

Expos 20: Eating Culture
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M/W 12-1:15 pm

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Office Hours: by appointment



<https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/74373>

“Food . . . is not art . . . A good risotto is a fine thing, but it isn't going to give you insight into other people, allow you to see the world in a new way, or force you to take inventory of your soul.”

So William Deresiewicz, in an opinion piece for *The New York Times*, dismisses society's rising fascination with food over the last several decades, one attested to by the explosion of cookbooks, a proliferation of food blogs, bestselling books on cod, salt, and sugar, and multiple competitive cooking shows.

It seems that, like the gluttonous ancient Romans of old, we have become obsessed with food. But is Deresiewicz right to suggest that food won't give us additional insight into ourselves, or the world? Isn't it equally possible that through an examination of what scholars and commentators call “foodways”—the various forces involved in how different cultures produce, buy, sell, and consume food—that we might possibly learn, and digest, much about our identities, ethnicities, and society?

Guided by the famous maxim of the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, “food is good to think,” in this course we contemplate foodways from multiple perspectives. In our first unit, we delve into what makes food “disgusting” or “wholesome.” How do we categorize what is edible as either polluting or pure? What even counts as food in different societies? In our second unit, we explore the intersection of food and society. How does food tie into smaller groupings, say, of the household? How does food help to construct who we are with respect to identity? In the third unit, we move to consider global trends of food as intertwined with power. We will reflect on the economic consequences of food as seen in the sugar industry, and explore the dynamics of how food becomes the site of contestation. Whose food is it, anyways? How has food been politicized?

Along the way, we will read a representative sampling of works in the study of food ranging from popular and insightful essays such as David Foster Wallace's “Consider the Lobster” to more scholarly treatments about the classification of food by the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss.

- While it will likely not be possible to arrange physical meetings, this class will have a participation component, and you are encouraged to think creatively about this in consultation with me (1 pt. of your final grade).

FYI: There is an Instagram account for this class [Instagram.com/eatthisculture](https://www.instagram.com/eatthisculture), which you are welcome to follow and to which you can post by sending photos.

- While this course's thematic component centers on food, an equally important goal of the course is to develop the ability to write clear, engaging, and coherent analytical essays of the sort you will be asked to produce frequently at Harvard. With this in mind the class is structured to give you the opportunity to work in a sustained and systematic way on improving your writing, with the opportunity to explore a number of different ways through which writing can be structured or developed. During the semester, you will write three essays, each of which tackles different aspects about the relations of food to the self, society, and the world, each of which is designed to highlight different writing skills. The thematic units and their associated writing assignments are described below.

Unit 1: Food and the Self

In the opening unit of the course, we begin with a series of definitions: How do we define ourselves with respect to food? Have we internalized rules in relation to how, or what, we might eat? We will discuss an article by William Deresiewicz and explore the work of several anthropologists, for instance the prominent structuralist Claude Levi-Strauss, who wrote the important volume, *The Raw and the Cooked*, and from Mary Douglas' "Deciphering a Meal". In the first paper, we explore what foods are considered "disgusting" or "gross" in society. Why, for example, do many blanch when thinking about the ingredients to Scottish haggis, while this very food is celebrated through a festival in Scotland? Similarly, many cookbooks of the 1950s call for the use of aspic/gelatin, made from the bones of animals, and yet almost none of us practice this now. What accounts for the change in attitudes? Alternately, instead of writing on what is disgusting, you may choose a different option to consider what defines "purity" or wholesome food as represented, perhaps, in labeling at Wholefoods or in your own experience.

This first definitional essay works on thesis, structure, evidence, and analysis.

Unit 2: Food, Society, and Film

The second unit considers the role of food in our social and cultural interactions. For instance, how is food involved in ethnic and group identification? How differently do societies encapsulate the rules that revolve around food? To help us explore these themes, we engage with selections from the anthropologist David Sutton and the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Doing so allows us to engage with the themes of memory, identity, and structure. In this unit, we will work with a lens or test-a-theory model that essentially considers a theory and applies it to a case study. There's a twist, however: our case studies will come from food tv, whether a cooking or baking shows or video clip. In the past, these have included the American show *Top Chef*, the wildly influential Japanese phenomenon, *Iron Chef*, and the popular UK show, *The Great British Bakeoff*. Your mission will be to analyze your clip through techniques of film analysis.

This second essay expands the slate of skills you have developed by applying close reading to visual media and by learning to apply theoretical perspectives to the analysis of text.

Unit 3: Powerful Food and How Food Relations Shape the World

The third unit of the course continues an outward progression by studying the matrix of food and the world. The specific focus will be the intersection of food and power. How might we define what power is, and how does it manifest in a specific area related to food, whether with respect to globalization, the domestication of species, food inequities, or the politicization of food in various dimensions? Your short research paper can be on any aspect of food and power (in consultation with me). You may also turn your attention to think through how the pandemic we are in applies to the food industry in some way.

In this third essay, the skills you develop include developing a research question, conducting primary research in the social sciences, and working through secondary sources.

Course Readings

- Course Reader

The course readings will be posted in PDF form on the course website, <https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/74373/files>

- You are not required to purchase textbooks for the class, but you are expected to print out the readings for each class' discussion.

