

# MIT 3932G: Politics and Representation of Food

**Instructor:** John Reed

**Screenings:** Mondays from 10:30am-12:30pm in HSB 9

**Discussion and Lecture:** Wednesdays from 2:30pm-4:30pm in HSB 11

**Email:** [jreed22@uwo.ca](mailto:jreed22@uwo.ca) (I respond within 48 hours)

**Office:** FNB-4081

**Hours:** Wednesdays 1:00pm-2:30pm or by appointment

## Course Description

This course explores what we eat, how we eat, and why media representation is central to political, economic, ethical, and environmental problems at home and worldwide. You will first learn about the corporate-industrial model of food production and then use your critical and creative skills to respond to what you've learned. You'll explore issues such as the commodification and control of biological property; factory farming and environmental damage; issues of representation, gender and identity; human/animal rights and welfare; the relationship between technology, food, and culture; globalization; food security; and the practice of alternatives to the corporate-industrial food system. You'll also explore how media and the arts can provide opportunities for education and resistance.

## Texts, Technology and Software

- **Texts:** All materials are available electronically via OWL. Skim PDF reader is great for reading!
- **Technology:** None needed. If we pivot online due to COVID see below.
- **Software:** OWL and Office 365 (Teams for discussion, Stream for videos, Powerpoint for presentations, and OWL for guided course content and links to screenings & lecture.

## Evaluation and Requirements

- (1) **Attendance** at screening (5%) and lecture (5%)
- (2) **Two Presentation contributions to 365 Powerpoint** (30% total).  
Each submission includes a 4-page exploration of an activist or artistic solution related to your week's material. One by Feb 16 and the other by April 8.
- (3) **Analysis of a Family Recipe**, due Mar 10 (20%).
- (4) **Include your recipe in a class cookbook** due March 18 (5%)
- (5) **Final Essay/Project Proposal and Annotated Bibliography**, due March 25 (10%)
- (6) **Final research essay**, 8 pages, due April 8 (25%)  
or  
**Art or informational project+8-page essay**, due April 8 (25%)

## Course Structure

We'll follow a few simple themes throughout the term: representation and ideology; commons and enclosure; globalization and ethics; and art, social justice and activism.

The first few weeks will ease us into thinking about ideology and food. Marx helps us think about commodity fetishism, alienation, industrialism, postindustrialism, globalization, commons and enclosure, and these terms will provide a framework for the entire semester.

These early weeks also interrogate the interrelation of subjectivity, representation and consumption, and we'll build upon these political aspects further as we look at the supermarket, activism and the arts, social justice, environmentalism, labour, and indigenous approaches to food.

I'll be asking you to engage with these issues using your MIT skills in media, culture, and communication. We'll also have a guest speaker attend to talk about their work.

# Evaluation

## 1. Attendance at Screening and lecture (10% total).

—> There are ten possible **screening** and **discussion** meetings this semester, and so attendance will be straightforward for each: 10/10=100%, 9=90%, 8=80% and so on for screening days and for lecture and discussion days. Screenings are worth 5% and lecture/discussions are worth 5% for a total of 10%.

## 2. Two Presentation Contributions to Office 365 + an exploration into a solution related to that week's content. Submit one by February 16 and one by April 8 (30% total)

You are responsible for part of the content of this course. Each week eight students will sign up to build presentation slides for the week. This will create a student archive and allow others to understand and navigate the readings.

There are two components:

- I. **Illuminate the readings.** You'll be assigned portions of the readings, along with some helpful hints if need be. **I'll place an empty Powerpoint cloud-based file online**, and you'll fill it in with critical concepts, selected passages for discussion, images and video to bring it to life, along with questions to throw out to the class. I don't expect you to be the expert on this material; you are merely helping to parse it and bring it to life for discussion.
- II. **Find an art or activist approach to that week's topic.** Do some online searching and look for art, activism, legal challenges, or community organizing to address some aspect of the problem we examine. Four pages, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman, cited, quoted, analyzed, and with a works cited. Submit one by February 16 and one by April 8.

## 3. Analysis of a Family Recipe, due March 10 (20%)

—>**Length: About 8 pages**

Using several syllabus readings and outside sources, you'll select a family recipe and reflect on its relation to the themes of this course. You may use any medium to reflect on this (photography, digital media, oral history, print, etc).

—>**Bonus:** You will receive a 5% bonus in this class if you bring your recipe to the Potluck (tba)

## 4. Include your recipe in a class cookbook! Due March 18 (5%).

## 5. Final project proposal and annotated bibliography, due by March 25 (10%)

—>**Part One:** An annotated bibliography of 10 sources that you will consult for your final paper or project. Annotations should be one paragraph long and provide a summary of each text. Use whatever formatting system you wish, but be consistent.

