In the coming weeks, you will find that this course relies heavily on communication. This syllabus is provided to you as a means of beginning and facilitating this process. In the following pages, I share some of the bases for my teaching philosophy as well as my expectations of you in this course. Please be sure to read this over very carefully.

This semester we will examine the various sociological and political dimensions of food. Atkins and Bowler note, "the study of food is rather like a ‘barium meal’ for X-raying social, political, economic and cultural issues, a kind of marker dye for broad structures and processes. In this sense food is the bearer of significance, as well as a material object of consumption." (Food in Society. 2001:vii) In sum, in this course food will serve as a mechanism through which we will examine larger structural issues in society. As we examine the questions "Where does our food come from, and how does it get to our tables?" we become aware of how little knowledge we have of the processes involved in producing and distributing our food. As Barndt notes, when we examine these questions, "we open a Pandora’s box…whose hands have planted, cultivated, picked, packed, processed, transported, inspected, sold, and cooked it?" (Tangled Routes. 2002:2) How do these processes relate to structures of power and inequality? How is our disconnect from food and processes of production, consumption, and distribution impacted by as well as reflected in our disconnect from the communities within which we live? We will explore these and many other questions this semester.

Keep in mind that this is a seminar. More than other courses, a seminar depends on the steady work, commitment, and engagement of all participants. Seminars can be engaging and thought-provoking spaces. In order for that to occur, we all need to participate equally and respectfully through, first, thoughtfully reading the material for each week (do not to come to class without doing the readings), and second, listening and speaking in class. You will find that the greater your participation in this class, the more your educational and social experiences this semester will be fully enriched.

My expectations in this seminar are that everyone will attend all class sessions and everyone will participate in each class discussion. Additionally, I would expect to see those who are more talkative making space for and encouraging those members who are typically quieter. Similarly, I would hope to see those who are typically quieter take opportunities to voice their ideas. I encourage you to view this course as a place to build community through conversations relevant to the study of the politics of food.
The following are our objectives for this term:

1. To explore the social meanings and the structural relations of power regarding the production, distribution, preparation and consumption of food.
2. To develop a sociological understanding of the structure of a globalized, industrialized agriculture and food system and the impacts on farmers, consumers and communities.
3. To examine the organization of a global food system that links the production and consumption of food; particularly how it generates abundance for some and famine for others.
4. To acquire knowledge of current responses to social problems regarding food and agriculture.
5. To develop a better understanding of how sociological concepts, theories, methods, and findings can be applied to the study of food.
6. To further our appreciation for the value of sociology and sociological perspectives in examining our world.
7. To develop an appreciation for the multiple ways in which sociology can be applied.

Perhaps the most important element of this course is critical thinking. To think critically means:

First, we must identify and challenge assumptions. We should try to identify the assumptions that are at the foundation of the concepts, values, beliefs, and behaviors that we deem important in our society. Having identified these assumptions we need to then explore their accuracy and legitimacy, considering whether or not what we take for granted does indeed reflect the realities that we experience.

Second, to think critically we need to be aware of our place and time in our culture. When asking questions about aspects of our culture we need to be aware of our own standpoint—the position from which we are asking these questions. In other words, we need to be aware of our own location at a particular intersection of culture and history, and how that is impacted by our own race/ethnicity, social class, sex/gender, sexuality, ability, age, etc. and how that in turn influences the questions we ask as well as the answers we accept. Our standpoint also influences what we see as “normal” or “ordinary” behavior. This relates to the concept of enculturation—immersion in our own culture to the point where we assume our way of life is “natural” or “normal”. Because we are so enculturated into our own societal standards and practices we often assume that they are the only options and, as a result, we are unaware of alternatives. Furthermore, as a result of this lack of awareness we often view those who have other cultural standards or practices as behaving in a strange or unnatural manner.

