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 through Amazon and at Boulder Book Store, 1107 Pearl Street.

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, handed out or posted on D2L.

Films (shown in class or on D2L): 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, by Harvey Levenstein

Recommended supplemental texts:
Assignments

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

Personal essay, 3 to 4 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.

Five or six posts on D2L as assigned, 2-300 words (10 percent of grade). These will be responses to readings or in-class discussion—or perhaps a brief restaurant review. They should not be dashed off, but clean, thought through, coherent and edited.

Movie review, 2-3 pages (20 percent)

Group presentation on The Omnivore’s Dilemma (10 percent of grade)

Persuasive research project, 8-10 pages (25 percent), subdivided as follows:

1. Class presentation, 15-20 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.

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, CU-Learn, 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

**Week One (Aug. 28 and 28):** Explanation of class focus; In-class exercise: my last meal; share and discuss

*Read Coming Home Again by Chang-Rae Lee and student essays*

**Week Two (Sept. 2 and 4):** How to write an essay. Analyze assigned essays. In-class exercise.

**Week Three (Sept. 9 and 11):** Share exercise. Class discussion: is there an American cuisine?

*Read article on American cuisine: [http://earlyamericanists.com/2013/07/03/food-in-america-and-american-foodways/](http://earlyamericanists.com/2013/07/03/food-in-america-and-american-foodways/) and post your response to American cuisine question on D2L by Sept. 16*

Write a personal essay. This can utilize the material you discovered during out last meal exercise, or be about something else entirely. Due Sept. 16

*Read: The Omnivore’s Dilemma, introduction and part 1.*

**Week Four (Sept. 16 and 18):** Small group essay critique. Watch A Place at The Table in class. Discuss film. Conferences on essays.

*Essay rewrite due Sept. 23.*

*Read The Omnivore’s Dilemma, part 2. Post a response to the first two parts of The Omnivore’s Dilemma: Do you see research possibilities here?*

*Read How to Write a Review (handout, posted)*

**Week Five (Sept. 23 and 25):** Practice review (in-class writing). Share.

*Write a review of A Place at the Table, due Sept. 30*

*Finish reading The Omnivore’s Dilemma. Post response to the book: Did you see research possibilities you’d like to pursue?*

*Read handout (posted) on presentation goals.*

**Week Six (Sept. 30 and Oct. 2):** Small group critique of review. Divide into groups to discuss you presentations on The Omnivore’s Dilemma. Conferences.
Meet with each other to prepare presentations for the week of Oct. 7 and 9. Each presenter should prepare and post a handout on his or her contribution to the presentation to be shared with the class.

Review rewrite due in Oct. 7

**Week Seven (Oct. 7 and 9):** Omnivore’s Dilemma presentations


*Post both a long and a short version of your thesis statement.*

**Week Nine (Oct. 21 and 23):** Share and critique thesis statements.

**Week Ten (Oct. 28 and 30):** Presentations on research

**Week Eleven (Nov. 4 and 6):** Presentations on research

**Week Twelve (Nov. 11 and 13):** Presentations on research

*Research paper due in Nov. 18*

**Week Thirteen (Nov. 18 and 20):** Analyze research.

**Week Fourteen (Nov. 25 and 27):** Fall break and Thanksgiving

**Week Fifteen (Dec. 2 and 4):** Small-group critique of research papers. Conferences.

*Research paper rewrite due Dec. 11.*

**Week Sixteen (Dec. 9 and 11):** Last in-class exercise. Wrap-up and celebration.

**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 two unexcused absences can result in your final grade
falling by one fraction of a letter (from A to A-, etc.); four 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](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.)