—>**Part Two:** A one-page summary or central claim: A one-page outline of your final project (research question, central claim or hypothesis, etc.) or multi-media project along with this document.

## 6. Major Research Essay (25%), due April 8

—>**Length: about 8 pages**

Using several syllabus readings and outside sources, produce a research essay following one of the course themes that interest you. You may expand upon any of the ones we've encountered, or you may suggest one to me. Your essay should add up to about 8 pages.

or

## 6. Art, Activist, or Informational Project + Essay (25%), due April 8

—>**Length: about 8 pages**

Attempt to raise awareness about a food-related issue through art, activism, journalism, or another public-oriented method. We will mount or publish these during the final week of class. In addition to your project, you'll need to reflect on your process, and include several syllabus themes and sources along the way. This accompanying write-up should be about 8 pages.

## Important Information

### COVID Contingency

In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence, or other health emergency, during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, all remaining course content will be delivered entirely online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will not change. Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

If university policy and public health directives necessitate additional measures to manage the spread of disease, students may be required to resume masking in instructional spaces. Students who are unable to wear a mask for medical reasons should seek accommodation through Accessible Education.

### Deadline for withdrawal without academic penalty

Students will receive graded work worth no less than 15% at least 3 days prior to the deadline for withdrawal without academic penalty. This year, the date by which students are to have received at least 15% of their grade in a first semester course is March 7, 2024. Details: <https://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/SessionalDates.cfm?SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=> .

### Plagiarism and the Use of Generative AI

Students in this class are reminded that plagiarism – using another’s work, ideas, or words without giving credit -- is a serious scholastic offence. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the unauthorized use of generative artificial intelligence to create content that is submitted as one's own. Students who use of AI-content generators (such as ChatGPT) to complete assignments without attribution or permission from the instructor are committing a scholastic offence. In order to pass this class you need to receive passing grades in **both** the written work [Final Project and Carbon Footprint] as well as Presentations and Attendance.

### Information about late or missed evaluations

- **Late assessments without academic consideration will be subject to a late penalty 10%/day.**
- Late assessments with academic consideration and worth more than 10% require the student to work with the Academic Advising unit in their Faculty of registration; once that has been approved, students need to contact the instructor to arrange for an alternate submission date.
- **You have one 48-hour ‘no questions asked’ (NQA) extension in this class.** Contact John directly to arrange an NQA accommodation.
- If you miss a lecture please use the slides provided on OWL and contact me for a screen recording of the lecture.

### Communication Protocol

- A weekly update will be provided on the OWL announcements and home page.
- Students should contact their instructor using UWO email or Teams.
- Emails will be monitored daily during the week; students will receive a response in 24 – 48 hours.
- This course will use Microsoft Teams for discussions if we move online, and OWL Assignments for all else.

### Professionalism and Privacy

- Western students are expected to follow the Student [Code of Conduct](#).
- Additionally, the following expectations and professional conduct apply to this course:
  - Students are expected to follow online etiquette expectations provided on OWL.
  - All course materials created by the instructor(s) are copyrighted and cannot be sold/shared.
  - Recordings are not permitted (audio or video) without explicit permission.
  - Students may be expected to take an academic integrity pledge before some assessments.

**How to Be Successful in this Class**

- Students enrolled in this class should understand the level of autonomy and self-discipline required.
- Invest in a planner or application to keep track of your courses. Populate all your deadlines at the start of the term and schedule time at the start of each week to get organized and manage your time.
- Make it a daily habit to log onto OWL to ensure you have seen everything posted.
- Follow weekly checklists created on OWL or create your own to help you stay on track.
- Take notes as you go through the lesson material.
- Download, print, and save the lecture slides!
- Connect with others. Form an online study group and try meeting on a weekly basis.
- Do not be afraid to ask questions. If you are struggling with a topic, check the online discussion boards or contact your instructor(s) and or teaching assistant(s).
- Reward yourself for successes. It seems easier to motivate ourselves knowing that there is something waiting for us at the end of the task.
- FIMS Undergraduate Services ([fims@uwo.ca](mailto:fims@uwo.ca)) and Western Student Experience are resources to help students succeed.

**Course Objectives as Related to MIT Program Objectives**

Upon successful completion of readings, assignments, and class participation, you will be able to:

- Gain an understanding of the practical, theoretical, historical, social and cultural contexts of media, information, and technology as they relate to the study and analysis of food (objective 1).
- Understand the range of information sources available in an area of interest, and be able to find, retrieve, and critically evaluate information and information resources in order to produce research essays and a class presentation (objective 2).
- Learn how the media of information, communication, news and entertainment are related to culture, ideology, and identity formation (objective 3).
- Explore cultural responses to technology, the forms they may take and the way relations between humans and technology create different kinds of cultures or 'technocultures' (objective 4).
- Examine patterns of thought, cognition, interaction, culture, or power embodied in the design and use of information technologies (objective 5)
- Gain an understanding of the processes and institutions involved in creating and disseminating information, entertainment, and knowledge (objective 6).
- Explore the connections between the control of information / communication technologies and democracy, the public sphere, capital accumulation, labour and occupations, and the environment (objective 7).

