Professor Smita A. Rahman

DePauw University

Department of Political Science

Office: 104 Asbury Hall

(765)658-4830

[smitarahman@depauw.edu](mailto:smitarahman@depauw.edu)

**FYS: THE POLITICS OF FOOD**

This first year seminar will explore how we vote every time we sit down to eat a family dinner, stop for a cheeseburger at a drive-through or go to the local supermarket to take advantage of the weeks’ specials. If we vote every time we eat, what are the consequences of such action?  What are the politics of drinking soda? Of buying tomatoes in winter? What policies and systems of production sustain such choices? What is the difference between organic and non-organic? Is it a difference of degree or a difference of kind? Who decides what is offered in the school lunch program? How is food safety practiced and enforced today? The course will begin by tracing the key links of the industrial food chain, by following a single crop, corn, as it winds its way through the chain of food production, becoming essential to the production of meat, dairy, processed food, soda and even matches and batteries. We will then take a close look at the ethics and politics of fast food by examining the marketing, lobbying efforts, labor policies and ingredient sourcing of the fast food industry. This will lead us to a broader political and ethical question about the environmental and public health costs of eating meat. Is it possible to eat meat in a sustainable fashion? Or is vegetarianism the only eco-friendly option? We will explore the ethics and politics of eating meat and the contentious issue of animal rights, to issues of sustainability and environmentally responsible food production, to related issues of food and globalization. We will close by examining the role food plays in helping to sustain and foster democracy and civil society.

# Course Rationale and Objectives

The objective of this first year seminar will be to explore the politics of food in a broad  
context—from everyday consumption, to agricultural subsidies and factory farming, to the cultural politics of food, to key questions of identity.

The course is designed to help you:

* Understand the key issues in food politics today
* Explore the political and ethical implications of what we eat and drink everyday
* Critically read and analyze texts from multiple disciplines
* Improve your ability to clearly express ideas and opinions, both orally and in writing.

Course Requirements

*Attendance and Participation:* This course will require active participation and regular work. You are expected to come to class having done the reading assigned for that day. I will regularly refer to the text in my lectures and ask you questions based on it. Regular attendance is a must. Class participation is essential to this course. You should come to class prepared to actively discuss a range of topics based on the reading and to unpack its broader implications and put it in critical perspective. Our “S” consultant, Anisha Yadav, is available to help you with strategies and tips for class discussion.

*Assignments:* In order to facilitate class discussion, you will be asked to complete small assignments. These can take the form of short one paragraph responses to a quote from the assigned reading, an in-class quiz, or a group assignment.

*Midterm Paper (5-7pp):* The midterm for this course will be in the form of a 5-7 page paper that responds to and critically analyzes the readings and films discussed in class. Topics for the midterm paper and instructions for completing the assignment will be distributed ten days before the papers are due.

*“Food Experience” Presentation*: In the second half of the semester, each student will be required to do a 15 minute presentation on a formative and significant food experience. You will have to provide the class with an account of the experience, its political and ethical implications and connect it to at least one course reading covered in class. You can use multimedia, handouts, cook food, share a recipe, or any other ideas you might have for this presentation. You are encouraged to meet with the “S” support member for our course, Anisha Yadav, to help you plan your presentation.

*Final Research Paper:* Your final for this course will be in the form of a 10-12 page research paper. Topics for the paper will be distributed a month before the paper is due. This paper will require you to do external research and also critically discuss class readings. You will be required to cite and use at least two peer-reviewed academic articles from your library research, in addition to class readings. We will have a library session to help you become familiar with databases and academic research and also devote class time to developing your papers.

Your grade for this course will be computed as follows:

Class Participation and Attendance 15%

Midterm Paper 25%

Presentation 15%

Final Research Paper 30%

Assignments 15%

Late Policy

Papers or assignments that are turned in late will be penalized a **third of a letter grade for every day they are late.**

If you fail to complete the midterm paper, the presentation, or the final research paper, you will not pass this course.

Laptop Policy

You will not be permitted to use your laptops during the class period for taking notes or any other function. Exceptions will only be made for students with a documented disability.

Course Material:

The following books are required for purchase and are available in the DePauw University Bookstore.

* Pollan, Michael, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*
* Schlosser, Eric, *Fast Food Nation*
* Nestle, Marion, *Food Politics*

Readings marked with an asterisk on the syllabus can be found on the Moodle page for this course. You should download and complete the readings in advance of the assigned date.

