

**Sociology 240: Sociology of Food**  
**Tuesday & Thursday 3:00pm – 4:25pm**  
**Rangeview 242**

**Instructor:** John T. Lang

**Office Hours:** Tuesday & Thursday, 4:30pm – 6:00pm, and by appointment

**Office:** Middle Swan 311

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**Course Website:** <http://moodle.oxy.edu>

## **INTRODUCTION**

This course examines the social relations surrounding the production, distribution, preparation, and consumption of food. In doing so, we will try to understand how the issues and problems of daily life reflect larger social forces, and how our understanding and actions shape the social world. This means that we will treat several major questions facing sociology today, including inequalities and identities based on national, racial/ethnic, class and gender positions; work and family; the environment; globalization and cultural change. We will explore some of the big questions about food and talk about some of the intriguing answers that sociologists have provided.

By the end of the course, you will be able critically examine and evaluate the connections between food, culture, and society.

Prerequisite: Sociology 101.

## **REQUIRED READING**

For this class you buy one book and access the other readings on the course website. The book is available at the Occidental College Bookstore or online at your favorite book seller.

Lang, Tim and Erik Millstone. 2008. *The Atlas of Food*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.  
Paperback.  
ISBN-13: 978-0520254091

## **GRADING**

I will base your final grade on the following:

Proposal – 5%

Reading Summaries – 15%

Annotated Bibliography & References – 15%

What You Eat Photo Essay – 20%

Presentation – 15%

Final Paper – 30%

## **Attendance/Participation**

Our time together is brief and we have a wealth of ideas to exchange and explore in that limited period. I expect you to come to class on time and remain here until class is over. You may miss 2 class sessions without penalty. After that, for each missed class the your final course grade will drop one fraction of a letter grade. For example, if your work is above average and earns you a B, that absence will cause your final grade to drop to a B-. For every additional absence, your grade will continue to fall by the same fraction of a letter grade.

Arriving late or departing early twice equals one absence. I have this policy to encourage students to attend class and to do well in the course. I do not distinguish between “excused” and

“unexcused” absences. You are, therefore, strongly encouraged not to miss class carelessly because of the possibility of unexpected or unavoidable absences during the semester. No matter the reason, it is always your responsibility to contact other students to learn what you've missed and to get notes.

### **Proposal – 5%**

This is the first stage of your final paper. Use this as an opportunity to carefully consider what topic you'd like to explore. Write a 4 to 6 sentence paragraph that summarizes your current thinking. Then, list 3 potential references that you'll use. *Sociological Abstracts* is an excellent database to use for your initial search; these references should be from peer-reviewed sources and your citations should be in ASA format. In total, this typed, double-spaced proposal should be about 1 page.

### **Reading Summaries – 15%**

For each class you must bring a three to four sentence summary (typed) of the assigned readings. If there are multiple readings for the day, you should write one summary for each; you can put them all on one page. Each summary should include your name and the date of the reading, the title and author, and indicate the thesis and details of major points covered. Outlines are NOT acceptable. I won't collect these every day and you may miss 2 of these per term without penalty.

### **Annotated Bibliography and ASA Formatted References – 15%**

Your annotated bibliography needs to contain at least seven sources, and should not include more than one book. An annotated bibliography is an organized list of sources that includes the sources' full bibliographic citation followed by an “annotation,” or description of the source. The bibliography is organized alphabetically by the first word of the citation, which is typically the author's last name. Each entry is followed by an annotation that is a concise and informative description that summarizes and evaluates the contents of a resource. It differs from an abstract, which just summarizes the original content. An annotation usually strikes a balance between summary and evaluation.

### **What You Eat Photo Essay – 20%**

To help understand the individual and cultural norms involved in your daily food choices, you will photograph one of your meals and reflect on the series of conscious actions and decisions that reflect the cultural meaning behind your food choices. In your 2 to 3 page typed, double-spaced report you will be required to apply the insights from your readings and our class discussions.

### **Presentation – 15%**

The presentation is your opportunity to share your research with the rest of the class. Use your 15 minutes of glory wisely. Remember that the class is unaware of your project or area of interest. You must successfully “teach” us your topic in 15 minutes. To achieve this you need to quickly summarize your project and cite specific supporting examples.

