

Expos 20: Eating Culture
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M, W 2-3 pm
1 Bow St., Room 317

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<https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/12858>

"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 Deresciewicz, 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 Deresciewicz 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, equally, learn (and digest) much about our identities, ethnicities, and society?

In this course we are guided by the maxim of famous anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, "food is good to think," as we contemplate various foodways from multiple perspectives. In our first unit we delve into what makes food "disgusting" or "natural." How do we categorize edible material as polluting or pure? What even counts as food in different societies? In our second unit, we explore what we can learn about food and culture by looking at successful cooking shows produced in different countries, for instance, Top Chef, Iron Chef, and the Great British Bakeoff. What do these shows as cultural artifacts tell us about the values that are celebrated or perpetuated through food? Our third unit will move to consider global trends of commodities, economics, and food ethics. For this unit students will conduct a research of food practice centered in some way on Annenberg. Can we define what a dining hall does, or should do? How has the ritual and

practice of dining changed over time at Harvard? Along the way, we will read classic works, from theories of food by anthropologists Mary Douglas, Jack Goody, and Michael Dietler, to ideas about food as a medium for relationships between people, including the relationships that make up a vast food economy of farms, factories, supermarkets, and our tables, as seen in the writing of novelists, essayists, and food journalists as diverse as Marcel Proust, David Foster Wallace, Wendell Berry, M.F. K. Fisher, and Michael Pollan.

This course is constructed somewhat differently than the typical Expos class with a significant experiential component. Although I don't require your participation outside of the class, your experience of it will be considerably enhanced by taking advantage of the various possibilities placed before you, whether through conducting observations at restaurants, a tasting at a coffee shop, visiting a chocolate factory, or coming for office hours.

While this course's thematic component centers on food, an equally important goal of the course is to develop your 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, and 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 will 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 the Deresciewicz article and explore the work of several anthropologists, for instance the prominent structuralist Mary Douglas', "The Abominations of Leviticus," and a selection from Claude Levi-Strauss' *The Raw and the Cooked*. In the first paper, we will explore what foods are considered "disgusting" or "gross" in our culture. Why, for example, do so many blanch when thinking about the ingredients to Scottish haggis? Why are we squeamish when cookbooks of the 1950s call for the use of aspic/gelatin, made from the bones of animals, in recipes? Alternately, what defines "purity" or wholesome foods as represented in every label at Wholefoods?

Unit 2: Food, Society, and Culture

Our second unit expands outward to consider the role food has to play in our social and cultural interactions. What are the commensal (partaking together) aspects of food? What role does food have in ethnic or group identification? Beyond this, how differently are the rules expressed that revolve around food in different cultures or societies? To help us explore these themes, we will read selections from the anthropologists Michael Dietler and Sian Jones, and explore the relatedness of ethics and taboos. Our paper for the second

unit will carry this theme further by investigating recent, and popular, cooking shows, for instance, the American show *Top Chef*, the wildly influential Japanese phenomenon *Iron Chef*, and/or the most popular show in the UK today, *The Great British Bakeoff*.

Unit 3: Food and the World

The third unit of the course proceeds further to consider the consequences of industrialization, histories of food, and the global economy. We will question modern development of food, for instance in the McDonaldization (or, substitute, KFC, Pizza Hut, etc.) of the world. We'll think about the rise of sushi consumption as seen in the work of Harvard's Ted Bestor, and consider the possible fate of Tokyo's Tsukiji market. In all of this, what is the role for conservation and fair trade cooperatives? Similarly, how should we think of issues of world hunger and economic development? To prepare for this, we will trace the history of sugar with Sidney Mintz and think about the relatedness of food in the context of stressed situations, whether of being a refugee or immigrant population. For the final paper for the course, students will hone their research skills and methodology by designing a project related to Annenberg Hall--perhaps by tracing a history of dining at Harvard, showing some element of social cohesion as illustrated through the practice of eating together, or an issue of social awareness as reflected in the daily or festive offerings provided by the university.

Course Readings

- *Course Reader*: The course readings will be posted in PDF form on the course website, <https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/9407>
- *Other resources*:
 - Models essays from *Exposé*
<http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~expose/>
 - *Harvard University Guide to Using Sources* website, here:
<http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu>

How the Course Works

The main goal for the course is for you 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; they take time, continual re-working, and critical reflection. The writing requirements outlined below are designed to provide you with the techniques for constructing good essays.