Third, when thinking critically we need to imagine alternative ways of thinking. In doing so, we must examine the assumptions that are at the foundations of our ideas and ways of behaving. Considering alternatives to current ways of thinking can often provide us with new insights about widely accepted ideas.

Fourth, to think critically one must develop a reflective analysis. Such an analysis requires that we be skeptical, not in the sense that we don’t believe anything we see but rather that we question what are seen as fixed belief systems now that we know there are possible alternatives to these beliefs. A reflective analysis requires that we challenge dominant ideas as well as popularly held notions regarding solutions to social problems.

Thinking critically frees us from personal, environmental, and institutional forces that prevent us from seeing new directions. Furthermore, as critical thinkers we are no longer passive recipients of knowledge and
products of socialization. Rather, after thoughtful scrutiny and continuously asking questions we become active participants in arriving at our own ideas and commitments. As a result, our ideas are based on a solid and informed foundation, all the while keeping in mind that we may still be wrong. When we face challenges to our ideas we will be better prepared to provide justification for and evidence in their support.

As you will come to notice, a fundamental aspect of this course is to think critically about food in society. When teaching this course, my object is not to negate your belief system and provide you with a new one, but rather to provide you with an environment that allows you to think critically about the attitudes and opinions you have been given. By doing so, it is my expectation that you will develop a belief system that you can claim as your own. I will continually push you to challenge yourself. Thus, I ask you to understand and comprehend the material presented to you and to think about how it either challenges or reinforces your ideas of how the world works.

Course Books

There are five required texts for this course:


The books may be purchased at the SCSU Husky Bookstore or at Campus Book and Supply. In addition to these texts, additional readings will be available on the course web site. Books for this course will be available on reserve at the Miller Center as well. *Please note that readings may be assigned in addition to those listed in the course schedule and reading list.*

Course Requirements

*Please Note: A passing grade in this course requires successful completion of each component of the course requirements.*

Your final grade will consist of the following components:

- Class Facilitation ................................................................. 10%
- Food Example ........................................................................ 10%
- Field Trip ............................................................................. 10%
- Novel Paper .......................................................................... 15%
- Class Participation .............................................................. 15%
- Semester Research Project .................................................. 40%
Class Facilitation

The first component of your final grade requires you to help facilitate class discussion once this semester. To prepare for this facilitation you will need to come to class the week prior to the week you facilitate with at least five questions for critical thinking and discussion. These questions will relate to the readings and/or topic of your assigned week. You will then need to come to class on the week you are assigned prepared to facilitate a discussion on the reading/topic for at least one hour of the class. I will aid you in this facilitation. This assignment is worth 10% of your final grade. Greater detail on this assignment will be discussed in class. A sign-up sheet for this assignment will be distributed in class.

Food Example

You will note that the syllabus includes a variety of familiar and not so familiar examples of food to illustrate the concepts and issues being addressed. At one point in the semester you are required to bring food to class. This should be food that others can sample, but you do not need to bring enough to feed a meal to the entire class. When bringing your example, be prepared to explain why you brought the food that you did to the class. In addition, you will submit a 2 to 3 page, double-spaced critical reflection of either the production, distribution, or consumption of the food item. This assignment is worth 10% of your final grade.

Field Trip

There are four field trips planned for this class:

- **Field Trip 1:** Tour of St. Paul’s Farmer’s Market, Saturday, September 12th. Depart SCSU @ 6:30 a.m.
- **Field Trip 2:** Tour of Gold’n Plump Poultry Processing Plant, Friday. Date and time to be announced.
- **Field Trip 3:** Putting the St. Cloud State University Community Garden “to bed” Saturday, October 17th. Meet at the garden site @ 8:00 a.m. (tentative date & time)
- **Field Trip 4:** A “slow food” tour of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Saturday, November 7th. Depart SCSU @ 7:30 a.m.

In addition, there is a possibility of another field trip:

- William Keller’s Organic Grass-fed Beef Farm: Date and time to be announced.

