treat all students with understanding, dignity and respect, to guide classroom discussion and to set reasonable limits on the manner in which they and their students express opinions. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I can make appropriate changes to my records. See policies at: http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html and at: http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code

Honor Code:

All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-725-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic
integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-
academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion).
Other information on the Honor Code can be found at:
http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html and at:
http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/

Sexual harassment:

The University of Colorado at Boulder policy on Discrimination and Harassment
(http://www.colorado.edu/policies/discrimination.html, the University of Colorado policy on
Sexual Harassment and the University of Colorado policy on Amorous Relationships applies to
all students, staff and faculty. Any student, staff or faculty member who believes s/he has been
the subject of discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age,
disability, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of
Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-
492-5550. Information about the ODH and the campus resources available to assist individuals
regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at http://www.colorado.edu/odh