Resources

- Among the resources at your disposal are selected model essays written by members of the freshman class of Harvard published each year in Exposé magazine (<http://projects.iq.harvard.edu/expose>). In some cases, the instructor has added annotations that highlight various intellectual moves made by the author and how these might be adapted for your own writing.
- Harvard University's Guide to Using Sources (<http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu>) offers a helpful indexing of ways to use sources properly and should be bookmarked; it will be an important point of reference.

How the Course Works

- The main goal for the course is to produce an original, compelling, and analytically sound essay for each of the three units of the course. Such essays are not written on the fly but rather take time, critical reflection and patient working. The writing requirements outlined below are designed to provide you with the techniques for constructing good essays.
- Class time is split between grappling with the course readings and in-class work directed at improving some aspect of your writing. It is important that you come to class (to our Zoom meetings) having already completed the relevant readings completed so that you are ready to participate actively in discussion. Occasionally, you may be asked to write a response paper/contribute a comment to an online discussion to help generate thoughts on the reading.

- Please note that class participation is part of your grade. Participation may be defined as active engagement in discussions, whether through a thoughtful comment, question, or active listening.

Writing and Revising

- **Response Papers**

Before composing an initial draft of each essay, you'll complete one or more response papers that focus on particular writing skills important for the relevant essay type. At times, you may be asked to produce a paragraph summarizing an article we have read, followed by a thoughtful response paragraph.

- **Drafts**

You will submit an initial draft version of each of the three essays prior to the revision. On each draft you'll receive comments in writing and in conferences that you will have with me.

- **Draft Cover Letters**

Every time you hand in a draft, you'll include a cover letter in which you provide guidance to your reader about what you are struggling with in addition to whatever other comments or questions you might have. I'll give more specific instructions about writing draft cover letters later in the semester.

- **Draft Workshops**

After the first and second drafts are due, we'll have an in-class draft workshop in which we work through two student papers (chosen by me) and offer the writers constructive criticisms and suggestions for improvement. These essays will be posted in the files folder of the course website shortly before each workshop. You will be expected to provide written comments in the form of a letter or bullet points on each draft that we workshop together. I'll send more detailed guidelines on draft workshops later in the semester. For the third essay, we will conduct workshop in small groups.

- **Conferences**

After I have read your draft for papers 1 and 3, we will meet for a 20-minute conference in which to strategize about ways to revise your essay. Plan on taking notes during the conference and think of questions to ask. These are to be scheduled online through the calendar of the course website. For the second paper, I plan only to give written comments.

- **Essay Revisions**

You should expect to revise each of your drafts extensively before submitting it, together with a cover letter, for a grade. These revisions must be submitted on the course website. When I return your papers, I will provide marginal comments, which will be accompanied by summative end comments.

Other Policies

- **Grading**

Strictly speaking, I will grade only the revisions, that is, the last version, of your essays rather than the drafts or response papers. For your graded work, I use slash grades that correspond to a numerical figure (A- = 91, B+/A- = 89, B+ = 87, etc.).

Course grades will be determined as follows:

Revision of Essay 1	20%
Revision of Essay 2	25%
Essay 3 Annotated Bibliography	10%
Revision of Essay 3	35%
Engagement	10%

NB: With each paper the number of writing components that you are expected to master increases. The result is that later essays are more demanding and harder to execute well; in other words, you are building a set of successive skills. The goal of the class is to bring you further along in your writing—whatever the initial level.

- Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Attendance

Because Expos has a shorter semester and fewer class hours than other courses, and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. *If you are absent without medical excuse **more than twice**, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.* On the occasion of your second unexcused absence, you will receive a letter warning you of your situation. This letter will also be sent to your Resident Dean, so the College can give you whatever supervision and support you need to complete the course.

Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. In the case of a medical problem, you should contact your preceptor before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours: otherwise you will be required to provide a note from UHS or another medical official, or your Resident Dean. *Absences because of special events such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts are not excusable absences.* If such an event is very important to you, you may decide to take one of your two allowable unexcused absences; but again, you are expected to contact your preceptor beforehand if you will miss a class, or at least within 24 hours. If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two-absence limit, you should contact your Resident Dean and you must directly petition the Expository Writing Senior Preceptor, who will grant such petitions only in extraordinary circumstances and only when your work in the class has been exemplary.

- Engagement

Engagement in the course consists of: responding to peers' drafts in peer review and workshop; responding to discussion questions or discussion threads on Canvas; doing the reading thoughtfully; responding to asynchronous assignments; and preparing for and contributing to conferences. For any student who experiences difficulty accessing class at any point during the semester, the other forms of engagement remain genuine parts of their work in the course.

- On Recording Courses

By attending course sessions remotely and accessing course recordings, students acknowledge that they may not post, publish, sell, or otherwise publicly distribute course materials without the written permission of the course instructor. Such materials include, but are not limited to, the following: video or audio recordings, assignments, problem sets, examinations, other students' work, and answer keys.

