

FIRST YEAR SEMINAR
The Politics of Food
Saint Michael's College
TTH 10-1140

Prof. Mike Bosia
mbosia@smcvt.edu
SED 349
Office Hours TTH 1230-215 and by appointment
Students are welcome to stop by anytime

Introduction

Coffee from Costa Rica. Strawberries grown in the Intervale. Fast food burgers.

We all have different tastes when it comes to what we consume. But food is more than nourishment and satisfaction. Food preferences, production, distribution, and preparation are the result of individual decisions about eating, growing, buying and selling. Collectively, these decisions affect our own health, the health of our natural environment, and the lives of those who work to grow and prepare the food we eat. But we are far from controlling our own consumption. Though our supermarkets are abundant with food from around the world, our individual choices are in fact shaped by economic markets and political decisions that reflect the value we place as a society on the environment and on individuals.

This seminar will investigate the connections between our food choices and political and cultural power. We will consider how decisions about production and distribution in the global economy result in specific social costs. We will look behind the scenes in restaurants, slaughter houses, and on the farm at how working life is organized for those who provide our food. We will examine the paradox of abundance and famine side-by-side in the world. Our goal is to reveal the politics behind our day-to-day decisions, and to weigh alternative choices made by local producers and consumers within a moral economy of food.

The seminar will include historical and contemporary accounts of food as a way of life, the work of journalists, advocates, and activists, as well as site visits to farms, markets, and restaurants. Students will engage the course material through discussion, analytical writing, and personal reflection.

Course Requirements

Discussion: Attendance and participation in discussion is necessary to each student's success in the seminar.

Writing Intensive: Written work submitted by the student will include a variety of formats and styles to encourage exploration in writing and to strengthen specific writing skills.

There are a total of 11 writing assignments. One of these is the final research project. The other 10 are a variety of weekly assignments (3 of which relate to the final research project), all of which are required. You will receive 1 point each week for completing assignments, including in-class participation in group editing/review.

Analytical Assignments: In total, 7 separate short papers or letters are required as indicated on the syllabus. ALWAYS include information from readings for that week and previous readings as appropriate. We will review papers in groups on Thursdays. You are required to bring papers for those days, and then you have one week to edit. You must submit 4 of these separate papers for grades.

Research Project: focuses on a specific aspect of food politics – policy proposals, growing or production, distribution, preparation, labor and working life. The research project will center on personal accounts through interviews with participants. Students will be required to engage some aspect of the readings. The project will be divided into four assignments. Students can only receive credit for the project if they participate in all aspects of production.

1. Project Proposal, outlining the theme and available resources.
2. Sources and interview questions reviewed in student groups.
3. Initial draft reviewed in groups and with instructor.
4. Completed Paper

Possible Topics:

Laboring in Fast Foods
 Gender and Restaurant Work
 Local Restaurants, Local Produce, and Profitability
 Vermont Farmers and GMOs
 Regulating Agricultural Pollution
 The Challenge of Organic Farming
 Cooperation and Sustainability as a Market Philosophy

Participation: You are required to be prepared, having completed the readings and with adequate notes. You are expected to be outspoken and participate in discussion and in-class assignments. You are required to participate in group review and editing of weekly writing assignments.

Evaluations:

Completion of Weekly Assignments:	10 Points
Graded Weekly Assignments (10 pts ea):	50 Points
Final Project:	25 Points
Preparation and Participation (including attendance):	15 Points

Field Trip: In the spring, students are required to participate in a Saturday field trip to Vermont's NEK to meet with organic farmers, dairymen, cheese makers, the managers of a cooperative market, and a restaurant chef and owner.

Texts and Readings:

Texts are available at the book store. Where indicated by an (e), the text will be distributed by email. An (r) indicates the book is on reserve at the library.

Week 1: Politics and Responsibility

T: Introductions and Expectations

TH: Essay and Review: Responsibility and The Kite Runner

Writing assignment 1: Response Essay

Week 2: Food, Politics, and Culture

"A Cultural Field in the Making," PP Ferguson (e) 42 pgs

"Delightful, Delicious, Disgusting," Carolyn Korsmeyer (e) 10 pgs

"Fragments for a new Urban Culinary Geography," David Bell (e) 12 pgs

The Omnivores Dilemma, Introduction, pgs 1-15

Writing Assignment 2: Apples and Oranges? Compare and contrast two approaches to food and politics/culture.

