ENGL 8090 (Seminar in Special Subjects):
Ecocritical Food Studies

Th, 3:35-6:05 pm  Daniel J. Philippon
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3 credits
Spring 2018 21 Lind Hall
Section 1 Phone: 612-624-4209
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Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description
You can’t throw a locally grown, organic, heirloom tomato these days without hitting someone talking about sustainable food. Yet both that tomato and that discourse have histories, and what’s unspoken about each is often as important as what’s said. In this seminar, we will bring together two critical approaches—ecocriticism and food studies—to explore the many dimensions of sustainable food as they appear in a range of literary and cultural texts. Note that this is not just a course about “food in literature” any more than it is a course on “sustainable food systems.” Rather, it is an examination of how all three of these subjects intersect: how a focus on sustainable food can help us understand the relationship between literature, culture, and the environment; how close attention to literary and cultural texts can illuminate current concerns about agriculture, food, and the environment; and how sustainability science can inform the fields of both food studies and literary and cultural studies. To accomplish this, we will read widely in both primary texts and secondary literature, concentrating mainly on food politics in nonfiction prose since World War II, but also examining the historical roots of such concepts as the pastoral, the domestic, and gastronomic pleasure. While our attention will focus mostly on food discourse in Europe and North America, we will also explore the global reach of the industrial food system and the various counter-movements that have emerged in response to it, particularly those that link food justice in the United States to food sovereignty in the Global South. Along the way, we will reference allied concepts—such as postcolonialism, ecomodernism, materiality, animality, and embodiment—as needed. Primary texts will likely include writing and media appearances by Wendell Berry, Carlo Petrini, Julia Child, Alice Waters, Michael Pollan, Will Allen, Raj Patel, and many others, with secondary reading drawn from across the fields of sustainability studies, ecocriticism, and food studies. Requirements include: attendance and participation, weekly reading responses, leading discussion, a food memoir, and a final project on ecocritical food theory and/or practice.

Course Web site: https://canvas.umn.edu/courses/35564

Objectives
What questions will the course help you to answer? How will you grow in knowledge and understanding? What intellectual abilities will the course help you to develop?

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

• understand the relationship between ecocriticism, sustainability studies, and food studies
• analyze one or more primary texts from the perspective of ecocritical food studies
• clarify your own position on various contested issues in food politics since World War II
• demonstrate skills and knowledge appropriate to your professional/disciplinary goals by completing a substantial project involving research, analysis, creative activity, and/or public practice
• collaborate with others to increase your knowledge and understanding
• communicate your ideas effectively in writing and in speaking

Texts
What reading materials will help you to pursue the goals of this course?

In this course, we will be reading five books, all of which are available in paperback:

• Wendell Berry, The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture (1977): any edition is fine
We will also be reading a number of articles and book chapters posted on our Canvas site, along with a few additional books and/or articles that we select together, based on your interests.

Important Note: Although these books were all written by men, this should in no way reflect the attention we will pay to women’s writing, women’s experiences, and gender in general. I will discuss the reasons behind my choice of these initial textbooks in class, and I fully expect that some if not all of the additional readings we will select together will be written by women.

Grades
How will I evaluate the nature, quality, and progress of your learning?

I will award grades in this course according to the University of Minnesota’s Uniform Grading Policy:
- A: achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements
- B: achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements
- C: achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect
- D: achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements
- F: represents failure and signifies that the work was either:
  - completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit, or
  - not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an “I” (Incomplete)

I will also award pluses and minuses, with the highest possible grade being an “A.”

I will assign an “I” (Incomplete) only in extraordinary circumstances, such as hospitalization. An Incomplete requires a written agreement between us, and it will automatically become an “F” at the end of the next semester of your registration if you do not complete the course requirements by that time.

Students taking this course using the S-N option must complete all requirements, which will be graded using the A-F system. Students must earn a “C-“ or better to receive an “S” (Satisfactory). Students earning a “D+“ or worse will receive an “N” (No Credit). If you wish to change from the A-F grading system to the S-N system, or vice-versa, you must do so within the first two weeks of the semester. Note that only grades of A, B, C (including C-), and S may be applied to a Graduate School degree program.