Please note that the dates and times of all of the above field trips are subject to change. I will do my best to provide final dates of field trips as early in the semester as possible. You are required to participate in at least two of these field trips. This assignment is worth 10% of your final grade. Additional details will be discussed in class.

Novel Paper

There are two novels and one memoir assigned for this course (The Jungle, My Year of Meats, and Catfish and Mandala). Each offers insightful commentary on food, “American culture,” and the like. While we will discuss these texts at several points in the semester, you will need to select one of these on which you will write a 5-page paper. The schedule of due dates is as follows:

- **The Jungle**
  - Due: October 5th
- **My Year of Meats**
  - Due: October 19th
Details of the paper assignment will be distributed later in the semester. This will be a graded assignment and is worth 15% of your final grade.

Class Participation

An additional portion of your final grade will be based upon your attendance at and your participation in each class. Attendance is mandatory in this class. Each time you are absent I will deduct 4 points from your final grade. Three (3) or more absences will result in an 'F' for the course. Consistently arriving late will also detract from your grade. If for any reason you need to miss class, please let me know. Please also see my expectations for participating in a seminar on page one of this syllabus. This component of your grade is worth 15% of your final grade.

Semester Research Project

A major portion of your grade will be based on a semester research project. This project has several components:

- Project Proposal 10% Due: September 21st
- Literature Review 15% Due: November 2nd
- Final Commodity Chain Chart 15% Due: November 23rd

This research project will require you to select a food item (something that humans consume) and examine its "commodity chain"—the network of labor and production processes that go into producing a particular food commodity. In addition to your individual research projects, our goal as a class will be to make the information that we gather both available and useful to those outside of this class. To that end, we will construct a web page as a class that will serve as a “clearinghouse” of information on the politics of food. Details of this project, as well as each component, will be distributed in class. Each of these will be graded assignments worth a total of 40% of your final grade.

Please note that graduate students and those doing senior project will be responsible for doing work in addition to this final project. More details of this assignment will be discussed in class.

Late Policy

I do not accept late papers. Assignments are due at the beginning of the class period on the date indicated in this syllabus.

Some Final Notes

I encourage you to make use of my office hours. They are devoted to you so don’t feel as if you are disturbing me when you come by. If they are inconvenient for you, please feel free to set up an appointment with me.
I know that the above rules and regulations may seem like a bit much, and it may appear that this class is more structured than you thought. This syllabus is provided as merely a guideline for how this course will be run. I ask all of you to feel free to give me feedback about this course. It is important that this learning experience be multidirectional; that we learn from each other. This cannot happen unless we all participate.

**Course Schedule and Reading List**

Assigned readings are listed directly below the weekly topic. On some weeks there are many readings listed as required reading. Don’t panic. When there are numerous readings listed, they are relatively short. Please be aware that this schedule is tentative and subject to change. Additional readings may be assigned in class.

**Reading Key:**  
*Fast Food Nation* = **FFN**  
*The Omnivore’s Dilemma* = **OD**  
Additional Readings = **AR**

**Theme I: Approaches to the Study of Food**

There have been many influences in the study of food. This section of the course will provide an overview of some of these approaches and explain why it is important to study food.

**Week of August 24th: Course Introduction—Why Study Food?**

**Required Reading:**
1. Read the syllabus carefully so that you understand my perspectives, expectations, goals, and your responsibilities.

**Week of August 31st: Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Food**

**Required Reading:**

**Field Trip 1:** Tour of St. Paul’s Farmer’s Market, Saturday, September 12th. Depart SCSU @ 6:30 a.m.
Theme II: From Seed to Fruit; Calf to Cow: The Production of Food

This section of the course will examine the political economy and ecology of the production of food. As you will come to find, there is a significantly complex diversity of trends regarding food production. We will examine several of the factors that influence these trends, as well as the impact of food production on the eco-system, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), organic farming, and other ethical issues regarding food production.