Week 3: The Political Economy of Industrial Food: The Cornopoly

The Omnivores Dilemma, pgs 15-123

Video: Holy Cow

Week 4: The Political Economy of Industrial Food: Laboring

Blood, Sweat, and Fear, Human Rights Watch (e) pgs 1-118

Writing Assignment 3: A Letter Home

Week 5: Fast Food and the Corruption of Culinary Cultures

"Burgers for Britain: A Cultural Economy of McDonald's UK," Karen DeBres (e) 26 pgs

"Fast Food in France," Rick Fantasia (e) 44 pgs

Slow Food, Chapter 2, "Tradition and Consumerism" pgs 19-33

"Carnal Knowledge: How I became a Tuscan Butcher," Bill Buford (e) 12 pgs

Writing Assignment 4: Project Proposal (ungraded)

Week 6: Fighting Industrial and Global Food

Tuesday, 2/20 NO CLASS

The World is Not for Sale, Bové and Dufour
“Two Fighting Farmers” pages 1-53

Writing Assignment 5: 300 word letter to the editor

Week 7: Biotechnology

Slow Food, “Frankenfoods,” pages 155-170

Video: The Future of Food

Thursday, 2/28
Guest Speaker

Week 8: The Political Economy of Global Agriculture

The World is Not for Sale
“The Damaging Effects of Intensive Farming,” pages 53-123

Writing Assignment 6: List of sources and potential questions (ungraded)

Week 9: Spring Break

Week 10: Organics, Markets, and Pastoral Agriculture

The Omnivores Dilemma, pgs 123-277

Week 11: Thoughts on Food and Identity

“The Sexual Politics of Cooking,” Vicki Swinbank (e) 32 pgs
“Reading Communities and Culinary Communities,” Parama Roy (e) 32 pgs
“The Overcooked and the Underdone,” TJM Holden (e) 28 pgs

Writing Assignment 7: Memoir and Personal Reflection

Week 12: Food and Tradition

“Restaurants as Agents of Culinary and Cultural Change,” Samantha Barbas (e)
19 pgs
“Transitions in Taste in Vietnam and the Diaspora,” Mandy Thomas (e) 15 pgs

“The Practical Aesthetics of Traditional Cuisine,” Miele and Murdock (e) 18 pgs
Slow Food, Chapter 6, “Markets” pgs 98-116

Video: The Cheese Nun

Week 13: Reflections on the Culinary Profession

Haute Cuisine, “The Cuisine” pgs 11-30 (r)

The Perfectionist, “Luxe, Calme, et Volupté,” (r) pgs 1-23

“Adventures in the Postmodernist Kitchen,” Elizabeth Miles (e) 13 pgs

“Changing the Menu,” Sen (e) 4 pgs

“The Bubbling Cauldron,” Zukin et al (e) 29 pgs

NOTE: Watch “Black Gold” on the PBS series Independent Lens

Writing Assignment 8: “Restaurant” Review

Week 14: The Politics of Choice

GO LOCAL OR ORGANIC: During Weeks 14 and 15 (April 15-29), you are REQUIRED to eat only local food (250 mile radius around Colchester) or only certified organic foods that you purchase or eat, except for meals provided at the Alliot dining hall (this exception does not include the cafés on campus). This means you MUST ask about the source of food and examine labels (where grown is more important than where canned!) and you should not consume anything outside one of these definitions. Of course, part of this process is negotiation, so you will be forced at times to make compromises. THAT is how you learn...

Saturday, April 14 – Field Trip

The World is Not for Sale

“We Can Change the World,” pgs 123-195

“A Taste of Trade Justice: Marketing Global Social Responsibility via Fair Trade Coffee,” Linton et al (e) 25 pgs

Writing Assignment 9: Project Draft 1 (ungraded)

Week 15: The Politics of Starvation and Malnutrition

World Hunger: Twelve Myths

Writing Assignment 10: 750 word Op Ed “My life (on organics/as a localvore)”

Office Hours: Project Draft Review

Week 16: Project Review

T: Review Project Draft

TH: Final draft review

Project due Friday!