### Schedule of Readings

<b>01: Introduction</b>		
Jan 8	Watch online:	• <u>Eating Animals</u> . (2019) dir. Christopher Quinn
Jan 10	Meet:	•Discuss the film, the syllabus, and the semester.
<b>02: Industrialization</b>		
Jan. 15	Watch in person:	• <u>Our Daily Bread</u> (2006) dir. Nicholas Geyerhalter
Jan. 17	Read:	•John Bellamy Foster, selections from <u>The Vulnerable Planet</u> •Eric Schlosser, selections from <u>Fast Food Nation</u>
<b>03: Globalization</b>		
Jan. 22	Watch in person:	• <u>Darwin's Nightmare</u> (2004) dir. Hubert Sauper
Jan. 24	Read:	•Becky Mansfield, "Modern" Industrial Fisheries and the Crisis of Overfishing" •Suzanne Ludicello, "What Economics Has to Do With Fishing"
<b>04: Commodity Fetishism</b>		
Jan. 29	Watch in person:	• <u>Banana Land: Blood, Bullets and Poison</u> (2014) dir. Jason Glaser, Diego Lopez
Jan. 31	Read:	•Eric Holt-Giménez, selections from <u>A Foodie's Guide to Capitalism</u>
<b>05: Biological Property and GMOs</b>		
Feb. 05	Watch in person:	• <u>The World According to Monsanto</u> (2008) dir. Marie Robin
Feb. 06	Read:	•Vandana Shiva, "Genetic Engineering and Food Security" in <u>Stolen Harvest</u> •Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "Postmodernization, or the Informatization of Production" in <u>Empire</u>
<b>06: Representation and Subjectivity: The Semiotics of Food</b>		
Feb. 12	Watch in person:	• <u>Triangle of Sadness</u> (2022) dir. Ruben Östlund
Feb. 14	Read:	•Warren Belasco, selections from <u>Food: The Key Concepts</u> •Charlene Elliott, "Consuming the Other: Packaging Representations of Foreignness in President's Choice"

**07: Fall Reading Week — No Class or Screenings****08: Labour**

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| Feb 26 | Watch in person: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>The Chocolate War</u> (2022) dir. Miki Mistrati</li> </ul>   |
| Feb 28 | Read:            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barry Estabrook, "From the Hands of a Slave" in <u>Tomatoland</u></li> <li>• Gabriel Allahduah, selections from <u>Harvesting Freedom</u></li> </ul> <p>-&gt;Special Guest: Gabriel Allahduah</p> |

**09: Activism and Art**

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| Mar. 04 | Watch in person: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>The Animal People</u> (2019) dir. Denis Kennelly</li> </ul>  |
| Mar. 06 | Read:            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alice Cutler and Kim Bryan, "Why We Are What We Eat" from <u>Do It Yourself: A Handbook for Changing the World</u></li> <li>• George Petelin, "Food for Thought: Visual Practice as Activist Research" in <u>Food Democracy: Critical Lessons in Food, Communication, Design and Art</u></li> </ul> |

**10: Waste, the Environment and Environmental Justice**

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| Mar. 11 | Watch in person: | <u>Trashed: A Global Tour of Rubbish</u> (2013) dir. Candida Brady   |
| Mar. 13 | Read:            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paul Connett, "Zero Waste: Sustainability In Our Hands"</li> <li>• David Naguib Pellow, selections from <u>Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago</u></li> </ul> |

**11: Ultra-Processed Foods**

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| Mar. 18 | Watch in person: | <u>King Corn</u> (2007) dir. Aaron Woolf  |
| Mar. 20 | Read:            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chris van Tulleken, selections from <u>Ultra-Processed People: The Science Behind Food That Isn't Food</u></li> <li>• Robert H. Lustig, "Ultraprocessed Food: Addictive, Toxic, and Ready for Regulation"</li> </ul> |

**12: Indigenous Food Sovereignty**

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| Mar. 25 | Watch in person: | • <u>Gather</u> (2020) dir. Sanjay Rawal   |
| Mar. 27 | Read:            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Charlotte Coté, "Indigenizing Food Sovereignty"</li> <li>• Dawn Morrison, "Reflections and Realities: Expressions of Food Sovereignty in the Fourth World" from <u>Indigenous Food Systems: Concepts, Cases, and Conversations</u></li> <li>• Kevin Slivka, "Places of Transformation"</li> </ul> |

**13: Conclusion: Display Class Projects!**

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| Apr. 01 | •No Class—Easter Monday |
| Apr. 03 | •Post your projects!    |