Week of September 14th: Government Policies and Food Regulation

Required Reading:
1. “Introduction” p. 1-10 FFN
3. “Your Trusted Friends” p. 31-57 FFN

Week of September 21st: Capital, Agriculture, & State Intervention

Required Reading:
2. “The Farm” p. 32-56 OD
3. “The Elevator” p. 57-64 OD
4. “Success” p. 91-107 FFN
5. “Cogs in the Great Machine” p. 149-166 FFN
7. Solkoff, Joel “Farmers Don’t Live Here Anymore” from The Politics of Food (p. 7-17) San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1985. AR
8. Floegel, Mark. “From Elsie to the Corporate Cow” Eating Well, Fall 2002: 36-37; 75; 77. AR

Project Proposal Due September 21st.

Week of September 28th: Food Processing and Manufacturing

Required Reading:
5. “Behind the Counter” p. 59-88 FFN
6. “Why the Fries Taste So Good” p. 111-131 FFN

Note: Complete reading of The Jungle by September 28th.
Week of October 5\textsuperscript{th}: Food, Nature and Manipulation

**Required Reading:**
5. Gorelick, Steven. “Solutions to a Farming Future” *The Ecologist*, May 22, 2000. \texttt{AR}

*Math the Jungle* paper due October 5\textsuperscript{th}.

**Theme III: From Farm to Table: The Distribution of Food**

This section of the course will examine the distribution of food, including the transnationalization/globalization of food networks. Through our readings and discussions we will consider levels of economic development, issues of war and poverty and their relation to the presence of famine or surplus, as well as the impact of structures of power on the self-determination of nations and regions.

Week of October 12\textsuperscript{th}: Food Marketing and Food Quality

**Required Reading:**
1. “What’s in the Meat” p. 193-222 \texttt{FFN}

Note: Complete reading of *My Year of Meats* by October 12\textsuperscript{th}.

Field Trip 3: Putting the St. Cloud State University Community Garden “to bed” October 17\textsuperscript{th}. (tentative date)

**Week of October 19\textsuperscript{th}: Gendered Labor: Food Sales and Delivery**

**Required Reading:**

*My Year of Meats* paper due October 19\textsuperscript{th}.

**Week of October 26\textsuperscript{th}: Globalization, World Trade, & Economic Development**

**Required Reading:**

Week of November 2nd: Famine, Feast and Food Security

Required Reading:

Literature Review due November 2nd.

Field Trip 4: “Slow Food” tour of Minneapolis and St. Paul, November 7th.

Theme IV: Stratification, Geographies, and Identities: The Consumption of Food

The purpose of this section of the course is to examine various aspects of food consumption and how this relates to issues of race, ethnicity, social class, income, age, sex, household consumption, religion, and culture as well as how it varies with regard to place and space.

Week of November 9th: The Stratification of Consumption

Required Reading:

Week of November 16th: Culture, History, and the Geography of Eating

Required Reading:

Note: Complete reading of Catfish and Mandala by November 16th.
Week of November 23rd: Food and the Ethics of Eating

Required Reading:
1. “All Flesh is Grass” p. 123-133 OD
2. “Big Organic” p. 134-184 OD
3. “Grass: Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Pasture” p. 185-207 OD
5. “Slaughter: In a Glass Abattoir” p. 226-238 OD

Catfish and Mandala paper due November 23rd.
Final “Facts and Actions” sheet due November 23rd.

Theme V: What Next? The Futures of Food
Having spent our semester examining the various political aspects of food, the purpose of this section of the course is to consider the future directions of food. We will do this through an exploration of the ways in which individuals and groups have responded to many of the problems we have discussed, developing both local and global strategies.

Week of November 30th: Signs of Hope

Required Reading:
2. “The Omnivore’s Dilemma” p. 287-303 OD
5. “Gathering: The Fungi” p. 364-390 OD

Week of December 7th: Final Class Meeting

Required Reading:
1. To be announced