Students who sell, post, publish, or distribute course materials without written permission, whether for the purposes of soliciting answers or otherwise, may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including requirement to withdraw from the College. Further, students may not make video or audio recordings of class sessions for their own use without written permission of the instructor.

Students needing course recordings as an accommodation should contact the [Accessible Education Office \(AEO\)](#).

- Deadlines

Because we are on a very tight schedule, it is imperative that you submit work on time. I will only accept late work with no penalty if the student contacts me to request an extension in advance of the deadline with a compelling reason. Otherwise late work will receive a significant grade penalty, normally of 1/3 grade per day late. But, everyone will receive one 24-hour extension ('get out of jail') pass to be used at any time during the semester except for the revision of the final paper. There may be occasionally other opportunities to earn additional extensions.

- Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Completion of Work:

Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course—not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind. You will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements, therefore, if you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work, and be copied to your Resident Dean. *If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date, and you have not documented a medical problem, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.*

- Policy on Electronic Submissions

You will submit most of your work electronically this semester. As you send or upload each document, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have saved the document in a form compatible with Microsoft Word or an Adobe PDF. It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you are sending is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the essay will be subject to a late penalty.

- Collaboration Among Students

The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students, and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). If you would like to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay, it is customary to do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the Student Handbook, "You do not need to acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading." However, all work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts, or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden.

- Academic Honesty

Throughout the semester we'll work on the proper use of sources, including how to cite and how to avoid plagiarism. You should always feel free to ask me questions about this material. All the work that you submit for this course must be your own, and that work should not make use of outside sources unless such sources are explicitly part of the assignment. Any student submitting plagiarized

work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to review by the Honor Council, including potential disciplinary action.

- Grading Standards: (adapted from the original by Kerry Walk, formerly of the Harvard College Writing Program)

A paper in the A range deploys the “Elements of Academic Argument” with exceptional grace and mastery:

- Thesis and motive/stakes: interesting, arguable, incisive; sufficiently limited in scope; stated early on and present throughout; supported by a clear motive that suggests why it is original or worthwhile
- Structure: logical, progressive (not just a list); invites complications, considerations of counterarguments; strong and obvious links between points; coherent, well-organized paragraphs
- Evidence: sufficient, appropriate, and well chosen; presented in a readable and understandable manner
- Analysis: insightful and fresh; more than summary or paraphrase; shows how evidence supports thesis
- Sources: well chosen; deployed in a range of ways (to motivate the argument, provide key terms, and so on); quoted and cited correctly
- Style: clear and conversational yet sophisticated; diction level appropriate to audience; smooth, stimulating, a pleasure to read

A B range paper may in part resemble an A range paper but may also exhibit any of the following qualities:

- Thesis and motive/stakes: arguable but may be vague or uninteresting or feature unintegrated parts; may be only implied rather than articulated clearly and/or not stated early on; may not be argued throughout and disappear in places; may be supported by a functional but unsubstantial motive
- Structure: generally logical but either confusing in places (big jumps, missing links) or overly predictable and undeveloped; few complications or considerations of counterarguments; some disorganized paragraphs (excessively long or short; could be confusing)
- Evidence: generally solid but may be scanty or presented as unanalyzed or unexplained quotations
- Analysis: at times insightful but sometimes missing or mere summary; may make inconsistent connections between evidence and thesis
- Sources: quoted and cited correctly (for the most part) but deployed in limited ways, often as a straw person or simply as affirmation of writer’s viewpoint
- Style: generally clear but lacking in sophistication; may be weighed down by fancy diction meant to impress; may exhibit some errors in punctuation, grammar, spelling, and format

A C range paper may in part resemble a B range paper but may also exhibit any of the following qualities:

- Thesis and motive/stakes: vague, descriptive, or confusing; parts unintegrated (e.g., three unrelated prongs); only implied or not stated early on; not argued throughout, disappears in places; supported by a simplistic motive or none at all
- Structure: confusing (big jumps, missing links) or overly predictable (“five-paragraph”); few complications or considerations of counter-arguments; disorganized paragraphs, often headed with descriptive (versus analytical) topic sentences
- Evidence: either missing or presented as undigested quotations; may be taken out of context

- Analysis: some insightful moments but generally either missing or mere summary; may present some misreadings
- Sources: plopped in (if used at all); may be quoted and cited incorrectly, used merely as filler or affirmation of writer's viewpoint
- Style: may be generally unclear and hard to read, or simplistic; may evince many technical errors

A D range paper may in part resemble a C range paper but may also exhibit any of the following qualities:

- Thesis and motive/stakes: missing or purely descriptive (an observation or statement of fact), or may be a total misreading; lacking a clear motive
- Structure: confusing; little focused development (paper usually short but may be rambling); disorganized paragraphs (also usually short); missing, garbled, or purely descriptive topic sentences (plot summary)
- Evidence: very few examples; unanalyzed or unexplained quotations; often taken out of context
- Analysis: missing or based on misinterpretations or mere summary
- Sources: plopped in (if used at all); incorrectly quoted or cited; used as filler
- Style: either simplistic or difficult to read; probably riddled with technical errors

An F (Harvard E) paper is similar to a D paper but is significantly shorter than the assigned length and addresses the assignment superficially.