THE GALLATIN SCHOOL OF INDIVIDUALIZED STUDY
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
FIRST YEAR RESEARCH SEMINAR
FOOD CULTURE AND FOOD WRITING
(FIRST-UG710)
SPRING 2012
MON. AND WEDS. 8-9:15 A.M.

Instructor: Scott Korb
E-mail: smk21@nyu.edu
Classroom: 1 Washington Place, Room 501
Office Hours and location: Tues. 10-12; 1 Washington Place, Room 405

COURSE DESCRIPTION

We love food and it haunts us. We indulge in it and abstain from it. It makes us sick and it heals us. We worry over where it comes from and serve it during our religious rituals. We pay a fortune for it and we give it away. Its preparation is a science and an art. With a major focus on crafting the research essay, this course asks students to consider the many, often contradictory, roles food has played, and continues to play, in culture. And through a process of writing, workshopping, and the all-important rewriting, students will have their own hand in the kitchen of the essay writer.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Writing should be pleasurable, hard work. And when done well, it should exhibit a Democratic Spirit. I’ve tried to select readings that, above all, make this point obvious. The aim of this course is to help you merge cogent, lively writing with precise, exploratory thinking. From the outset, a major emphasis will be placed on research methods. Over the course of the semester you will expand your repertoire of styles, forms, and techniques while finding and explaining (in writing) ideas that are new to the world. Most importantly, you will learn to construct interesting, arresting essays that build upon the work you do for your daily assignments.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Throughout the course I will help you learn to write effectively; you can also expect a great deal of help from your classmates. We will often have workshops in class. You can expect to write for every class. Major course requirements are as follows:
1. A series of instructor-evaluated writing exercises. These exercises will allow you to respond critically to the readings and begin to develop essay ideas. Required lengths for each will be specified when we discuss the exercise in class.

2. Four peer-evaluated/instructor-graded essays, each with multiple drafts. (For each essay, all drafts must be submitted with the final essay on the due date.)

The four essays, like our readings, will all consider food culture and food writing. Exactly what interests you about our relationship to food – where we get it, how and why we eat it, what it means – is up for you to decide (or learn, I hope). Over the course of the semester, you’ll be expected to explain to me and your classmates what’s at stake in how we think about food. Where you need it, we’ll be there to help you along the way.

The first essay will require you to eat something and write about the “meal” in a way that makes meaning, through thoughtful analysis, of the food experience. (3-4 pages; no more than 1,200 words.)

The second essay will require you to write critically about a piece of food writing (either something we’ve read in class or a piece you’ve found on your own) in an extended, formal way, perhaps drawing on an informal writing exercise. This essay may be interpretive or argumentative – that is, you may expound on the text or take issue with its claims, or both. (3-4 pages; no more than 1,200 words.)

The third essay will require you to write about the preparation of food in a comparative way that makes meaning of the difference(s) in preparation. Your emphasis may be on one of the two (or more) food preparations – or any of the steps or decisions made along the way – but you must do some comparative analysis. (4-5 pages; no more than 1,500 words.)

The fourth essay will require you to research some aspect of food culture that is of interest to you, gather evidence from of a variety of other thinkers and writers and develop an organizing principle around which you present this evidence in support an idea of your own. This final piece of writing may be a further development of the ideas you’ve presented in the previous essays, but no material from your other essays may appear word-for-word in the final one. (10-12 pages; no more than 3,600 words.)

All essays and out-of-class writing exercises should be typed, double-spaced, in twelve-point font with one-inch margins. Please use MLA citation style (with in-text citation and a Works Cited list) for all papers. We will go over the specifics of citation in class.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

This course requires a great deal of class participation. You’ll be expected to share not just your responses to your classmates’ writing and the required readings, but also to question both me and your classmates and to be ready to defend (and, occasionally, abandon) your own ideas.
Every student will have marked at least one passage from each class’s required reading that you will be prepared to read aloud and discuss with the class. The selection may be a beautiful paragraph, or a revealing turn of phrase, or an example of what you believe to be awful thinking. Whatever it is, it should be marked.

If, due to illness, emergency, or religious holiday, you cannot attend class, please be in touch with me directly as soon as possible so that you can be prepared for your next class. Please be aware that more than two absences will jeopardize your course grade.

**STANDARDS AND GRADES**

All final essays must:

- explore and develop an idea from diverse evidence in a coherent, interesting way;
- have a thoughtful, elegant beginning, middle, and end;
- be grammatically correct; and
- have a tone appropriate for the intended audience.