Do not read your paper; instead, use note cards to remind you of key points, and speak to us, not at us. A touch of humor, if appropriate, is fine. Just make sure that your presentation is interesting. You selected a topic that you are passionate about. Share the passion with us. Use any aids that might be helpful, including slides, handouts, music, video, and/or photographs.

### **Extra Credit - Food for Thought Speakers**

There will be a number of food-related talks on campus this semester that I think are worth your time. To help encourage you to attend I am offering extra credit.

For each talk you attend I will increase your presentation grade one fraction of a letter grade. For example, if your presentation is satisfactory and earns you a C, attending one talk will cause me to raise your grade to a C+; if you attend 2 talks, your grade will become a B-; if you attend 3 talks, I will raise your presentation grade to a B. Though I strongly encourage you to attend all the events, you cannot earn extra credit for attending more than 3 talks and you cannot receive a presentation grade higher than an A.

1. Debra Eschmeyer, Monday, January 25 @ 5-630pm in Johnson 200
2. Winona La Duke, Tuesday, February 2, 2010 @ 11:45am in Thorne Hall
3. Jonathan Gold, TBA

### **Final Paper – 30%**

Your final paper should be no less than 10 pages in length; it must not exceed 15 pages (not counting references). You must turn in a hard copy at the start of class on the due date. Late papers will be penalized a full letter grade for each day late.

In your final paper you will make a concise and cogent sociological argument about food. I'm asking you to consider food within the context of the social institutions and interactions we study in this class while writing this paper. For example, you might analyze to what extent food preferences are the properties of individuals, and to what extent they are socially structured. More specifically, you might explore, to what extent do food opportunities and patterns of food consumption reflect existing inequalities, and to what extent do food opportunities shape the structure of social inequality? This is only an example. We will discuss possible topics and ideas throughout the course. I encourage you to think broadly about what interests you. Consider this an opportunity to scrutinize your own food opportunities and food-related behavior; critically review the social science literature on food; and write about and share your findings with your peers and professor.

### **COURSE GRADES**

Do NOT count on a curve. I will assign letter grades for the entire course as follows:

93.0 and higher = A	73.0 to 76.99 = C
90.0 to 92.99 = A-	70.0 to 72.99 = C-
87.0 to 89.99 = B+	67.0 to 69.99 = D+
83.0 to 86.99 = B	63.0 to 66.99 = D
80.0 to 82.99 = B-	60.0 to 62.99 = D-
77.0 to 79.99 = C+	59.99 and lower = F.

Letter grades in this class have the following meaning:

- A *Outstanding performance.* You have demonstrated very thorough knowledge and understanding of all the material, truly superior critical thinking, and expressed insightful and original thoughts clearly. You have completed all required assignments and they have been among the best in the class.
- B *Good performance.* You have demonstrated solid knowledge and understanding of the material and good critical thinking. You have also shown the ability to express your ideas clearly. You have completed all required assignments and they have been of good quality.
- C *Satisfactory performance.* You have demonstrated basic knowledge and understanding of the major concepts taught in the class and some critical thinking. You have completed all or most of the required assignments and they have routinely been free of significant problems.

- D *Deficient performance.* You have only acquired a limited understanding of the class material. You have failed to complete all the required assignments and they have routinely had serious problems.
- F *Failure.* You have failed to learn a sufficient proportion of the basic concepts and ideas taught in the class. You have failed to complete many required assignments and they have routinely had serious problems.

#### COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

I will hold you responsible for the information in this syllabus, so I expect you to read it, understand it, and ask questions about anything you don't understand.

*Office Hours:* I hold three official office hours each week. I also encourage you to make an appointment outside of office hours or come by my office anytime to see if I'm available. I am happy to discuss class concepts, college more generally, musings about majors, future planning, or graduate school.

*Feedback:* I love getting feedback on my teaching and how the class is going. I value your input and I am willing to make changes to the class according to your preferences. Please share with me any comments, suggestions, and ideas you may have, and help me make this a great class. If you would like to do so anonymously, you can type and print out a note and drop it in my mailbox on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of Middle Swan.

*Class Demeanor:* While we may find ourselves disagreeing, we must do so with respect, a commitment to hearing what others have to say, and a willingness to think and rethink our own positions. Personal insults have no place in the college classroom.

