

**Science & Society Topics: Food-Flix & Chill**  
S&TS 1126.101, Fall 2021

Meeting time: M/W 8:05am-9:20am  
Location: 423 Morrill Hall; via Zoom

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*"Mommy wants you to know where your food comes from."*

### **Course Description**

If the films produced over the last 15 years serve as any indication, food resonates. With titles ranging from *Supersize Me* (2003) to *Food Evolution* (2016), with the likes of *Conspiracy* (2014) and a few thought-provoking Chipotle commercials sprinkled in-between, food topics have no dearth of cinematic appeal. This seminar will teach you to write clearly about food issues, paying particular attention to the parallels between the chosen films and contemporary food-related social movements. In addition to critical analysis of films through a “food studies” lens, we will sample readings from a variety of related genres, from science writing to blogs and media criticism. Writing assignments will span these methods, culminating in the submission of a collaboratively researched proposal for a class film script.

### **Course Rationale**

As a powerful lens of cultural and scientific analysis, food (and films about food) serves as a fruitful topic for an introductory writing course in science and technology studies. Discourses around food comprise many voices and dimensions, and this course will guide you through exploration and analysis of a variety of perspectives, including those of farmers, activists, scientists, journalists, historians, and ethicists. We will model our work on well-written, classic historical and contemporary texts and films that demonstrate the variety of writing styles and genres common in the field of Science & Technology Studies. The goal of this course is to use the writing (and revision) process to build clear, concise, and intellectually forceful arguments that suit the demands of a particular topic, medium, or audience.

## **Required Texts**

*The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, Michael Pollan (2007)

*Food: The Key Concepts*, Warren Belasco (2008)

## **Access to films**

- ⇒ Films will be made available on Canvas through the “Course Reserves” folder
- ⇒ Films are available on a mixture of Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime
- ⇒ Optional evening film screenings

## **Learning Outcomes**

As you proceed through this course, your work should show that you have acquired basic techniques and vocabulary for analyzing texts and films about food, and for conducting original research on the topic. You should have a foundation for utilizing library resources and other research services at Cornell University, including an understanding of strategies for avoidance of plagiarism and other violations of Cornell's Code of Academic Integrity. You should learn to use and appreciate drafting, revising, and peer review to improve your writing. With these skills, you are expected to demonstrate competency in formulating a specific, persuasive thesis; in supporting your position with appropriate evidence; and communicating your ideas in clear, grammatically correct prose.

## **Journal Activity**

This course is primarily a course about writing. And we will write a lot! I ask that you purchase a small journal at the beginning of the semester; the Cornell Store has an overwhelming selection, so be sure to pick something you will not lose. You should plan to have your journal for class every day for in-class writing exercises and free writing. I will not collect or grade your journals.

## **Conferences**

You should each plan to have two individual conferences with me during the semester, either via Zoom or in-person. Of course, I encourage everyone to meet with me more frequently. Please feel free to attend office hours, make appointments, or ask me questions over email.

## **Attendance**

Seminar-style classes only work if students are physically and mentally present. Showing up prepared for class is part of the shared responsibility of an intellectual community, and we only get out of it what we are willing to invest. One can hold this high expectation of engagement while simultaneously recognizing we are in the midst of a pandemic. You are adults, and I trust you to know what is best for you to get the most out of our class while also respecting your peers. I do not need a doctor's note. I will not ask for details. You do not need to have COVID to need a sick day. To that end, I expect you to participate in class and I will take attendance for my records. If you miss more than three classes, I will request a meeting to check in to see how I can be helpful to you. Attendance will only negatively impact your grade if you fail to communicate with me. Class recordings will be provided to students who have multiple excused absences; please do not depend on this as an alternative to participation without consulting with instructor in advance.

## **Deadlines:**

You are expected to meet all deadlines described within this document. Deadlines—especially *draft* deadlines that must be met for our frequent in-class workshops to be useful to you—are specifically designed to keep your workload evenly distributed throughout the semester and to prevent it from

piling up. I offer no formal “extension” policy. However, stuff happens. Cornell is hard. We all work differently. Often, obstacles like physical and mental health, food or housing insecurity, or struggles at home feel out of our control. COVID-19 has magnified these challenges to a seemingly insurmountable level, and we are all impacted differently. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or at any time create unnecessary stress, please let me know as soon as possible so we can develop a plan to meet both your needs and the requirements of this course. *My policy is simply that you communicate with me* so we can put you in the best position to succeed. Deadlines are always flexible—but please ask!

