

STS 201: Understanding Technological Society (through Food)

Time: MW 8:30-10:00

Location: CUL Lecture Hall #3

Instructor: Michael Brownstein, msb@njit.edu

Office Hours: Mondays 3:00-4:30, Fridays 11:30-1:00, or by appointment in 312 Cullimore

Course Description

This course examines the impact of science and technology on politics, economics, culture, health, and morality. We will focus on one particular example: food. Topics include: industrial agriculture, food and justice, food and community, and the ethics of eating. This course includes a service learning component, guest lectures, film, and a variety of technical and non-technical readings.

Required Texts

None. All readings will be posted to Moodle.

Grading

The scale this course uses is as follows:

A= 100%-90%	D=69%-60%
B= 89%-80%	F=59% - 0%
C=79% -70%	

Note: pluses and minuses will be given (e.g. 92% = A-) except for in final grades, which will not use minuses, as per NJIT's bizarre policies.

Requirements

Papers (40%)

Students must write two critical essays, each approximately 6-8 pages. The instructor will distribute choices for essay topics. Students will have the option to re-write their essays for a better grade if they choose.

Be warned: you will be expected to work hard on these essays. Half-baked ideas and sloppy writing will not be accepted. You should plan to revise your essay several times **before** turning it in. Keep the following advice from David Foster Wallace in mind:

“If you are used to whipping off papers the night before they’re due, running them quickly through the computer’s Spellchecker, handing them in full of high-school errors and sentences that make no sense and having the professor accept them ‘because the ideas are good’ or something, please be informed that I draw no distinction between the quality of one’s ideas and the quality of those ideas’ verbal expression, and I will not accept sloppy, rough-draftish, or semiliterate college writing. Again, I am absolutely not kidding.”

Be *really* warned: IF YOU PLAGIARIZE A PAPER, YOU WILL FAIL THE COURSE. See the “What Counts as Plagiarism” handout for more information. Also see NJIT’s academic integrity policy:

<http://www.njit.edu/academics/integrity.php>

Reading Quizzes (20%)

Occasional unannounced reading quizzes will be given in class to ensure that students are both doing and comprehending the assigned readings.

Group Poster Presentations (20%)

In groups, students will create a poster on a topic of their choice and present their research to the class. This project requires students to do independent research. [Here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) are tips for creating effective posters. Also, Davida Scharf is an expert researcher and our librarian for the Humanities Department. She has prepared online research guides which you may find useful. Start here: [Tools for All Writers](#). She is available for help during her office hours, or by appointment. Her contact information and calendar are available here <http://researchguides.njit.edu/scharf>. Take advantage of her expertise. Library Research Guides are also available to the Rutgers information resources. See: <http://libguides.rutgers.edu/>

Participation, Attendance, Quality of Failure, and Protokol (20%)

Active and informed **participation** in class discussions counts for a relatively large portion of your final grade in this course. If you are afraid of speaking in public, push yourself to try. If you are terribly afraid of speaking in public, please talk with me about it privately before the course begins. Note that asking questions in class—no matter how simple or well-informed the question is—counts as “active and informed participation.” So, ask the questions that are in your head, even if you think everyone else knows the answer. (Hint: they don’t.)

Regular class attendance is expected and counts toward this portion of your grade.

Quality of failure refers to your willingness to take intellectual risks. Have you proposed a different way to look at things? Have you taken a stand for an unpopular view? Have you argued for a view that might seem strange? Most importantly, have you been willing to speak or write about something even if you’re not sure it’s right? If so, then you will get a good Quality of Failure grade. Whenever you take a risk and fail, just tell yourself, “this is how I learn.”

The final component of your participation grade is a daily class *Protokol*. A *Protokol* is a short **interpretive** summary of the previous class’ discussion, read aloud by a student at the start of each class. An interpretive summary means that you must do more than simply regurgitate what was said in the previous class; instead, you must condense, organize, and clarify what went on in the previous class. Each student will be expected to do one *Protokol* over the course of the semester. Students will be asked to upload their *Protokol* to Moodle.

Schedule

W 9.4: Introductions

What is STS?

M 9.9: Winner, "Technologies as Forms of Life" & "Do Artifacts Have Politics?"

W 9.11: Jonas, "Towards a New Philosophy of Technology"

Why Food?

M 9.16: Moss, "The Extraordinary Science of Addictive Junk Food" & Schlosser, "Why McDonald's French Fries Taste So Good"

W 9.18: Pollan, "Farmer in Chief" & Kramer, "The Ruination of the Tomato"

Industrial Agriculture

M 9.23: Tietz, "Boss Hog" & Reply to Tietz from Smithfield Farm & *The Economist*, "Good Food?" (two articles)

W 9.25: Thompson, "The Productionist Paradigm" & Stoller-Conrad, "Family Farms"

M 9.30: Food, Inc. (Film)

W 10.2: Food, Inc. (Film)

M 10.7: Guest Speaker (Carrie Brownstein, Whole Foods Market)

W 10.9: Tillman, "Agricultural Sustainability" & Vaidyanathan, "The Wheat Stalker" & **Paper #1 due**

Food and Justice

M 10.14: Winne, "Community Gardens" & "Income Disparities, Poverty, and the Food Gap"

W 10.16: Crouch, "Evolution or Gentrification?," Cagle, "Different Breeds of Urban Agriculture Duke it Out in Detroit," & Thompson, "Detroit: Land Grab or City Revival?"

M 10.21: Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

W 10.23: Altieri and Rosset, "Ten Reasons Why Biotechnology Will Not Ensure Food Security" & McGloughlin, "Ten Reasons Why Biotechnology Will Be Important to the Developing World" & **Service Learning Day** (Court Street Urban Farm)

Food and Community

M 10.28: Berry, "The Agricultural Crisis as a Crisis of Culture," Berry, "The Fifty Year Farm Bill," & Adams, "Century Farms: A Slice of History, Threatened"

W 10.30: Borgmann, "Focal Things and Practices"

Ethics of Eating Animals

M 11.4: Rachels, "The Basic Argument for Vegetarianism"

W 11.6: Singer, "All Animals are Equal"

M 11.11: Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights"

W 11.13: Norcross, "Puppies, Pigs, and People"

M 11.18: From the *New York Times*, “Put Your Ethics Where Your Mouth Is” (all finalist essays)

W 11.20: Wallace, “Consider the Lobster”

M 11.25: Catch-up, **Paper #2 due**

Student Research

M 12.2: Poster Presentations

W 12.4: Poster Presentations

M 12.9: Poster Presentations

W 12.11: Poster Presentations