*Technology in Class:* Please turn off your cell phones when you come to class. Similarly, text messaging will not be tolerated in class. You are welcome to bring your laptop to class and use it to take notes, access readings we're discussing, and the like. You are not welcome to surf the web, check email, or otherwise perform non-class-related activities during class. Here's my best advice: If you aren't using it to perform a task specifically related to what we are doing in class at that very moment, put it away.

*Special Accommodations/Learning Differences:* Any student eligible for and needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a disability should talk to me sometime in the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain confidential. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes a learning disability, I encourage you to contact the friendly folks over at the Center for Academic Excellence (x2849).

*Assignments:* A hard copy of all papers/assignments must be handed in at the start of class on the scheduled date. I do not accept assignments via email. Late assignments are docked 1 grade per day. Computer and printing problems are not a good excuse for missing a deadline. Make sure to print your papers early enough to be able to address any problems before class. Keep a paper and electronic copy of everything you hand in until you receive your course grade.

*Academic Integrity:* As is always the case, you are responsible for your own work. If you find yourself questioning whether you have documented or cited your sources properly, it is your responsibility to come see me about these issues prior to submitting an assignment. If you are thinking about submitting work that is not your own due to pressure, frustration, perfectionism, or any other reason, please talk to me. I am here to help you resolve these issues before they become a problem for your academic career. Academic integrity violations, including plagiarism, will be taken very seriously. A description of Occidental's academic ethics policies is available in the Student Handbook and on the following webpage: <http://www.oxy.edu/x8000.xml>

**CLASS SCHEDULE**

All readings are due on the day they are listed. Although I will do my best to keep us on schedule, it is possible that we will make some adjustments during the semester. I will give as much notice - both in class and on the course website - when changes are necessary.

**JANUARY**

- 19 Welcome to the class
- 21 Berry, "The Pleasures of Eating"  
Kingsolver, "Lily's Chickens"
- 26 Pollan, "Farmer in Chief"  
Guthman, "Can't Stomach It"
- 28 LeDuff, "At a Slaughterhouse, Some Things Never Die"  
**HANDOUT: Proposal Assignment**

**FEBRUARY**

- 2 Belasco, "The Stakes in our Steaks"
- 4 Altieri & Rosset, "Ten Reasons Why Biotechnology Will Not Help the Developing World"  
McGloughlin, "Ten Reasons Why Biotechnology Will Be Important to the Developing World"  
Barlett & Steel, "Monsanto's Harvest of Fear"
- 9 **SPEAKER: Susan Dworkin in JSC Morrison Complex**
- 11 **DUE: Proposal**  
Nestle, "The Ironic Politics of Obesity"
- 16 **HANDOUT: Annotated Bibliography**  
Julier, "The Political Economy of Obesity"  
Kwan, "Individual versus Corporate Responsibility"
- 18 Jordan, "The Heirloom Tomato as Cultural Object"  
Laudan, "Birth of the Modern Diet"
- 23 Millstone & Lang, "Part 4: Processing, Retailing, and Consumption" (pp. 78-101)
- 25 Lewis, "The Maine Lobster as Regional Icon"  
Wallace, "Consider the Lobster"

**MARCH**

- 2 **DUE: Annotated Bibliography**  
Parasecoli, "Feeding Hard Bodies"
- 4 Ray, "Domesticating Cuisine"  
Holden, "The Overcooked and the Underdone"
- 9 Spring Break
- 11 Spring Break
- 16 Salazar, Feenstra, & Ohmart, "Salad Days"  
**HANDOUT: What You Eat Photo Essay**
- 18 Millstone & Lang, Part 1: Contemporary Challenges (pp. 14-31)
- 23 Millstone & Lang, Part 2: Farming (pp. 32-63)
- 25 Millstone & Lang, Part 3: Trade (pp. 64-77)
- 30 **DUE: What You Eat Photo Essay**  
Ebert, "Nil by Mouth"

**APRIL**

- 1 Presentations
- 6 Presentations
- 8 SPEAKER: Janet Poppendieck in JSC Morrison Complex**
- 13 SPEAKER: David Griswold in JSC Morrison Complex**
- 15 Presentations
- 20 Presentations
- 22 Presentations
- 27 In Class Reflections
- 29 DUE: Final Paper**

I'm looking forward to a great semester!