### **Requirements for Written Work**

- Plan to submit each writing assignment on Canvas via email *prior to the beginning of class*
- Occasionally I will request that you print a copy for workshopping
- Submit as a word document or PDF only. *Please, no Google docs*
- Typed in a standard, 12-point font; double-spaced
- All pages should be numbered and have 1-inch margins
- Include your name, my name, the course number (STS 1126) and date
- Proofread and spelchek you’re werk!

### **Requirements for Reading Assignments and Student-Led Discussion**

Reading (and talking about) good writing is a critical step in growing as writers. Unless otherwise stated, you are expected to come to class each Monday prepared to discuss that week’s assigned readings and films. Each student will have an opportunity to (co)lead class discussion on these weekly readings. Your participation grade will reflect your effectiveness and engagement in leading the class discussion. Naturally, preparation is important for fostering discussion. You will receive a rubric to help you in leading an effective discussion, but you should focus on the following:

- ⇒ Clearly understanding the film or text — this may sometimes take multiple readings of the text and extensive notetaking.
- ⇒ Preparing a quick summary of the film or text, including the author’s main arguments and selection of specific passages to serve as evidence.
- ⇒ Developing a number of effective, relevant, and diverse discussion questions that cover enough material for about 20 minutes of class time.

### **Grading Policy**

- Written work, including shorter (2-3 pages) and longer (5+ pages) essays — **70%**
- Class participation, including attendance, in-class writing, homework assignments, peer review workshops, and thoughtful participation during class discussions — **30%**
- There will be *numerous* extra credit opportunities for engaged attendance and written reflection at related out-of-class events

### **Electronics**

Many students prefer to take notes on a laptop or read on a tablet; for others it is a more accessible option than paper and a pen. Either is fine so long as these tools do not become a distraction to others or stifle productive discussion in the classroom. Phones should remain stowed. If you feel the need to shop for a new winter coat, finish a CHEM 2070 problem set, or scroll through Twitter at 8am, I promise it will be more pleasant from your bed ☺

## Academic Integrity

Because words, ideas, and research represent the intellectual property with which scholars build their careers, “Using that property without permission or credit is a form of larceny” (Hjortshoj, *The Transition to College Writing* pg. 183). All of the work you submit in this course must have been written for this course exclusively. All sources or references must be properly cited, or you may risk penalty for violation of Cornell’s Code of Academic Integrity: <http://ccengagement.cornell.edu/new-student-programs/academic-initiatives>. If you have questions, *please ask!*

## Students with Disabilities

I am happy to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for students with disabilities. Requests for academic accommodations are to be made during the first three weeks of the semester, except in unusual circumstances. Students are encouraged to register with Student Disability Services to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.

# Calendar

## Week 1: Introduction

- Monday (Aug. 30) — Introduction
- Wednesday (Sept. 1) — Email workshop; What can we learn from a few Chipotle commercials?

*READ:* Food: The Key Concepts, Ch. 1 “Why Study Food?” pgs. 1-13; Food and Culture, “Why Food? Why Culture? Why Now?” pgs. 1-11

## Week 2: Why food?

- Monday (Sept. 6) — LABOR DAY, No Class
- Wednesday (Sept. 8) — **Essay 1 FINAL due (2-3 pages, ungraded)**; Guest: Corey Ryan Earle '07, “Glorious to chew: Food at Cornell”

## Week 3: Why film?

- Monday (Sept. 13) — Reading film
- Wednesday (Sept. 15) — Instructor models first discussion leadership activity

*READ:* Food: The Key Concepts, Ch. 2 “Identity: Are We What We Eat?” pgs. 15-34; Ch. 4 “Convenience: The Global Food Chain” pgs. 55-78

*SCREEN:* *Supersize Me* (2004)

#### Week 4: King Corn

- Monday (Sept. 20) — Secondary sources and citations lesson with Librarian Ashley Shea, Mann Library's Head of Instruction Initiatives
- Wednesday (Sept. 22) — **Essay 2 draft due**; Revision workshop.

