

**Weighing America:
Eating, Bodies and Food Culture(s) in the Land of Plenty
CMST 3900
Service-Learning Curriculum
Department of Communication Study
Louisiana State University**

Professor

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This “Course” in Four “Courses:”

Let us consider the banquet that is this course by examining four inter-related strands, or “courses.” Instead of imagining them served one at a time, we’ll pursue them as interlocked or related, like the diverse and complementary tastes in a rich meal.

The Rhetoric of the Healthy Body and Food Politics

We begin with a social problem that potentially affects us all. America is experiencing an “epidemic” of obesity in a brave new world of manufactured food. In the last two decades, the number of Americans identified as overweight or obese has ballooned. At the same time, an increasing number of Americans—women, men, teenagers, and children as young as six—report that they are dieting to lose weight. This course deepens our understanding by considering the rhetoric of the search for the healthy body in the United States over the past two centuries. It explores the changes in the American diet and in our interpretation of healthy eating that resulted from technologies that now dominate food production. It examines the development of medical knowledge about diet, nutrition, eating disorders, and surgical efforts to reduce body size. It further studies the problems associated with making expert knowledge, practices and recommendations accessible to the public via mass communication and popular culture. We will finally complicate our understanding of American food culture by comparing and contrasting our national and local food cultures through the exploration of Louisiana food traditions, the local “slow food movement, and the unique culinary landscape of New Orleans. Throughout, our focus will be not only on food practices and the processes behind them, such as technological developments and paradigmatic shifts in economies, but also on the acts of representation and communication by which we have come to know, or fail to recognize, our “foodways” and their (seemingly dire) implications.

“Slow Food” as Counter Movement

Within the current world of food politics and practices, we will study the Slow Food Movement and its local manifestation, Slow Food New Orleans. This group is a chapter of Slow Foods USA and a part of the international Slow Foods Movement. Slow Food hopes to enact a lasting change in the food system that ensures equity, sustainability, and pleasure in eating. Slow Food claims to promote food that is “good, clean and fair,” and we will consider in detail what each of these terms may mean in the context of a food system. We will also consider Slow Food as community-building, where food becomes a way of connection. We will meet the people involved in this work locally and extend academic inquiry by engaging their worldview through action and critical reflection.

Community Service-Learning as Method of Engagement

This class will combine academic inquiry and research with community service learning. You may be used to taking courses in which you are the recipient of knowledge provided

to you by experts, whether professors or authors. You also have practice at building skills such as writing, speaking, researching and thinking critically through your previous course work. In this course, we will ground and repurpose them by putting them to work in the world. Through community service learning, we will study local perspectives on food culture, and assist one local group, Slow Food, in advancing their work and slightly changing the world.

Service-learning has been defined as a “credit-bearing, educational experience in which students: 1) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified on- and off-campus community needs and 2) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility” (Bingle and Hatcher). As you can see, it has elements in common with both other types of learning in higher education and in traditions outside the academy, such as volunteerism. For us, it will provide a thoughtful way to cut to the heart of a social problem and take part in real work addressing it.

This term you will create, receive partner and community input on, and revise communication and promotion materials supporting the Slow Food New Orleans monthly gatherings. While these monthly gatherings have been established at a different area restaurant each month, the Slow Foods NOLA board would like additional and improved communication materials to spread word of the gatherings and their particular agendas or evening’s program. These materials should also explain in a clear, accessible but interesting manner the main purposes of the Slow Foods movement.

This project will lead you to consider not only what constitutes Slow Food, but how to present the local group, and the broader movement, to others in the community. It will also present an occasion for you to communicate with the residents of New Orleans about broader issues discussed in this course and to further develop the communication network that supports this local group. You will gain experience in health promotion, advertising and organizing as you learn to tune a message to reach its audience.

Integrative Inquiry as Way of Life

As you continue to read the syllabus, note that our focus on service learning promotes new ways of inquiry with a richer purpose as we study the social context and history of food and eating in America, from (and against) which movements such as Slow Food have arisen. As college students, you are often told that one of the “master outcomes” of your experience is that you will become “lifelong learners.” In this course you have the opportunity to make this term real, by practicing *a way of being* in which multifaceted learning and reflective action becomes part of the fabric of identity. If you can learn to recognize and come to understand a problem affecting many, and find and communicate some part of the solution, you will join the ranks of inventors, entrepreneurs, artists, and leaders committed to a better life.

Learning Objectives

As we proceed through the course, we will track and assess the following objectives. Use them to focus your work and trace your progress.

Academic Objectives

In this course, you will learn to:

Read and think critically and with purpose about weight and food in America.
Locate, extract, and evaluate research on weight and food in America.
Trace some of the many factors that comprise and condition a widespread social problems
Historicize a social issue by analyzing changing discourses
Communicate effectively in written, spoken, visual and technological modes about a controversial issue.
Demonstrate an understanding of some of America's food and eating traditions.
Adjudicate ethical claims emerging from cultural debates about food and weight.

Community Service-Learning Objectives

Through the service-learning component of the course, in particular, you will:

Demonstrate skills in leadership and teamwork by participating in a multi-faceted service-learning activity.
Lead an event to raise awareness of local foods and the Slow Food movement.
Critically engage and help to transform the local food culture(s) of Louisiana.
Demonstrate critical reflection in relation to the service project

Broader Service-Learning Outcomes

Community service-learning may also broader desired outcomes, such as:

Enhancing your sense of civic engagement and social responsibility
Gaining exposure to community movements and organizations
Appreciating cultural differences while building awareness of the deleterious effects of social and economic disparities
Identifying community needs and committing to addressing them

In short: As the semester goes on, consider how your view of the world and your place or role in it is changing...

Course Projects and Assessments

Your mastery of these various objectives will be demonstrated through the following assessments and course projects.