A work achieves excellence in all listed standards. B work achieves general superiority in all listed standards. C work is average in each standard. D or F work is seriously deficient in one or more of the listed standards. Final grades break down as follows:

- Each of four essays: 80% (essay 1, 15%; essay 2, 15%; essay 3, 20%; essay 4, 30%)
- Daily writing assignments: 10%
- Participation and attendance: 10%

**CONFERENCES**

Please feel free to arrange a meeting when you think you need to see me. I may also ask you to meet with me if I think you need additional help. I may also refer you to the Gallatin Writing Center, where junior and senior Peer Writing Assistants can provide additional help.

**A NOTE ON PLAGIARISM**

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else’s work as one’s own in all forms of academic endeavor (such as essays, theses, examinations, research data, creative projects, etc.), intentional or unintentional. Plagiarized material may be derived from a variety of sources, such as books, journals, internet postings, student or faculty papers, etc. This includes the purchase or “outsourcing” of written assignments for a course. The University’s code of academic and personal conduct applies in all instances of plagiarism. You may find

REQUIRED READINGS

We will be reading selections from Michael Pollan’s recent book The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals (Penguin, 2006). Some of our other readings come from Molly O’Neill’s anthology American Food Writing (Library of America, 2007).

Another required text is J.M. Coetzee’s Elizabeth Costello (Penguin, 2003), from which we’ll be reading two chapters, or as Coetzee calls them, “Lessons”: “The Lives of Animals: The Philosophers and the Animals” and “The Lives of Animals: The Poets and the Animals.”

David Foster Wallace’s essays “Tense Present” (a.k.a., “Authority and American Usage”) and “Consider the Lobster” were originally published in Harper’s Magazine (April, 2001) and Gourmet Magazine (August 2004), respectively, but are now also available in his collection Consider the Lobster and Other Essays (Back Bay Books, 2006).

Various other readings from The New Yorker, New York Times, and Slate can be accessed online. If necessary, we’ll conduct those searches in-class.

The essay I wrote, “Having What She’s Having,” was originally published in Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture (Spring 2007), and is included in a longer form in my book The Faith Between Us: A Jew and a Catholic Search for the Meaning of God (Bloomsbury, 2007). This essay can be found using ProQuest.

We’ll also be reading a few sections of the Bible, versions of which are all over the Internet. If you’re interested in owning a good scholarly bible, however, I recommend the Harper Collins Study Bible (New Revised Standard Version), edited by Wayne A. Meeks.

You can find the required books at Bluestockings bookstore (172 Allen Street).
COURSE CALENDAR

WEEK ONE
Mon., Jan. 23 – Introductions
Weds., Jan. 25 – Video: Alton Brown’s Good Eats


WEEK TWO
Mon., Jan. 30
Weds., Feb. 1 – Group A workshop

Readings: John McPhee, from Oranges; M.F.K. Fisher, “A Lusty Bit of Nourishment,” from Consider the Oyster (both American Food Writing [AFW]).

WEEK THREE
Mon., Feb. 6 – All class workshop
Weds., Feb. 8

Readings: Ruth Reichl, from Looking for Umami; David Sedaris, “Today’s Special,” from Me Talk Pretty One Day (both AFW).

WEEK FOUR
Mon., Feb. 13
Weds., Feb. 15 – Analytical essay due


WEEK FIVE
Mon., Feb. 20
Weds., Feb. 22 – Video: The Hunt (Lapham’s Quarterly website)

WEEK SIX
Mon., Feb. 27 – Group B workshop
Weds., Feb. 29 – All class workshop

NO READINGS

WEEK SEVEN
Mon., Mar. 5
Weds., Mar. 7 – Interpretive/argumentative essay due


SPRING RECESS – MARCH 12-MARCH 17

WEEK EIGHT
Mon., Mar. 19 – Video: Julia Child’s The French Chef

Readings: Julia Child, “About the Television Series,” from The French Chef Cookbook; James Beard, from Delights and Prejudices (both AFW).

Weds., Mar. 21 – Video: Mario Batali’s Molto Mario


WEEK NINE
Mon., Mar. 26 – Group C workshop
Weds., Mar. 28 – All class workshop

NO READINGS

WEEK TEN
Mon., Apr. 2
Weds., Apr. 4 – Comparative essay due; Research topics due

WEEK ELEVEN
Mon., Apr. 9
Weds., Apr. 11 – Group D workshop (outlines and sources)

WEEK TWELVE
Mon., Apr. 16 – All class workshop (outlines and sources)
Weds., Apr. 18

Readings: Anthony Bourdain, from Kitchen Confidential; Alice Waters, “The Farm-Restaurant Connection,” from The Journal of Gastronomy (both AFW); Ray Kroc, from Grinding It Out: The Making of McDonald’s (AFW)

WEEK THIRTEEN
Mon., Apr. 23
Weds., Apr. 25 – Group E workshop


WEEK FOURTEEN
Mon., Apr. 30 – All class workshop
Weds., May 2


WEEK FIFTEEN
Mon., May 7 – Research essay due