*READ:* The Omnivore's Dilemma, Introduction- Ch. 3; Yale Film Analysis Guide  
*SCREEN:* *King Corn* (2008)

#### Week 5: The Omnivore's Dilemma

- Monday (Sept. 27) — **Essay 2 Revision Assignment due**; *The Art of Quoting* style exercise
- Wednesday (Sept. 29) — **Essay 2 FINAL due**

*READ:* The Omnivore's Dilemma, Ch. 4-7  
*SCREEN:* *Food, Inc.* (2008)

*Individual conferences September 27-30*

#### Week 6: The Historian's Toolkit

- Monday (Oct. 4) — **Essay 2 Reflection due**; Workshop: Notetaking
- Wednesday (Oct. 6) — Workshop: Introduction to the archives

*SCREEN:* Flowers & Swan (2011) article, "Eating at us"; "Milk Money," *Rotten* (2018)

#### Week 7: The Botany of Desire

- Monday (Oct. 11) — INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' DAY, No Class
- Wednesday (Oct. 13) — Visit to Cornell Teaching Dairy Farm

*SCREEN:* *Botany of Desire* (2009) [Optional, but recommended]

#### Week 8: Animals over plants?

- Monday (Oct. 18) — **Essay 3 PLAN due**. Discussion
- Wednesday (Oct. 20) — Guest: Dr. Michael Mazourek, Ph.D. '08 Cornell vegetable breeder & founder, Row 7 Seed Company

*READ:* The Omnivore's Dilemma, Ch. 8-10; *bon appétit* "Honeynut Squash Is a Tiny Squash with a Big History" (Nov. 2017)  
*SCREEN:* Netflix's *Chef's Table* (Season 1, Episode 2)

Week 9: Plants over animals?

- Monday (Oct. 25) — **Essay 3 DRAFT due.** Workshop: Return to the archives
- Wednesday (Oct. 27) — Workshop: Active vs. passive voice

*READ:* Food: The Key Concepts, Ch. 5 “Responsibility: Who Pays for Dinner?” pgs. 79-103;  
The Omnivore’s Dilemma, Ch. 11-14  
*SCREEN:* *Forks Over Knives* (2011)

Week 10: Are we seeing a food (or film) evolution?

- Monday (Nov. 1) — Writing workshop: Thesis statements
- Wednesday (Nov. 3) — Writing workshop: Essay 3
- Friday (Nov. 5) — **Essay 3 FINAL due.**

*READ:* The Omnivore’s Dilemma, Ch. 15-20

Week 11: “Big Ag” pushes back

- Monday (Nov. 8) — Writing workshop: Essay 4
- Wednesday (Nov. 10) — Checking in.
- Friday (Nov. 12) — **Essay 4 FINAL due.**

*READ:* Food: The Key Concepts, Ch. 6 “The Future of Food” pgs. 105-123  
*SCREEN:* *Food Evolution* (2017)

Week 12: What’s “science” got to do with it?

- Monday (Nov. 15) — Guests: Dr. Karl Haro von Mogel, Ph.D., plant breeder at U.C. Riverside & science writer Kavin Senapathy
- Wednesday (Nov. 17) — Writing workshop: Evaluation and evidence

*READ:* Journal of Environmental Communication Special Issue (2010: Vol 4, Issue 3) – Food, Culture & the Environment: Communicating About What We Eat [selections]

- ⇒ *Read Editor’s Introduction to Special Issue:* Opel, Johnston, & Wilk (2010, pgs. 251-254)
- ⇒ *Skim abstracts of each article in Special Issue (Volume 4, Issue 3)*
- ⇒ *Read individual article:* Lindenfeld (2010), Can Documentary Food Films Like Food Inc. Achieve Their Promise? (pgs. 378-386)

Week 13: Framing farming, revisited

- Monday (Nov. 22) — Writing workshop: Writing about science
- Wednesday (Nov. 24) — **Essay 5 FINAL DUE**; THANKSGIVING BREAK, No Class

*READ*: Nisbet & Aufderheide (2009), "Documentary film: Towards a research agenda on forms, functions, and impacts"

Week 14: Writing Workshop

- Monday (Nov. 29) — Essay 6 workshop
- Wednesday (Dec. 1) — Essays 6 workshop

**Final (collaborative) project/Essay 6 proposal** due Wednesday, Dec. 1 by 9pm

Week 15: Conclusion

- Monday (Dec. 6) — **Essay 6 FINAL PRESENTATIONS**; conclusion activity

**Essay 6 FINAL due: Tuesday, December 14 by 9:00am**