Class Participation: This is essential as it will enrich not only your own experience, but

the whole course and all its participants. This includes a your responsibility to be familiar with primary course readings (secondary readings are optional) as well as Slow Food activities.

Food Diary: To build your critical awareness of your own food habits, you will keep a food diary through the first part of the course.

Slow Food Communication Materials: The central product of our service-learning partnership, these materials will be drafted, community input will be received, and the materials will be created to promote a SLOW FOOD LSU chapter. You will work in teams to generate print, website, and social media materials.

Slow Food Participation: You will be required to attend on Slow Food New Orleans event this term where you will provide assistance for the community event. Specific tasks TBA.

Reflective Journal: This work will allow you to connect various aspects of the course content and work to one another, including connecting the service-learning project to our readings, discussions, film viewings, guest lectures and activities. Journal collected and commented on throughout the term. The entire journal is due at the end of the term.

Research Paper: In this formal project, you will examine in detail an aspect of the course curriculum in a 15 page research paper.

Debate: This will be a reflective, philosophic and informed debate where teams will explore positions on aspects of current food politics and practices.

More details about the projects will be forthcoming.

Grading Scale: I use a 100o point scale. Here are the percentages.

Food Diary	10%
Slow Food Communication Materials	35%
Reflective Journal	10%
Research Paper	20%
Debate	15%
Participation	10%

Required Activities

Service-Learning Slow Food Project, including monthly gatherings
Tour of Pennington Biomedical Center
Tour of New Orleans Restaurant Scene and Local Farmer's Market

Film Viewings -- Scheduling TBA

Supersize Me, Dir. Morgan Spurlock

Food, Inc., Dir. Robert Kenner

King Corn, Dir. Aaron Woolf

Bad Seed: The Truth about our Food, Dir. Mervyn LeRoy

Readings:

Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (Norton Critical Edition).

Joan J. Brumberg, *Fasting Girls: a History of Anorexia Nervosa*.

Tom Fitzmorris, *Hungrytown: A Culinary History of New Orleans, the City Where Food Is Almost Everything*.

Marion Nestle, *Food Politics: How the Food Industry influences Nutrition and Health*

Raj Patel: *Stuffed and Starved: the Hidden Battle for the World Food System*

8/27 Week One:

Introduction to Course, Overview of Content, Service Learning, Slow Food

9/3 Week Two:

Personal Food Experience

Introduction to community partner, SLOW FOOD New Orleans.

9/10 Week Three:

Primary Reading:

Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*

9/17 Week Four: (T)

Primary Reading:

Marion Nestle, *Food Politics*

Food Diary Due

9/24 Week Five: (T)

Primary Readings:

Marion Nestle, *Food Politics*

10/1 Week Six:

View Supersize Me.

10/8 Week Seven:

Joan Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*

10/15 Week Eight:

Workshop of SLOW FOOD LSU communication materials.

**Attend October Slow Food monthly gathering: Group A
Participate in World Food Day LSU: Group B**

10/22 Week Nine:

Prep for Debate

10/29 Week Ten:

In-class Debate

11/5 Week Eleven: (T)

Primary Readings:

Raj Patel, *Stuffed and Starved*

11/12 Week Twelve:

NOLA Culinary Tour. 2pm

11/19 Week Thirteen: (T) (NCA)

Pennington Biomedical Research Center Tour

Primary Readings:

Raj Patel, *Stuffed and Starved*

11/26 Week Fourteen: TBA

Thanksgiving Holiday

12/3 Week Fifteen: Food Futures

Primary Readings:

Tom Fitzmorris, *Hungrytown*

Final Version of Promotional Submitted and Responded to by Community Partner.

12/10 Week Sixteen: Exam Week:

Final Research Paper Due

Reflective Journal Due

Selected Slow Food Movement Internet Resources

Slow Food Baton Rouge

HYPERLINK "http://slowfoodbr.org/" <http://slowfoodbr.org/>

Slow Food New Orleans

HYPERLINK "http://slowfoodneworleans.com/" <http://slowfoodneworleans.com/>

Slow Food USA

HYPERLINK "http://www.slowfoodusa.org/" <http://www.slowfoodusa.org/>

Slow Food.com: Hub of International Slow Food Movement

HYPERLINK "http://www.slowfood.com/" <http://www.slowfood.com/>

Worldwide Food Conference/Event

HYPERLINK "http://salonedelgustoterramadre.slowfood.com/"
<http://salonedelgustoterramadre.slowfood.com/>

Municipalities Extending the Ideas of Slow Food

HYPERLINK "http://www.cittaslow.org/" <http://www.cittaslow.org/>

Writing about Food

HYPERLINK "http://www.ediblecommunities.com/content/"
<http://www.ediblecommunities.com/content/>

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

HYPERLINK "http://www.fao.org/" <http://www.fao.org/>

Oxfam: Family of Organizations Striving for Food Security

HYPERLINK "http://www.oxfam.org/" <http://www.oxfam.org/>

Slow Money: Re-grounding Our Economy, Starting with Food

HYPERLINK "http://www.slowmoney.org/" <http://www.slowmoney.org/>

Challenges of Eating Slow: *Wall Street Journal* Article

HYPERLINK "http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122022613854086965.html"
<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122022613854086965.html>

Fork in the Road: *Grist* Magazine Article

HYPERLINK "http://grist.org/sustainable-food/2012-01-10-fork-in-the-road-for-slow-food/" <http://grist.org/sustainable-food/2012-01-10-fork-in-the-road-for-slow-food/>

Interview with Carlo Petrini, Founder of Slow Food Movement

HYPERLINK "http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/feb/04/slow-food-carlo-petrini" <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/feb/04/slow-food-carlo-petrini>