Addendum A On Writing

FYS Director Prof. William Marquess prepared the following criteria for judging writing, which we will use in this seminar. All forms of writing in this seminar will “make a point” or “provide an explanation,” so this is applicable whether you are writing an essay, a letter, a memoir, or a reportage.

The essay has a clear thesis that is stated early. A thesis is a significant, arguable position on the material under consideration. Although it may involve your opinion, it presents a case that depends on more than opinion, as you support it with evidence.

“Genesis is an important text full of interesting stories” is a weak thesis because the position is hardly arguable—everyone agrees that Genesis is an important text—and the word “interesting” presents such a general opinion that it would be hard to support.

One good way to think of a thesis is that it attempts to answer a specific, useful question. “Genesis portrays a harsh and sometimes contradictory image of God” answers the question “What image of God do you find in Genesis?” It involves opinion—to this writer, the God of Genesis seems harsh—but it’s a position the writer can back up with evidence from the text.

The essay supports its thesis with clear evidence. It uses specific details to illustrate main ideas, citing the text when appropriate. Ideally, the support would be organized step by step in a logical sequence, with one main idea per paragraph. (One way to test this, after writing a draft, is to go back through and “gloss” each paragraph in the margin, identifying the main idea it develops. If there’s no main idea, or several, you’ve got further work to do in sharpening that paragraph, and possibly that part of the argument.)

Generally speaking, it is not necessary to repeat all the facts or to retell the story you’re discussing. Try to choose only the facts or the elements of a story that matter for your particular position. Similarly, quotations should be limited to passages that are especially pertinent, language that is unusually telling or difficult to paraphrase.

The essay considers arguments against its own position. The contemplation of opposing positions is one sign of a writer who has truly thought through the material, with a mind open to varying points of view.

Sometimes you can use this part of the process in the structure and even the thesis statement of your essay. For instance: “Although the God of Genesis seems harsh in some of his early actions, eventually he demonstrates a more loving, compassionate spirit.” After this thesis, you could write a section that establishes one side of the discussion, and then present the evidence that shows how the other side is more compelling.

The essay has a clear conclusion. This is an art. Try not just to repeat what you said in your introduction. Instead, try to choose a final point in the argument that leads naturally to your conclusion, and allows you to close without repetition. If you've chosen a title that suggests your thesis (generally a good idea), perhaps you can remind the reader of it in your final lines.

The writing is clear and mechanically correct. Presentation matters. A strong, perceptive discussion that is marred by weak grammar or bad spelling can garner no more than a B.

Addendum B **PLAGIARISM**

Plagiarism is a violation of academic integrity, and you can be subject to disciplinary procedures if you plagiarize. Your work must at all times be your own. In this seminar, you can draw on other's arguments, or you can provide evidence that you have gathered through interviews or in texts, but you will receive no credit for an assignment if, in each case, such works are not cited in a format that is appropriate to the style of writing. Citations are necessary when you quote someone else or when you draw on their ideas without necessarily quoting them. Plagiarism can also subject you to academic discipline.

In this seminar, you must use full citations (adopt a style you prefer) when you are writing essays – except that texts used in class may be cited with reference to author and page number only. Letters, memoirs, Op-Eds, and reportage will use journalistic standards, which means that the work is cited within your text and not as a footnote. As in, “Will Ferrell’s character in Talledega Nights refused to say ‘I love crêpes,’ despite the threat of a broken arm.”

According to the College’s policy on academic integrity:

Plagiarism. Presenting another person’s ideas as one’s own, by directly quoting or indirectly paraphrasing, without properly citing the original source. This includes inadvertent failure to properly acknowledge sources.

When using ideas, arguments, and/or data from other sources the student must clearly define the sources using appropriate quotations and citations. Plagiarism may occur even when not using the exact words of another author. Paraphrasing a section of an article or book without the proper attribution is considered plagiarism. A student should ask his/her professor if there is any question about the proper use and citation of material from other sources.

Compositions, term papers, or computer programs acquired either in part or in whole from other students, the Internet, commercial or any other source, and submitted as one’s own work shall be considered plagiarism. If the work contains the thoughts or words of others, and the student inadvertently fails to acknowledge the source(s), this action is considered plagiarism. Plagiarism applies to printed sources, electronic/magnetic sources, video/audio sources, CD ROM and material obtained through network sources, including E-Mail.