Grades will be assigned in terms of a percentage of possible points according to the following standards:
- B+ >= 87%
- C+ >= 77%
- D+ >= 67%
- A >= 93%
- B >= 83%
- C >= 73%
- D >= 63%
- F < 63%
- A- >= 90%
- B- >= 80%
- C- >= 70%

I may choose to grade more generously, but I will not raise my standards above these.

If at any time you have concerns about your grade, please do not hesitate to contact me. Overall, I would say I am a “tough but fair” grader. I expect your work to be outstanding, and the way to get an “A” is to meet those expectations in every respect.

How to Calculate Your Grade
You can calculate your grade at any time by adding up all the points you received on your assignments to date and dividing that number by all the points you could have received on those assignments. (Grades for attendance and participation will not be calculated until the end of the semester.) I will also be posting grades to our Canvas site.

Credits and Workload Expectations
According to University policy, it is expected that the academic work required of graduate students will exceed three hours per credit per week.
**University Resources**

**What University resources exist to help you succeed in this course?**

**Student Writing Support**
Student Writing Support (SWS) offers free writing instruction for all University of Minnesota students—graduate and undergraduate—at all stages of the writing process. Consulting is available by appointment online and in Nicholson Hall, and on a walk-in basis in Appleby Hall. Phone: 612-625-1893. Web: http://writing.umn.edu/sws

**Student Academic Success Services**
University Counseling & Consulting Services (UCCS) offers learning support services, including classes, workshops, individual consultation and counseling, and study skills resources to help you be successful at the University. They have two Twin Cities campus locations: Minneapolis (340 Appleby Hall) and St. Paul (199 Coffey Hall). Phone: 612-624-3323. Web: http://www.uccs.umn.edu/

**Student Mental Health and Stress Management**
Many university services exist to help you address a range of mental health concerns or stressful events that may lead to diminished academic performance. These include strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating, and/or lack of motivation. For more information on confidential mental health services, see: http://www.mentalhealth.umn.edu/

**University Policies**

**What University policies apply to this course so that you will have a safe, productive, and fair environment for learning?**

**Sexual Harassment**
Sexual harassment by or toward a member of the University community is prohibited by Board of Regents policy. Complaints about sexual harassment should be reported to the University's Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 419 Morrill Hall. https://diversity.umn.edu/eoaa/

**Classroom Conduct**
All students at the University have the right to a civil, productive, and stimulating learning environment. In turn, instructors have a responsibility to nurture and maintain such an environment. Lively, even heated, discussion is not disruptive behavior. Both instructors and students have a fundamental obligation to respect the rights of each other and an equally fundamental obligation to respect the instructional setting as a place for civil, courteous behavior. Students who disrupt the educational process because of discourteous, threatening, harassing, or other aggressive behavior will be removed from class.

**Disability Accommodations**
It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. If you have a disability, please contact me and/or Disability Services (180 McNamara Alumni Center, 612-626-1333 TTY/voice) to schedule an appointment with a Specialist. All requests will remain confidential. This syllabus is available in alternative formats upon request. https://diversity.umn.edu/disability/

**Student Academic Integrity and Scholastic Dishonesty**
Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else’s work as your own can result in disciplinary action. Any student found guilty of scholastic dishonesty in this course can be assigned a penalty up to and including an “F” or “N” for the course and be reported to the University’s Office for Student
Requirements
What will you be doing to pursue the goals of this course?

To succeed in this course, you must complete the following requirements, which are worth a total of 1,000 possible points. For more information on this point system, see the section on grades.

1. Attendance and Participation (100 points): The word “seminar” derives from the Latin *seminarium*, or “seed plot,” a place or thing in which something is developed or cultivated. For all of us to develop our knowledge and skills with regard to our subject will require equal amounts of independent study and collaborative learning. Each week we will assemble for 2-1/2 hours, bringing with us the results of our independent reading, thinking, and writing. Even more than other kinds of courses, seminars are intended to be places where everyone works together to broaden our knowledge and deepen our skills. As a result, I expect only the best of what you have to offer. Your mind, your courtesy, and your sense of humor should all be operating in top form. You should be eager to learn and grow, open to constructive criticism, and willing to help and collaborate with others. Needless to say, your regular attendance and active participation are required. If you know in advance that you are going to be absent on a particular day, please let me know.