Class time will be 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 with the relevant readings completed and ready to participate actively in discussion. To help you do so, we will often have an exercise that will help to generate thoughts on the reading, whether to be turned in or posted on the course website. Everyone is expected to participate in class discussions with at least one thoughtful comment per class, which I

will record together with your attendance. Failure to do so will adversely affect your participation grade. Because all of us are sorely tempted to check internet sites, scores, and messages, as a general rule we will have a NO LAPTOPS policy in our class. You will be expected instead to have readings printed out or have written notes prepared from which to speak.

On occasion, we will have outside events or outings for the class. Although not finalized yet, these may include class trips to the coffeeshop Dwelltime for a "cupping" (tasting) and, hopefully, to the Tazo chocolate factory, among other possibilities. These trips are meant to help enrich your experience in the course and provide further stimulus for your thinking on different topics. While recommended, they should be thought of as supplementary, and are not required for the class.

Writing and Revising

- *Response Papers:* Before you compose an initial draft of each essay, you'll complete one or more response papers that focus on particular writing skills that are 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 well-composed paragraph of response that may focus on questions such as: What were the highlights of this reading, or what were areas in which it showed weakness? How persuasive overall did you find the piece?
 - *Drafts:* You will submit a draft of each of the three essays. On each draft you'll receive detailed comments from the instructor (in writing and in conferences).
 - *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 the aspects of the essay you are struggling with in addition to whatever other comments or questions you might have. I'll give you more specific instructions about writing draft cover letters over the course of the semester.
 - *Draft Workshops:* Immediately after the first two drafts are due we'll have an in-class draft workshop in which we work through two student papers (chosen by the instructor) and offer the writers constructive criticisms and suggestions for improvement. I will email you the essays I have chosen before each workshop. You will be expected to provide written comments (in the form of a letter) on each draft that we workshop together. I'll hand out more guidelines on draft workshops later in the semester.
- For the third unit, we will be working in small groups of three and you will exchange your paper with each other. Our mini draft workshop will happen in these small groups, rather than in the classroom setting, but with all other requirements set (written comments in the form of a letter, etc.).
- *Conferences:* After I've carefully read your draft, we'll meet for a 20-minute conference in which we'll work together on strategies for revising the essay. You should also plan on taking notes during the conference. Missed conferences may not be rescheduled.

- *Essay Revisions:* You should expect to extensively revise each of your drafts before submitting it, together with a cover letter, for a grade (the last revision will not need a cover letter). These revisions must be submitted to the course website. I will handwrite marginal comments for you, with accompanying typed end comments.

Other Policies

- *Grading:* I will grade only the revisions (that is, the last version) of your essays, not the drafts or response papers (although I may suggest, as an aid to interpreting my evaluations, what sort of grade a draft *would* receive if I were to grade it). For your work, at times I will use slash grades because, in my assessment, these papers fall between two grades, say, a B and B+ (B/B+) or between an A- and A (A-/A).

Course grades will be determined as follows:

Revision of Essay 1	20%
Revision of Essay 2	30%
Revision of Essay 3	40%
Participation and exercises	10%

NB: With each paper the number of writing elements necessary to master increases and, so, each essay in some sense raises the stakes by becoming successively more difficult. The goal envisioned through this class is not that you become an exceptional writer, equally accomplished in every facet of writing, but rather that you improve along a spectrum of performance.

- *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.

- *Deadlines:* We are on a very tight schedule, so it is imperative that you submit work on time. I will only accept late work if the student contacts me to request an extension *in advance* of the deadline and has a compelling reason. Otherwise late work will receive a significant grade penalty. For your papers, which constitute the bulk of the grades in the class

- *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.*

- *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:* All work submitted for this course must be your own work. Any outside sources you use must be cited properly. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and will be referred to the college’s Administrative Board for further disciplinary action, including expulsion from the university. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, consult the relevant sections of *Harvard Guide to Using Sources* and/or speak with the instructor. Near the beginning of the course, I will schedule brief chats with each of you to get to know you as well as discuss your thoughts about the Honor Code.