Office Hours and Accessibility:

My office hours are on Tuesdays and Thursdays. On Tuesday, I am available in my office from 11:30-12:30 and again from 4-5PM. I am also available in my office from 4-5PM on Thursdays. Feel free to drop by to talk about the class, discuss future interests or simply to continue a conversation! In addition to these regular weekly office hours, I am often available to meet on Mondays and Friday, though not every week. Send me an email to set up an appointment if you need to meet to on one of these days. I offer additional office hours before exams as well and will announce them in advance by email. I am also available to meet via Skype (my Skype address is smita.a.rahman) and also available to talk on the phone (I will give out my cell phone number on the first day of class).

Academic Integrity:

Violations of DePauw University’s Academic Integrity Policy will be taken very seriously and punished accordingly. All violations will be reported officially and the student will fail the assignment for which they are charged with the violation.

The complete Academic Integrity Policy can be found at: http://www.depauw.edu/univ/handbooks/dpuhandbooks.asp?ID=101&parentid=100

Support:

The First-Year Seminar is designed to be an exciting intellectual experience and one where you receive all the support you need to succeed. You are encouraged to meet with me during regular office hours to discuss any areas of concern you have about the course and your performance, to talk about future plans, or simply to continue to explore ideas and talk about politics.

If you cannot come to my Tuesday and Thursday office hours, please email me to set up an appointment. I will do my best to accommodate you. I am also easily available by Skype or on my cell phone (I will provide the number on the first day of class) to answer questions. Please try to limit these calls or texts to between the hours of 8am and 6pm.

In addition, you are encouraged to contact the support team we have for the course as frequently as you need to, in their respective roles. You are particularly encouraged to talk to your mentor, Dave Tykvart, for any questions and concerns you have about student life and also about the course.

Student Mentor, Dave Tykvart, davidtykvart\_2013@depauw.edu

“S” Consultant, Anisha Yadav, [anishayadav\_2013@depauw.edu](mailto:anishayadav_2013@depauw.edu)

Reference Librarian, Mandy Henk, amandahenk@depauw.edu

## SCHEDULE OF SEMINAR TOPICS AND READINGS

Thursday, August 24 Introduction

Tuesday, August 30 Film: *King Corn*

Thursday, September 1 No Class—Away for conference (work on response paragraphs)

Tuesday, September 6 Class Discussion of *King Corn* (Response Paragraphs due!)

Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, pp. 1-56

Thursday, September 8 Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma,* pp. 57-122

Tuesday, September 13 Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation,* pp. 1-58

Thursday, September 15 Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, pp. 59-110

Tuesday, September 20 Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation,* pp. 111-168

Thursday, September 22 Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation,* pp. 169-224

Tuesday, September 27 Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation,* pp. 225-288

Thursday, September 29 \*Miller, *Coca-Cola: A Black Sweet Drink from Trinidad*

\*Watson, *China’s Big Mac Attack Trinidad*

\*Caldwell,  *Domesticating the French Fry: McDonald’s and Consumerism in Moscow*

Tuesday, October 4 \*Foer,  *Eating Animals* (excerpt)

**MIDTERM PAPERS DUE**

Thursday, October 11 *\**Singer, *Animal Liberation* (Chs. 1 and 6)

**October 16-23: No Class—Fall Break**

Tuesday, October 18 Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma,* pp. 123-184

Thursday, October 20 Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma,* pp. 185-238

Tuesday, October 25 Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma,* pp. 238-276

Thursday, October 27 Film: *Food, Inc.*

Tuesday, November 1 Nestle, *Food Politics,* pp 93-136

Thursday, November 3 Nestle, *Food Politics,* pp. 137- 172

Tuesday, November 8 No Class—Religious Holiday (Eid ul Adha)

Thursday, November 10 Nestle, *Food Politics,* pp. 173-218

Tuesday, November 15 Nestle, *Food Politics,* pp. 358-294

Thursday, November 17 \*Barthes, *Towards a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption*

\*Douglas, *Deciphering A Meal*

\*Harris, *The Abominable Pig*

\*De Certeau et al, *The Nourishing Arts*

Tuesday, November 22 Library Research Information Session

Thursday, November 24 No Class—Thanksgiving

Tuesday, November 29 Food Experience Presentations

Thursday, December 1 Food Experience Presentations

Tuesday, December 6 Food Experience Presentations

\*Bourdain, *“Go Ask Alice”*

Thursday, December 8 Conclusion

**Final Research Papers Due by E-mail only on Wednesday, December 14th by 5 PM\*\*\***

\*\*\*Late papers will be penalized by a third of a grade for every day that they are late