   - To help us get started, I would like you to submit a 1- to 2-page intellectual autobiography, explaining who you are, where you’ve been, and where you’re going. I am particularly interested in the intersection of your physical travels with your intellectual ones. Please also explain your expectations for this class and how I can help you fulfill them. Use this as an opportunity not only to enlighten me about your personal story but also to establish your own focus for the semester. Please post your autobiography to our Canvas site by 9 a.m. on Thursday, January 25. It will not be graded, but its submission will count toward your attendance and participation score.

   - Please also bring in a found food text on February 1. This can be anything “textual” (broadly speaking) related to food. Examples include a food package, label, and/or advertisement; food-related newspaper article, blog, or web site; a food periodical, such as *Cook’s Illustrated*, *Bon Appétit*, or *Gastronomica*; a food-related book, article, story, or poem; or a work of visual art, film, and/or music about food. Although we may not have time to discuss everyone’s object, we will share and analyze as many of them as we can in a kind of scholarly show-and-tell.

   As part of your attendance and participation score, I may also ask you to participate in workshops and peer-editing groups, in which you will read and comment on the writing of other students, as well as receive valuable feedback about your own writing. You may also need to meet one or more writing partners outside of class.

2. Reading Responses (200 points): Another important part of this course is the series of eight reading responses you will write over the course of the term, in response to our course texts. These responses will allow you to share your written thoughts with other students in the class, and they could also help you to develop your own writing projects.

   Each response should be 300-600 words long (approximately 1-2 pages, double-spaced) and should be a thoughtful, considered reaction to one or more of the texts we are reading for that week. Your reading responses should be based primarily on your own attention to and engagement with the texts, but I also encourage you to engage the responses of other students by posting follow-up responses.

   Reading responses should be submitted to the appropriate “Discussion Forum” on our Canvas site by 9 a.m. before each Thursday class. (Please post them as text entries, not Word attachments.) Because we all need time to read and process these responses before class, late and missing responses will receive no credit. Please plan your reading and writing accordingly.

   Note that there are nine reading responses listed on the course schedule, but one of these will be taken up by your discussion guide (see below), so each of the remaining eight responses will be worth 25 points.

   Although I will read this forum closely, I will not be providing feedback on individual entries. Instead, I will watch for trends in the length, number, timing, and quality of your messages throughout the semester, and I will let you know if you need to improve.
At the end of the semester, I will grade all your responses collectively according to the following scale:
   A: frequent and courteous participation, with mature and thoughtful insights
   B: above average participation and insight
   C: moderate participation and reasonable insight

3. Leading Discussion (50 points): In the second half of our course, you will work with another student to lead class discussion of the assigned reading(s) for one class meeting. You should plan to provide a 15-minute introduction to your assigned reading(s) and to direct our conversation in the ways you find most appropriate. Discussion leaders should consult with me before they plan their presentation and submit a discussion guide instead of their normal reading responses. Days and readings for leading discussion are March 8 (Will Allen), March 22 (Raj Patel), March 29 (Michael Pollan), April 12 (student choice), and April 19 (student choice).

4. Food Memoir (50 points)
   In addition to your reading responses, I would like you to submit a 3-4 page food memoir recounting and analyzing some aspect of your own personal engagement with food. The primary purpose of this memoir is recounting (to help you to understand the memoir genre), but a secondary purpose is analyzing (to get you to think critically about the content of your memoir). Choose one of the following subjects to write about, or consult with me if you have another idea:
   - a childhood food memory
   - one or more meals that stand out in your mind
   - how you learned to cook
   - how you cooked a new food or used a new cooking technique
   - why you eat the way you do
   - a typical weekday meal (breakfast, lunch, or dinner) your family would eat, and how your family would eat it
   - a grace or blessing your family says before a meal
   - a favorite family recipe: its personal, cultural, and historical significance
   - a meal associated with a cultural or religious holiday, such as Thanksgiving: what you ate, where you gathered, who was there, how the gender and age of the participants affected who did what
   - your birthday and any foods associated with its celebration
   - a visit to two different kinds of food markets: a conventional supermarket, a neighborhood grocery store, a food co-op, a Whole Foods, and/or a farmer’s market
   - a taste test between two different foods (Coke vs. Pepsi, name brand vs. generic cereals, etc.)
   - a visit to a restaurant you have never been to before or that serves a kind of food you have never eaten before
   - your experience with a particular national, regional, or local cuisine or food
   
   Have fun, be creative, and feel free to use dialogue and humor! You may also consult with friends and family members if you need help remembering certain details of your experiences. Your memoir is worth 50 points and is due on March 8.

5. Final Project (600 points): I will work individually with each of you to develop a final project appropriate to your interests and the goals of this course. This may be a traditional seminar paper, 16-24 pages long, or it may take some other form, such as:
   - a research prospectus for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation
   - a review essay on a major theme of this course, similar to what you might submit for an oral or written preliminary exam
   - a manifesto, white paper, or work of creative writing
   - a digital, web-based, visual, or mixed-media project
   - a syllabus and extensive justification for a new course
   - a public education campaign, museum exhibition, or art installation
   - a collaborative project with one or more other members of the class
   
   Whatever the project, it must represent a public or publishable example of theory and/or practice related to ecocritical food studies, broadly understood. I would be disappointed if you did not make plans to use this
final project to fulfill some other academic goal—whether that be a programmatic requirement, a conference presentation, a dissertation chapter, a journal article, a professional report, or some other worthy achievement.

To help you achieve your goal, I will ask you to submit three “milestones” throughout the semester, along with a self-evaluation. Each of these components has its own point value:

- **Milestone #1**: Detailed 3-4 page proposal, consisting of a 1-2 page abstract of your intended subject and method and a 2-3 page annotated bibliography of 6-8 relevant books and/or articles. (Your annotations need not be extensive; 50-100 words each is a good target.) If your project will involve a public component, be sure to indicate your intended audience, method of delivery, predicted impact, and “theory of change.” Due February 22 (50 points).
- **Milestone #2**: Progress report, 2-3 pages, explaining what remains to be done and including a longer review or discussion of a single article or book. Due March 22 (25 points).
- **Milestone #3**: Class presentation of your project and your progress on it (using PowerPoint/Prezi/Keynote as needed). Due in April, specific date TBA (50 points).
- **Final Project**: Due on Wednesday, May 9 by 11:59 p.m. (450 points).
- **Self-evaluation**: Due on Friday, May 11 by 11:59 p.m. (25 points).

I would of course be happy to review additional abstracts, outlines, and partial or complete drafts, with sufficient notice.

For help in planning large and/or collaborative projects, see the University Library’s “Assignment Calculator” <https://www.lib.umn.edu/apps/ac/> and the Center for Educational Innovation’s site on “Surviving Group Projects” <http://teamwork.umn.edu>.

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**Contact Me**

**How can you contact me to help you learn?**

The best way to contact me is immediately after class; I would be happy to meet with you briefly to answer a question or elaborate on a point made in class. To contact me at other times, email is almost always the best way to reach me. I encourage you to talk with me outside of class, so I can get to know you better as a person and learn more about the subjects that interest you, since the main reason I am here is to help you learn and grow. **My contact information appears at the top of this syllabus.**

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**Course Schedule**

**How is this course structured to develop your knowledge, understanding, and abilities throughout the semester?**

This schedule is subject to change, so if you miss a class you should check with a classmate for the most current information. Lecture notes, handouts, and additional readings will be available on our Canvas site.

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**1. Ecocriticism, Food Studies, and the Environmental Humanities**

1/18  **Week 1: Welcome**

1/25  **Week 2: Ecocriticism, Sustainability, and Early Environmental Writing on Food**  
Read:  Lawrence Buell, et al., “Literature and Environment”  
Philippon, “Is American Nature Writing Dead?”  
Jane Bennett, “Edible Matter”  
Henry David Thoreau, “Higher Laws,” from Walden (1854)  
Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” from A Sand County Almanac (1948)  
Rachel Carson, “A Fable for Tomorrow,” from Silent Spring (1962)  
DUE: Intellectual Autobiography (see Requirement #1 above)

2/1  **Week 3: Food Movements, Food Studies, and Food Writing**  
Read:  Michael Pollan, “The Food Movement, Rising”
2/8

**Week 4: Food, Garden Writing, and the Environmental Humanities**

Read:
- Philippon, "The Environmental Humanities: An Extensive Pleasure"
- Rob Emmett and David Nye, from *The Environmental Humanities: A Critical Introduction*  
- Emmett, from *Cultivating Environmental Justice: A Literary History of U.S. Garden Writing*  
- Stéfan Sinclair and Stephanie Posthumus, “Digital ? Environmental : Humanities”

(please also look over the rest of the DEH web site before coming to class)

Guest Speaker: Rob Emmett, Roanoke College

DUE: Reading Response #2

**Important Note:** Rob Emmett will be speaking on “These Were Not the End Times: Voices from the Late Fossil Fuel Era” today (2/8) from noon to 1:30 pm in Folwell 113 as part of the Environmental Humanities Initiative speaker series. Lunch will be provided, and I will respond to Rob’s talk and then moderate a discussion afterward. Please attend if you can!

### 2. Landmark Texts in Ecocritical Food Studies

#### 2/15

**Week 5: Farming: Wendell Berry**

Read:
- Berry, *The Unsettling of America*
- Berry, "The Pleasures of Eating"

DUE: Reading Response #3

#### 2/22

**Week 6: Processing: Carlo Petrini**

Read:
- Petrini, *Slow Food Nation*
- Philippon, "How Local is Slow Food?"

DUE: Milestone #1 (Final Project Proposal)

#### 3/1

**Week 7: Cooking: Kitchens, Recipes, Celebrity Chefs, and Gender**

Read:
- Philippon, “Kitchens of the Great Anthropocene”
- Susan J. Leonardi, "Recipes for Reading”
- Julia Child, “About the Television Series”
- Alice Waters, “The Farm-Restaurant Connection”
- Tracey Deutsch, “Memories of Mothers in the Kitchen”

Guest Speaker: Tracey Deutsch, History Department

DUE: Reading Response #4

#### 3/8

**Week 8: U.S. Food Justice: Will Allen**

Read: Allen, *The Good Food Revolution*

In class: Mid-semester evaluations

DUE: Food Memoir

Discussion Leaders:
3/15  **Week 9: No Class (Spring Break)**

3/22  **Week 10: Global Food Justice: Raj Patel**  
Read: Patel, *Stuffed and Starved*  
Patel and Philippon, “Still Stuffed and Starved, Ten Years Later: A Conversation”  
DUE: Reading Response #5; Milestone #2 (Final Project Progress Report)  
Note: Recruitment weekend - prospective students may be visiting class.  
Discussion Leaders:

3/29  **Week 11: The Natural History of Food: Michael Pollan**  
Read: Pollan, *Cooked*  
Nicols and Philippon, “An Interview with Michael Pollan”  
Note: Michael Pollan lecture at 7 pm in Northrop Auditorium  
DUE: Reading Response #6  
Discussion Leaders:

4/5  **Week 12: No Class (Work Day for Final Projects)**  
Instructor out of town

3. **Student Choice and Final Project Presentations**

4/12  **Week 13: Student Choice and Final Project Presentations**  
Read: TBA  
DUE: Reading Response #7  
Discussion Leaders:

4/19  **Week 14: Student Choice and Final Project Presentations**  
Read: TBA  
DUE: Reading Response #8  
Discussion Leaders:

4/26  **Week 15: Politics of Land: Colony, Property, Ecology**  
Guest Speaker: Dipesh Chakrabarty, University of Chicago (IAS Thursdays, location TBA)  
Read: Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” “Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change,” and “Climate and Capital: On Conjoined Histories”  
DUE: Reading Response #9

5/3  **Week 16: Last Class and/or Dinner**  
Course evaluations, and any remaining final project presentations

5/9  Final Projects due by 11:59 p.m. (Wednesday)

5/11  Self-evaluations due by 11:59 p.m. (Friday)

5/16  Grades due by 11:59 p.m. (Wednesday – expected)